

Art and Patrons: A Sociological Review

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Abstract: *There is a strong relationship between art and society. Sociologists have tried to study art sociologically since 20th century. One of the important factors of art is a patronage system. It directly affects the art and the artists. Indian traditional arts also have been the subject to patrons. In this paper researcher has tried to show the relationship between Indian classical dance and the role of patrons in exploiting, preserving, reviving and glorifying it over the centuries.*

Key Words: *Sociology of Art, art, patrons, Indian classical dance, Kathak, Bharata Natyam, religious importance, women of ill fame Devadasis.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Art is an integral part of society. Many scholars and Sociologists have emphasised the vital position of arts in society. Howard S. Becker, Arnold Hauser, Harrison White, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Pitrim Sorokin and Max Weber etc. have mentioned the relationship between art and society. Sociologists considered the concern of art in society and thus studied it sociologically. Art can't be studied in isolation without taking into consideration the social background in which the art form emerged, survived and flourished. Even gender and the social status of an artist also play an important role. Similarly one more important aspect regarding art is patron or the patronage system. Present paper concerns with the role of patrons in the emergence, sustenance and the development of art form.

1.1. Art and Patrons:

Patronage is the support, encouragement, opportunity, or financial aid that an organization or individual grants to another. In the history of art, art patronage refers to the support that kings, popes, and the wealthy people have provided to artists such as musicians, dancers, painters, and sculptors. The word "patron" derives from the Latin: *patronus* ("patron"), one who gives benefits to his clients. Patronage system is well known for the sponsorship of artists and the commissioning of artwork. Other disciplines benefited from patronage, are musicians, writers, philosophers, alchemists, astrologers, and other scholars. Some of the famous and dynamic artists like Chrétien de Troyes, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, William Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson all sought and benefited the support of noble or priestly patrons. Artists like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven also sought and enjoyed the support of patronage system.^{1, 2}

Through the ages in various parts of the world, patronage of the arts was important in art history. It can be seen in reference to medieval and Renaissance Europe. Patronage can also be traced in feudal Japan, the traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, and at many other places. Art patronage can be seen wherever an imperial system and nobility conquered a society and controlled a significant share of assets. Rulers, nobles and very affluent people have provided patronage to the arts to support their political ambitions, social positions, and esteem. The patron serves a fundamental function in the development of art. Most of the times, being an active consumer of art, he is its inventor, often dictating form and content. Art patronage functions as an evidence of wealth, status, and power and could also serve purposes of propaganda and entertainment.

After the rise of bourgeois and capitalist social forms in the middle 19th century the European culture moved away from its patronage system to the more publicly supported system of museums, theatres, mass audiences and mass consumption that is familiar in the modern world. This kind of system continues across many fields of the arts. No doubt that the nature of the sponsors has changed from religious institutions like churches or temples----- to emperors-----to state----- to charitable trusts, etc. It may simply refer to direct support (often financial) of an artist.

In the latter part of the 20th century some scholars started taking interest in studying the arts, revival of arts, patronage and social changes in arts. These scholars have taken into consideration the important and often neglected role of patronage in the cultural life and arts.

1.2. Indian Art:

Indian traditional arts also have been the subject to patrons, mainly Indian classical dance, music, painting and the art of sculptures. Patrons have always supported, influenced and sponsored the art of Indian dance. In different period of time or in different reigns the status of dance and dance artists, contents and techniques of art and even the costumes and accessories have been influenced accordingly. In this paper researcher has tried to show the relationship between Indian classical dance and the role of patrons in exploiting, preserving, reviving and glorifying it over the centuries.

In India there are eight well known traditional classical dance forms which have sustained and developed over the centuries. All have faced social changes, ups and downs and have revived themselves as a great Indian tradition. In this process patrons had an important role to play. To explain the process well the researcher has taken into consideration the two most popular and ancient classical dance styles in India for example, Kathak and Bharata Natyam.

1.3. Kathak:

The dance form originally from North India has a long social history. The term Kathak is derived from the Vedic Sanskrit word *Katha* which means "story", and *Kathaka* which means "the one who tells a story", Kathak dancers, in the ancient India, were travelling poets and lyricists were known as *Kathaka* or *Kathakar*. While travelling from village to village, these *Kathaka* or *Kathakar* told various stories about the places they have visited. 'Pandits' in the temples invited these *Kathakar* to come and narrate stories within the boundaries of the temples. The content of Kathak thus changed from stories and plays to Puranas like Mahabharata and Ramayana and to other mythological stories. The content became a lot spiritual in nature. One can easily notice a strong and definite connection between arts and temples in India. It can be seen in the art of *kathavachakas* who carried on the tradition to this day in the North in the temple area and in the open space. In short we can comment that due to the patronage of Hindu temples and Pandits the content of the art was stories of Hindu Gods and myths. While telling stories with expressions and appropriate costumes and hand and body gestures they slowly developed a dance form Kathak. When the religious impact was at its peak the position of the art and the artists was also good in society. There was definitely a religious content in the art of Kathak, which has been suffered a setback during the period of the foreign invasions and the following Muslim Rule.

Then there was an emergence of the Mughal era. The Mughal emperors looked at it as a source of entertainment rather than a mode of worship. Kathak as a dance form flourished during this period but the content changed a lot. In Mughal rule there was a definite shift in the content of the dance and the emphasis also changed. However, in the Mughal period the art of Kathak received the necessary movement for its growth. In other words though the art lost its religious importance in this period, the Mughal emperors helped it to develop in different manner. One of the important Mughal emperors whose name cannot be forgotten in this regard is Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah:

He was the last Nawab of Awadh. His kingdom was protected by the British under treaty. It was eventually captured on 11 February 1856, two days before the ninth anniversary of his coronation. The Nawab was exiled to a suburb of *Kolkata*, where he lived out the rest of his life on a generous pension. He was a poet, dancer and great patron of the arts. He is widely credited with the revival of *Kathak* as a major form of classical Indian dance. He is survived by many descendants. 3.

1.3. His contributions to dance:

Kathak dance developed strongly and became an eminent art under the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah. In the ancient times Kathak being the part of the temple ritual, was performed at temples. With the change of time the Kathak performers in search of better prospects, safety and rich patronage left the temples and entered into royal courts. Sometimes they compelled to do so by Mughal emperors. Transformation was inevitable. The dance started adapting itself to the demands of the court, but it was under the artistic guidance and patronage of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, that Kathak achieved greater dimensions. He gave a definite form, made it more artistic. He enriched it with *rasa* and *bhava*, and he added literature to it and furnished it with dignity and finery to its presentation. He himself choreographed many compositions and danced himself with the ladies of his court. 4.

Kathak dance attained new heights of popularity and glory under his expert guidance and prolific patronage. Thakur Prasadji was his Kathak guru, and the unforgettable Kalka-Binda brothers performed in his court. Due to various festivals, Dance dramas, and Kathak performances, Lucknow became the magnetic cultural centre where the most reputed musicians, dancers and poets of the time flourished. The greatest musicians, dancers and instrumentalists of the time enjoyed his generous patronage and hospitality. It was at his reign that Lucknow Gharana came into existence and attained maturity, through the efforts of the great gurus like Thakur Prasadji and others. The Lucknow

style of Kathak dance is characterized by graceful movements, elegance and natural poise with dance. He not only made Kathak as the official court dance, but made it popular among the people.

During this period, Kathak was also performed by tawaifs and baijis who themselves developed the art in parallel to its improvement in court. They frequently performed on lighter classical music. The style of the performances given by the tawaifs' also differed from the court style. Kathak has lost its religious importance and became just a means of livelihood of these tawaifs, baijis and other performing artists in courts and in theatres. They were developing and performing it as per the demand of their masters and hosts. In the Mughal rule there was a definite shift in the content of the dance and the emphasis also changed. However, in the Mughal era the art of Kathak received the necessary movement for its progress. In other words though the art lost its religious importance in this period, the Mughal emperors helped it to sustain and to develop in different manner. This transition in Kathak took place during the period of the 1st century A.D. to 19th century A.D. Due to such social changes one can observe two types of changes in Kathak Dance.

Firstly, it had a glorious tradition of temple origin and it was a means of worshiping God in the medieval period. As during Bhakti movement the fine arts found perfectly suitable situation to develop, the art flourished with the patronage extended by the temples, priests and devotees. People were using it for religious purposes. Resultantly the artists achieved comparatively a better status in society especially in Northern India.



(Impact of Indian tradition and religion on costume and content)

Secondly, during the period of the foreign invasions and Muslim rule, the religious content, of course, suffered a setback. Dance form was much more developed than in the past but the artists lost the status. One could easily observe these changes in dance content, for example *Mujra* dance and *Salami* instead of *Vandana*, *Bhajan* and *Bhakti*, inclusion of Farsi terms like *Amad and Paran* and changes in costumes, and jewelry etc.



(Impact of Mughal tradition and culture)

After the Mughal rule Kathak dance faced a worse eclipse in the British rule. Once again the changes in patrons changed the nature and status of the art and the artists. In the British rule the arts were neglected. These two situations were different. The court and the temple gave rise to different aspects of the dance. It was during the British period that Kathak came to be known as nautch. The British officers who came to India in the administrative services often used to take the native entertainment; they called these dancers as nautchwalis.

In the British period the institution of courtesans sustained the art of Kathak though it assumed a different character. It was more aimed at entertaining the patrons and pleasing them. In this process it lost its dignity and came to be associated with the women of ill fame. According to Sunil Kothari, in British rule the dance as an art form was hated and looked down upon. It was considered a means of livelihood for the women of low position in society. And therefore it was out of limits for the middle and upper class. It was already degenerated into vulgar art and was in danger of extinction. 5. The situation changed in post independent India. Some renowned artists and exponents took the efforts to revive the art and it helped this art form to regain its position. The state also started taking interest in preserving the traditions which eventually resulted in the preservation and the development of the arts. The exponents like Binda- Kalka Maharaj should not be forgotten in this regard and the establishment of Kathak Kala Kendra at Delhi helped to gear up the movement. Today one can see Kathak as the most popular, highly stylized, and one of the developed classical dance forms in India. In India same situation and transitions could be observed in case of one other classical dance form that is Bharata Natyam.

3. BHARATA NATYAM:

Bharata Natyam initially known as Dasiattam is one of the oldest dance forms in India. It was nurtured in temples and courts of southern India since ancient times. The patrons of this dance style were the rich and wealthy temples in South India. It is a highly specialized science with a traditional background and strict codes and principles. Nattuvans and Devadasis have handed down the highly developed art of Bharata Natyam over the centuries. The teachers were called Nattuvans and ritualistic dancers were called Devadasis, in the temples of south India. This style is a direct descendant of devotional dances performed in the temples of South India from the 10th century to the middle of 20th century. Until recently the chief exponents of Bharata Natyam were Devadasis, or temple girls specifically designated to the task of dancing for Gods. The temple dancer, acquiring her professional knowledge from Nattuvans, often forms with him a lifelong agreement rarely broken by the temple officials. The institution of Devadasis and her offering of prayer through the dance medium have its roots in religion, as is clear from the nature of the vocation. After some period it started to be known as the art of Devadasis.

Many feudal lords in South India gave patronage to temples and to the staff in the temples. The funding given by them helped these artists. It was a status symbol for the feudalists to appoint more number of artists in the temple. Due to the strong patronage this art developed and flourished. Unfortunately over a period of time due to economic and social pressures feudalism started losing its power and the funds given by them to the religious institutions started reducing. Then there was a downfall of this system of temples, temple dancing and artists in the temples. Devadasis fell into disrepute. This led to dance itself receiving a bad reputation because of the practitioners who were in an unsustainable situation. And this dance became a means of livelihood of them. It lost its religious and social status. For many centuries women and girls in the reputed families were prohibited from learning and performing it.

After the pioneering efforts of some revivalist this dance regained its dignity and fame. In 1930s the pioneers like Rukmini Devi and E. Krishna Iyer revived dancing traditions and tried to attain the status of Bharata Natyam dance traditions of today. Such pioneers brought the dance out of the temple area and onto the stage. Still it has to retain its devotional character to some extent. The modern form of the Bharata Natyam presentation is credited to four Nattuvans of Pandanallur. They were brothers. Menakshi Sunderam Pillay of Pandanallur, the greatest living teacher of Bharata Natyam, is the direct descendent of these four brothers, affectionately known as 'Tata' or Father. This Grand Old Man of the South keeps his rich inheritance alive with religious dedication.

Today the situation has been changed and it has become prestigious to know and perform Bharata Natyam. Devadasis gradually excluded from it. The art of Bharata Natyam and its prestige today is being slowly restored to its former position. Today Bharata Natyam is one of the most popular and widely performed dance styles and is practiced by male and female dancers all over India. In the British rule the system of formal education was started. It did not consider the arts as a subject of curricula. The generations that went to the schools and colleges founded by the British in India in the 19th century, remained afar from the art traditions of the country. Apparently the art of dancing had almost ruined by the 20th century and what could be seen of it was only a diluted, almost degenerated form of what was known as the 'nautch' in North, and the 'sadir' in the South. It was like a shadow of a big reality. The recent revival of interest in dance, developed as a symbol of national pride. And this brilliant indigenous art and culture started developing, which has proved helpful to the revival of Indian dancing that took place in 20th century.

4. CONCLUSIONS:

This sociological review helped researcher to draw the following conclusions;

- The patronage system plays a vital role in exploiting, preserving, reviving and glorifying the art.
- Both the Indian traditional dance styles had religious importance and social approval. However the changes in social situation and the changes in patrons moved the arts through different levels of ups and downs.
- Patrons played an important role in preserving, sustaining and developing the art.
- Finally it can be said that there is a strong relationship between arts and social factors. One of the major factors is a Patronage system. One can observe corresponding changes in art and society.

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