UNIT 2  PRINCIPLES OF ARTS

Structure

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2.1  INTRODUCTION

Inner feelings and ideas can be expressed by using colours in the form of painting or carving on stone and other medium, in the form of sculpture. The process of such expression has given birth to visual art. The art forms such as painting and sculpture are the two important visual art forms also known as plastic arts or fine arts. They have evolved through visual expression based on the visual language. For creating a sculpture or a painting, what is important is the vision—the sight without which you cannot see the world, you cannot experience the colours and shapes and as a result you cannot create visual art. Visual arts include architecture also. You will study them later in other units.

There are also other ways of expression such as singing, playing on musical instrument, dancing and acting. These arts are performing arts as they have to be performed for the audience hence they are called as performing arts. The performing arts use body language for various kinds of expression. You will study them in next Blocks.

Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the language of art;
- will learn the principles of arts;
- know about essential elements such as balance, harmony, rhythm etc.; and
- we will also know about the folk and classical art forms.

2.2  LANGUAGE OF ART

Art has its own language through which it communicates effectively. Human beings have an inherent quality to express in a creative way and also to appreciate beautiful things. In the literature like poem, drama or narration the word is the
verbal language. Proper usage of the words with their meanings and formation of sentences enhances the quality of literature. It is an art learnt through acquiring skill, technique and aesthetics.

Similarly, theatre is a kind of communication, which unfolds in a space on the stage. The main element of stage language is the spoken word. The spoken word is used in combination with acting, mime, costume, expression of feelings and emotions, lighting, position of the actors on stage and their gestures. Thus, the stage play is the effective means of artistic communication.

In both vocal music (singing) and instrumental music: sound is the basic language. The combination of sound and the variables of seven notes—saptasvaras make different tunes known as ragas. You learn more about them further. The sound in combination with volume, tempo and rhythm make melodious music.

The bodily movement, position of the limbs, hand gestures and the expression of navarasas (nine kinds of aesthetic emotions) form the language in dance. Along with these, music and costume also play important role in making dance beautiful and effective communication. You will understand more about dance in the chapter Indian dance.

In painting, colour is the essential language. The line, brush stroke, position of the image and handling of the space are also important in using the colour. In the same way handling of the medium and modeling forms the basic language for sculpture. You will learn more about it in the chapter of Visual Arts.

All the elements discussed above are the formal language of the each art form. They are further developed as structure and content of the art in the particular manner.

2.3 PRINCIPLES OF ARTS

There are certain basic principles which are common to all art forms. They are content, balance, rhythm, symbolism, proportion, harmony, emotional expression and achieving the mastery over the medium. The content is seen as the subject matter or a theme in a painting, drama, music or dance.

Content: The artist whether a painter or dancer or musician thinks in images or picture form. He imagines the entire story or event in a manner where he gets scope to beautifully present it before the onlookers. His imagination is backed by the content in the form of poems or drama theme or a concept which he has to portray. The artist constantly thinks about the presentation which should be expressed at its best. Anadavardhana, a great Kashmir scholar in 9th century speaks about the dhvani, the inner meaning of the content and also about rasa-dhvani, the emotional meaning of the content in art. You will study more about rasa under the units which deal with Performing Arts. Thus, content is the important aspect of the language in any of the art forms.

Form: form in art is concerned with the specific shape like square, triangle, cubic or the quality, which the artistic expression takes. Forms are related with media. The media used often influences the form. For example, the form in a sculpture must exist in space in three-dimensions, and respond to gravity. Similarly, Tajmahal appears great because of the marble; if it was built in other type of stone it would not have the quality. Here the form is enhanced in space because it is white in colour and the marble could take the superb carving. Another example is that of
the musical instrument that gets the sound effect depending on the shape of the instrument, such as the drums which are always cylindrical having covered on one side or two sides producing the desired sounds by beating with hand or sticks. In the video games and television (Media Arts) it is the non-linearity, interactivity and interconnectivity of the virtual presence. In dance, the forms are created with the bodily movements and hand gestures. In painting, the features of figurative and non-figurative forms are treated with fine colour etc. Thus, form is regarded as the soul of art without which art can not be expressed at all.

Balance: The language of each art has to have balance within many of the internal elements such as rhythm and content or form and content. While depicting the content the gestures, body postures and music content and such other things are used with a sense of balance. Balancing of space, movements, tone, form constitute the compositional elements in art. Balance has to be the key factor to bring the artistic expression to rise to the level of quality in art.

Rhythm: Rhythm is not only important to music but also very much sensed in words, bodily movement and brush strokes in other art forms also. Even the survival of human being is due to the rhythmic breathing. Basic human instincts for harmony, balance, rhythm are felt in every activity. But in art, there is an internal sense of appreciation of balance and harmony to create beauty which is inherent.

Symbolism: Art is expressed through symbolic bodily gestures or drawn images. The meaning of the content or story is narrated through hand gestures in dance, different types of gaits or costumes in drama, similarly the ragas in music evoke the time and moods and similarly the figures, motifs, postures, and colours have symbolic meanings in painting and sculpture. All these evolved with the process of culture. For example, white or blue colours symbolise peace, certain ragas in music like Bhupali in Carnatic music symbolises the early morning and sunrise, a single tree in the stage setting symbolises open air, and so on.

Emotional expression: The emotions are the under current to all arts. Art looses its essence if emotions are not involved. Different kinds of emotions are evoked depending on the character and theme in drama and dance. The navarasas — the nine types of emotional states are like the soul of artistic expression in all arts. They influence the viewers and convey messages and create artistic experience — the rasanubhava in both visual and performing arts. It reveals originality in artistic expression. You will study more about the navarasas in the units ahead.

Proportion: Proportion is a principle which gives structure to art. Otherwise it is difficult to understand where to begin and where to end. If we do not think of a form in size and the order in which it should be brought into art, the expression in art creates confusion. In music it fixes the range of voice and its association with other instruments. In dance the dancer has to use the place given to her in relation to time and space, so also the painter or sculpture has to think in terms of the size of the forms that has to be brought out in relation to the size of the stone or a painting of the canvas. Thus, the order of size and shape brings a structure where art is proportionately created. In art the size should not be too big or too small. The artistic values are comprehensive when art is proportionate in expression. Arts in Media today sometimes are too elaborate and too long, where the viewer gets tired on seeing such long and oversized presentations.
Harmony: Each of the above principles discussed by it is an independent element. If it is expressed without proper coordination with the other principle it will not create joy or delight in the onlookers. Required proportions, colour effects and emotional qualities, compositional elements like form, content, balance and rhythm, when harmoniously treated, the art will be delightful otherwise the experience can be chaotic.

Mastery over the medium: Art can be obtained through a sense of trained ability. It is also acquiring mastery over the medium. For example, in painting one has to train to use colours and acquire mastery over line, form, colours which is the medium in the art of painting. Similarly, in dance it is the ability to use body movements, facial expression and hand gestures, so also in music it is voice and the ability to elaborate the ragas in melody. Mastery over the medium is possible only with constant practice and improvisation. All great artists perfect their basics and practice rigorously. There is no shortcut for acquiring great skills. Skill of execution was viewed as a quality inseparable from art and thus necessary for its success.

2.4 TRIBAL AND FOLK ARTS

Nearby your town you have several villages and even tribal settlements. You must have come across their ways of living. The way they celebrate their festivals, dress in different manner and speak their own language.

Tribal Art: Tribes are people who are considered as the original Jewellers of a country. They live in deep forest or hilly areas and have age-old practices which are very special to their groups. Each tribe has a leader and the entire community will compulsorily follow the orders of their leaders. Their practices are related to their customs, rituals, tradition. They have their own dialect (may not be a language) and dress code, weave their cloth, grow their own crops. Some tribal groups do not want the rural (village) or urban (city) to influence them. They maintain self-sufficiency and have their own law and order. India has variety of tribal settlements richly contributing the diversity in to Indian culture.

Some times tribal art is confused with the folk arts. But what we must understand is that they are different and that they develop in different circumstances. Tribal art is a product of culturally less advanced ethnic groups often isolated from the rest of the more advanced ones. For example, the Bhils and Gonds tribes of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have evolved a dance holding each other in a continuous circular movement. Similarly, the Naga tribes from Nagaland have head hunting community, the tribes weave very colourful fabric, have their peculiar head-dress, always hold a weapons, have their own festivals and celebrations. Their law and order system is very strange and different from the other society. The Bastar tribes from Madhya Pradesh produce sculptures in metal which are very unique. The Toda and Irula tribes from Nilgiris have their own way of building their houses on hills and deep forests, their own system of medicine, burial procedure after death and weave their own fabrics. The Banjara Tribes (Lambadi) move from place to place and their settlements are known as tandas. They have rich and colourful costume, dances, songs, rituals and festivals. The Worli tribes who live in Mumbai and Maharashtra are very artistic. They decorate their houses with paintings in various themes, known as Worli paintings. Tribal art and their life is very interesting to study. Anthropology is a subject which studies the origin and culture of the tribes.
**Folk Arts:** Where as Folk arts are associated with village life small even classical arts have their origin in folk art. To define Folk art — ‘it is the art of common people expressed in simple language for educating and entertaining the simple village folk’. The term ‘janapada’ is used which means ‘the ways of common people’ Lok parampara is also used to recognise the traditions of village culture. ‘Folklore’ is the term in English defining the ‘traditional beliefs, legends and customs current among the common people’. The Indian cultural roots are very much with the living traditions and the arts associated with them. They are existing today in the form of folk art.

India is very much a rural society and rich in Folk art. Most of the folk-art is based on the rituals and performed on special social occasions. In all their offerings, nature plays an important role. Their dances, music, poems and making images largely depend on local gods and goddesses known as Grama devatas. The annual festivals of the village are also associated with the local gods and goddesses.

The observance of any type of festival ritual is associated with the idea of well-being of the entire village or community. This is the inherent nature of folk art. The art of drawing colourful pictures on the floor is an important folk art. The art of Mandana in Rajasthan, Chowk in Uttar Pradesh, Rangoli in Karnataka and Maharashtra, Aripaya in Bihar, Alpana in Bengal, Kolam in Tamil Nadu, and Muggus in Andhra Pradesh are the different names of one and the same folk art found, associated with the idea of lokamangala or the well being of the people. Various auspicious symbols and motifs which are used here are the swastika, kalasha, tree, wheel, lotus, sun, moon, animals and birds which have continued through the centuries. The vessels, walls, doors, wooden objects are all decorated with these motifs treated as very auspicious. In course of time the mythological themes and legends occupy the folk art and we have the pat-chitra tradition in Orissa, leather puppets in Andhra and Karnataka, chitr-kathi paintings in Maharashtra, Kalamkari paintings from Andhra Pradesh, Ram Narayan katha in Gujarat and Rajasthan, Madhubani paintings from Bihar and Kalighat paintings from Bengal. All these artistic expressions are naturally expressed in a simple way. The materials used for folk art are available near by. The objects created are used in everyday life. The seasonal observances have impact on the folk art. You will study more about folk dances, folk music and folk theatre in the units under Performing arts.

### 2.5 CLASSICAL ARTS

The term classical art has several meanings. Originally it was used for referring to the art of ancient Greece. The art like drama, sculpture, painting and literature produced during the fourth and fifth centuries BCA was regarded as classical art. Later, it included many other periods in western art history. In present times, classical is used to describe perfection of form, with an emphasis on harmony and unity in creating art. Usually, it is applied to works that are representational but idealistic. Classic is used to describe anything which is unique in expression.

‘Shastriya’ is the term used for classical arts, which evolves and develops stage by stage according to the aesthetic needs of the society. It has set standards for taste. The art is judged by the competent persons from time to time. The classical art is formal and restrained. The art created with classical background are treated as masterpieces. Classical art, whether music, dance or sculpture follow a rule-bound system. The texts give the formal principles and ways of practicing the art.
The classical art need to be learnt under guru. The guru shishya parampara is the important feature in classical art. The values and the principles are given high importance. The goal of expression is to reach the perfection.

The art of Gupta period is the outstanding example of classical phase of Indian art because the classical ideals in literature were reflected in art also. Indian scholars of early times categorised the cultured and refined form of art under samskruti, the rustic and natural form under prakriti. This also shows the distinction between court art in the language of Sanskrit and the colloquial and regional languages as Prakrit. This also refers to 'Margi', the classical and 'desi' the folk or regional. We will discuss more about the stylistic features of Gupta and other art forms in the subsequent units. Classical Dance and music are important under the section of performing arts.

2.6 SUMMARY

Every art is known by its own language. The art approaches and practices very well depend upon the language of art. To understand art in true sense we have to study the various principles of art. The principles of composition in art involves the basic elements such as content, form, balance, rhythm, proportion, harmony and the mastery over the medium. We come across tribal, folk and classical arts. They should be understood in their own perspective. Many countries have their classical phases of culture but have changed so much that those features are completely absent in present times. But in India we have tribal, folk and classical traditions of art that still prevail. Each one of them has their own distinct features. For example, the Yakshagana is a very popular art form in coastal Karnataka which is considered as folk art. Whereas Kathakali in Kerala, similar in many ways to Yakshagana, has more classical features and is categorised as one of the classical dance forms of India.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1) Match the Following:

1. In dance  a) proper usage of words
2. In painting  b) spoken word and mime
3. In music  c) bodily movement and gestures
4. In literature  d) line, form and colours
5. In theatre e) the seven notes, the saptasvaras.

2) Fill in the blanks with suitable words from the list given below:

1. The content is seen as ________________________ in a painting, in drama, music or dance.
2. ________________________ a great Kashmir scholar in 9th century speaks about the dhvani.
3. The emotions are the ________________________ of all arts.
4. Proportion is a principle which ________________________.
5. Art can be obtained through a sense of ________________________.
   a) trained ability, b) gives structure to art, c) Anadavardhana, d) under current, e) to the subject matter or a theme
3) State whether the following statements are True or False:

1. They do not maintain self-sufficiency and have their own law and order.
2. Folk art is the art of city people expressed in complicated language.
3. The materials used for folk art are available only in cities.
4. Classical is used to describe perfection of form, with an emphasis on harmony and unity in creating art.
5. The art created with classical background are treated as masterpieces.

2.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic principles of art?

2. What do you mean by mastery over the medium?

3. Write in 3 or 4 lines on each of the following
   a. Content in art
   b. Proportion in art.

4. How do you distinguish folk arts from classical art?

2.9 ANSWERS

1) 1 - c), 2 - d), 3 - e), 4 - a), 5 - b)
2) 1 - e), 2 - c), 3 - d), 4 - b), 5 - a)
3) 1 - F, 2 - F, 3 - F, 4 - T, 5 - F.
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Folk art is the ways of common people expressed to show their feelings. All these artistic expressions are naturally expressed in a simple way. The materials used for folk art are available near by. The objects created are used in everyday life. The seasonal observances have impact on the folk art. The folk art is rhythmic, appealing and may not require formal training. Where as classical arts are complicated with system of rules codified over a long process. It needs to be learnt under a guru. The abilities and skills are perfected in classical arts. It expresses the taste and ideals of the period. Stylistic features are very much evolved and each phase has its own stylistic characteristics features.