

An artist's creative freedom

Laila Khan's meditational moorings on Lord Ganesha as an object, as a subject, as an inspiration, are all born of her freedom as an artist to choose iconic imagery that surpasses all boundaries and unites the cosmic consciousness in the world. Indeed when we gauge and study the iconicity of the little elephant God we know that he is both mysterious as well as definitive and purposeful in our spiritual lives.

When we review her many works in this suite we are reminded of the bhaktas who composed hymns to Lord Ganesha and gave Him four offerings - milk, honey, sugarcane essence, and *dal*. In return, He would give expertise in three forms of linguistic excellence. In another verse she sings what all one will get from Ganesha, - *Vak*, good mind, auspicious wealth, good health. All one has to do is to worship His sacred feet every day with flowers.

Loving and admiring Lord Ganesha is not about going to temples or places of worship. It is having a little lamp within, a flickering living flame of reverence and deep love. This existence has the power to create its own oasis of a spiritual atmosphere and it is this inner spirit that drives our journey. The beauty of Lord Ganesha as a little God is that he is accepted with joy and is a beacon of emotive associations by all who come within his web of influence. Ganesha lives not just in sculptural forms and drawings and paintings but in the small pages of everyday living. Those who love and believe say they have been witness to the deepest Yogic mysteries in beautiful and crisp verses in so many Indian languages. Never has such esoteric knowledge been democratised like it has been for Lord Ganesha in different parts of India.

Tamil poets and tradition

A popular invocation in the state of Tamil Nadu is *Kaithalam Niraikani* by a latter medieval saint, Arunagirinathar, found in his *Thirupukazh*.

He speaks of the great deeds of Ganesha . He states that Ganesha wrote the essence of the three forms of Tamil in the mountains. This refers to the legend of Ganesha writing the *Mahabharata* using Himalayan boulders for palm leaves.

The reason for this is that the essence of three forms of Tamil is Dharma and *Mahabharata* is the literary expression of Dharma. Thus this verse of Ganesha invocation stresses the cultural and spiritual unity of India.

In modern times, the great Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati wrote *Vinayagar Nanmani Malai*. The spiritual grandeur of this is second only to that of the *Vinayagar Agaval*. This hymn also takes into account the spiritual and material needs of the modern man.

Vibrations of the soul

These works of art by Laila are born of meaning to call forth corresponding vibrations of the soul for Laila. As an artist is not only justified in using whatever she wants to use, but it is also a sense of duty within her in which she uses only those forms which fulfil her own need.

‘ That is beautiful which is produced by the inner need, which springs from the soul.’

Such spiritual freedom is as necessary in art as it is in life,’ said the great Wassily Kandinsky in his phenomenal book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* , published in 1912. Laila’s *Untamed Spirit* lives out this epoch.

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