

Developing Beliefs: The Religious And Cultural Importance Of Metal Craft In India

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Abstract:

Throughout history and cultures, metal crafts have been utilized to communicate an extensive variety of religious beliefs, rites, and customs. They are not just useful items; they are also potent representations of dedication and faith. This research paper explores the significance of metal and metal craft within the religious traditions of India, focusing on Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity. It delves into the historical and cultural contexts of these religions, highlighting the diverse ways in which metal is utilized for religious purposes, artistic expression, and cultural identity. The paper examines the role of metal in sacred objects, rituals, architecture, and decorative arts, showcasing its symbolic importance and practical applications. Drawing on scholarly literature and case studies, the research investigates the connection of metal craft with religious beliefs, traditions, and practices, illustrating how artisans and craftsmen have contributed to the preservation and evolution of religious traditions through their creative endeavours. It uses a multidisciplinary approach to explore the intricate tapestry of metal craftsmanship within the religious landscapes of India and highlights its historical significance, cultural meanings, contemporary relevance, and role of artisans in preserving and evolving religious traditions.

Keywords: Metalcraft, Religion, Tradition

Introduction:

India is a country with a rich religious landscape, with several major religions being practiced by its population. four major religions are practiced in India: Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity. Hinduism, the oldest religion, is followed by the majority of the population and emphasizes concepts like duty, karma, and reincarnation. Islam, the second-largest religion, is followed by a significant Muslim population. Christianity, which arrived in India in the early centuries CE, has a substantial presence in South India and parts of Northeast India. Sikhism, originating in the Punjab region in the 15th century, follows the teachings of Guru Nanak and subsequent Gurus. Overall, India's religious landscape is characterized by diversity, pluralism, and coexistence, with followers of different religions often living side by side and participating in each other's cultural and religious celebrations.

Metal has been used in religious traditions as a significant element. The Islamic period saw the use of various alloys by metalsmiths, including bronze, brass, and heavily leaded metal (Rashitov, D. D. 2021). In the context of heavy metal music and culture, there is a strong fascination with religious and spiritual themes, such as Judeo-Christian eschatology, paganism, occultism, and Satanism (Scheller, J. 2023, June). Scholars have also noted that heavy metal and punk rock artists have articulated a range of religious beliefs, with Christian heavy metal bands using religious symbolism as a cultural conversation with

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mainstream heavy metal, and punk drawing from various traditions including Rastafarianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Luhr, E. 2010). These genres have also been seen as providing a sense of identity, community, and ethical code for living, functioning as extra-institutional religions (Moberg, M. 2009). Overall, metal has played a significant role in the dissemination of alternative religious and spiritual beliefs and ideas, contributing to the aesthetic and affective appeal of the genre (Craddock, P. T. 1979).

Metal and metal craft are two distinct concepts. Metal is a material with chemical properties and physical attributes, like iron, copper, aluminum, gold, and silver, and can be manipulated into various shapes. Metalcraft, on the other hand, involves the artistic manipulation of metal to create objects or works of art through techniques. Metalcraft, on the other hand, is primarily focused on aesthetic or artistic expression, often incorporating functional aspects. metal craft involves the artistic manipulation and transformation of metal into objects of beauty, utility, or symbolism through various techniques and processes.

Importance of metal in Indian culture: Metal has been a significant part of human civilization since ancient times, shaping various aspects of life. Metals like gold, silver, and brass have held a special place in history for their physical properties and symbolic and spiritual meanings. Gold symbolizes purity, prosperity, and divinity, often associated with the divine and used in religious artifacts and rituals. Silver, known for its brilliance and malleability, is associated with lunar energies and feminine attributes, symbolizing purity, clarity, and intuition. In spiritual practices, silver is used to channel and amplify psychic energies, acting as a conduit between the physical and spiritual worlds. Brass, with its warm golden hue and durability, holds special significance in spiritual contexts, associated with strength, protection, and resilience. Brass artifacts and ornaments are often used in religious ceremonies and rituals, serving as conduits for prayers and offerings. These metals also find their way into cherished possessions, such as the mangal sutra worn by married women in many cultures.

The study (Rashitov, D. D. 2021) explores the traditions of jewelry and precious metals in the customs, religion, and folklore of the Tatars, focusing on their historical-cultural context. It aims to analyze the correlation between jewelry, spiritual heritage, and religion in Tatar culture, despite not specifically mentioning metal use in religion.

In essence, metals like gold, silver, and brass transcend their material properties to become vessels of spiritual significance, connecting individuals to the divine and serving as tangible reminders of the sacred in both mundane and extraordinary aspects of life.

Significance of metal in religion: Metal holds significant symbolism and practical importance in various religious traditions worldwide. It is used to create sacred objects and artifacts, such as statues, idols, amulets, and ritual tools, which represent deities, and spiritual concepts, or serve as focal points for worship and reverence. Metal is associated with qualities such as purity, strength, and durability, which may symbolize divine qualities or virtues that practitioners seek to embody or honor. Metals are frequently used in religious rituals and ceremonies, such as ringing bells made of metal to signify the beginning or end of worship.

Precious metals like gold and silver are used in the construction and adornment of sacred spaces, such as temples, mosques, churches, and shrines, adding to their grandeur and sanctity. Offerings and donations of metal objects, coins, and jewelry have been made throughout history as acts of devotion or donations to religious institutions.

The use of metal in religious traditions is exemplified in the use of metal threads in luxury textiles, which have been historically associated with religious and secular elites (Karatzani, A. 2012). In ancient India, the therapeutic use of metals, including gold and silver, is documented in the Ayurvedic system of medicine, indicating their spiritual and

healing significance (Barve, M., Mashru, M., Jagtap, C., Patgiri, B. J., & Prajapati, P. K. 2011). The significance of metal in ritual is also evident in precontact Eastern North America, where intricate metal objects were created for ceremonial and spiritual purposes (Trevelyan, A. M. 2014). These studies collectively highlight the diverse and significant role of metal in religious traditions and practices.

Metalcraft: The term "metal craft" delineates the procedure of fabricating diverse articles and artistic creations wherein metal serves as the principal constituent. This encompasses an expansive array of methodologies and specialized fields, such as jewelry crafting, blacksmithing, metalworking, welding, casting, forging, and engraving. Across millennia, artisans and practitioners from various cultures and societies have engaged in the creation of utilitarian, decorative, or dual-purpose metal crafts. Some common examples of metal crafts include the following: blacksmithing, metalworking, welding, casting, engraving, jewelry making, metal sculpture, decorative metalwork, etc.

Blacksmithing involves shaping and forging metal using heat and tools, creating tools, weapons, and architectural elements. Metalworking involves cutting, bending, shaping, and assembling metal sheets or rods to create objects like sculptures, furniture, ornaments, and household items. Welding joins metal pieces together using heat and pressure, used in fabrication and construction. Casting involves pouring molten metal into a mold to create specific shapes, used in sculptures, jewelry, decorative items, and industrial components. Engraving is the art of carving designs or inscriptions onto metal surfaces, used in jewelry making and decorative metalwork. Jewelry making uses precious metals like gold, silver, and platinum, using techniques like soldering, stone setting, polishing, and texturing. Metal sculpture creates three-dimensional artworks using cutting, welding, bending, and shaping, ranging from small tabletop pieces to large outdoor installations and public art. Decorative metalwork adds aesthetic appeal and architectural detail to buildings and interiors. Metalcraft requires a combination of artistic creativity, technical skill, and knowledge of materials and techniques, serving both functional and aesthetic purposes in various industries and art forms.

Metalcraft plays a significant role in religious traditions. In Candomblé, the art of making iron artifacts is crucial for consecrating entities of the religion (Porter, V., & Rosser-Owen, M. (Eds.). 2012). Similarly, in India, metalworking is intertwined with religious practices, such as the casting of copper alloy images and the creation of bells and lamps for religious ceremonies (Srinivasan, S. 2020). The survival of traditional crafts in the face of global competition and changing market demands is a challenge faced by artisans in various regions, including Assam in India (Gillian, Farrell. 2023). These crafts not only have economic importance but also hold cultural and philosophical values.

Let's understand with an example, the filigree technique in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, carries local cultural images and embodies values such as tolerance, discipline, and care for the environment (Chutia, L. J., & Sarma, M. K. 2016). The art of making metal objects for religious purposes not only sustains the crafts themselves but also contributes to the preservation of cultural and religious traditions.

Metalcraft in different religions: Metal crafts have played a significant role in various religious traditions for centuries, serving both practical and symbolic purposes. Metal is commonly used to create religious icons and statues, which are placed in temples, churches, shrines, or other places of worship as focal points for devotion and meditation. Metal objects, such as chalices, censers, candle holders, and offering plates, are used during religious ceremonies and rituals, often crafted with intricate designs and symbols specific to the religious tradition.

Metal is also used in the construction of musical instruments, such as bells, gongs, Tibetan singing bowls, and cymbals, used in various religious practices. Religious artifacts, such as crosses, crucifixes, amulets, talismans, and religious jewelry, are believed to offer

protection or serve as reminders of faith. In the study of Srinivasan, metalworking is intertwined with religious practices, such as the casting of copper alloy images and the creation of bells and lamps for religious ceremonies (Srinivasan, S. 2020). Metalwork is often incorporated into the architectural design of religious buildings, such as temples, mosques, churches, and synagogues, with decorative metal gates, grilles, domes, spires, and other ornamental elements. Metal tools are used for specific rituals or ceremonies, such as purification rituals in Indigenous cultures. Religious symbols, such as crosses, crescents, menorahs, and pentacles, are crafted from metal and hold deep spiritual significance. Metal armor and weapons, adorned with religious symbols or inscriptions, invoke divine protection or blessings in battle.

Metalcraft in Hinduism: Metal crafts are integral to Hinduism as it is serving various religious purposes. It is used to create statues and icons of Hindu deities, such as Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, Goddess Lakshmi, and Lord Ganesha, which are worshipped in temples and homes. The intricate design and symbolism of metalwork in Hindu temple architecture, such as domes, spires, gates, and decorative elements, symbolize cosmic principles and spiritual significance. Some kinds of metal objects, such as lamps, bells, incense holders, water vessels, and ceremonial utensils, are sacred and made of brass, copper, or silver. Intricate jewelry and ornaments, such as necklaces, bangles, earrings, and anklets, are also made of metal and worn during religious festivals and ceremonies. Yantras and mandalas, sacred geometric patterns, are created using metal crafts, representing the cosmos, and used in meditation, worship, and rituals. Deities are associated with specific vehicles and implements made of metal, such as the Mouse of lord Ganesha, Sudarshana Chakra of lord Vishnu, and Trishul of lord Shiva.

Metalcraft is an important tradition in Hinduism, with various forms of metalworking being practiced in different regions of India. The Dhokra casting technique, used by the caster community in India, is one such traditional metal craft that is still practiced (Eungi, Choi 2022). The Cauvery basin region in South India is known for its metalworking traditions, including the tradition of copper sculptures in Thanjavur and Swamimalai, bells and lamps in Nacharkoil, and decorated metal plates in Thanjavur is a significant cultural heritage. (Champak, Kumar, Sahu. 2015). These crafts have deep cultural and religious significance in Hindu society. Additionally, the filigree technique in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is another form of metalworking that has cultural and philosophical value, with motifs representing natural wealth and virtue (Sharada, Srinivasan. 2020).

These metal crafts not only showcase the artistic skills of the craftsmen but also play a significant role in religious rituals and cultural practices within Hinduism. When we look at Hindu astrology, metal crafts are used to create yantra plates for calculations and remedies. Overall, metal crafts in Hinduism serve practical, aesthetic, and spiritual purposes, enriching the religious and cultural practices of devotees and practitioners.

Metalcraft in Sikhism: Metal craftsmanship holds a significant role in Sikhism, contributing to the augmentation of religious rituals, traditions, and symbolic representations. Within gurdwara architecture, metal crafts are employed to fashion intricate designs adorning decorative features such as domes, minarets, gates, and railings. Moreover, these crafts facilitate the creation of emblematic Sikh symbols like the Khanda, Ek Onkar, and the Sikh emblem, often manifested in wall hangings, plaques, and ornamental pieces. Instruments integral to Sikh devotional music, such as tablas and harmoniums, are meticulously crafted using metal components such as brass, copper, and steel, utilized in religious ceremonies and spiritual practices. Additionally, metal craftsmanship gives rise to religious artifacts like kirpans, karas, and khandas, serving as visible manifestations of Sikh individuals' faith and dedication to Sikh tenets.

Furthermore, within gurdwaras, metal crafts find utility in enhancing the ambiance of sacred spaces through the creation of various accessories and fixtures. Metalcraft is an

integral part of the traditional socio-economic setup in South Asia, including Sikhism. Artisans in the village society engage in metalworking activities, manufacturing agricultural implements, and cloths, and providing services in exchange for a share of crops (Basanta, Kumar, Mohanta., Daitari, Sahoo. 2003). The indigenous metalworking handicrafts in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, include the filigree technique, which holds cultural and philosophical values. These values, such as tolerance, discipline, hard work, and independence, align with the formulation of national character values (Ashok, Kumar. 2018). While there is no specific mention of metalcraft as a tradition in Sikhism in the provided abstracts, the presence of metalworking artisans in the traditional socio-economic setup suggests that metalcraft could be a part of Sikh tradition as well. Further research may be required to explore the specific role and significance of metal craft within Sikhism.

Additionally, metal crafts are used in gurdwara accessories, such as chandeliers, light fixtures, and candle holders, to enhance the ambiance and decor of the sacred space. Overall, metal crafts in Sikhism serve both practical and symbolic purposes, enriching the religious experience and cultural identity of Sikh communities worldwide.

Metalcraft in Islam: Metal crafts play a crucial role in Islamic religious practices, architecture, and cultural expressions. Mosque architecture features intricate designs and geometric patterns made from metals like brass, copper, and stainless steel, reflecting Islamic aesthetics and cultural heritage. Metalcraft has been an important tradition in Islamic culture, particularly in the production of copper-based artifacts. Copper-working has been utilized to revive and update Islamic heritage by incorporating elements of Islamic art and design, representing its main characteristics. The study (Al-mağallaġ al-urdunniyyaġ li-l-funūn, 2022) explores the revival of Islamic heritage through copper craft, which merges traditional Islamic elements with contemporary aesthetics.

Metalcraft has been an important tradition in Islamic culture, particularly in the production of copper-based artifacts. Copper crafting has been utilized to revive and modernize Islamic traditions by replicating their key features and incorporating Islamic art and design elements. (Al-mağallaġ al-urdunniyyaġ li-l-funūn, 2022). Historical sources indicate that precious metalwork, including gold and silverware, was prevalent in medieval Islamic courts, demonstrating the significance of metalcraft in Islamic societies (Valentina, Laviola. 2017). Calligraphy, a form of Islamic calligraphy, uses metals like gold, silver, copper, or brass to create intricate artworks featuring verses from the Quran or other Islamic texts. These artworks serve as decorative pieces in mosques, homes, and public spaces, conveying spiritual messages and aesthetic beauty.

Islamic artifacts and ornaments, such as incense burners, candle holders, and decorative lamps, are also made from metals, symbolizing spiritual enlightenment and divine guidance. The minibar and pulpit design, where the Imam delivers sermons during Friday prayers, showcases skilled craftsmanship and Islamic artistic traditions. Metal crafts are also involved in the construction of musical instruments, such as drums, cymbals, and string instruments, contributing to the spiritual atmosphere and cultural expressions within Sufi gatherings and ceremonies. Islamic jewelry and accessories, such as rings, bracelets, and necklaces, feature Islamic motifs and symbols, serving as expressions of faith and reminders of spiritual values. Overall, metal crafts play diverse and significant roles in Islam, reflecting the rich heritage and traditions of the Islamic faith.

Archaeological studies have also revealed the production technology and socio-economic implications of copper-based artifacts in Islamic communities, highlighting the importance of metal consumption in these societies (Robyn, Iredale. 2022). Furthermore, catalogs of Islamic metalwork collections provide valuable insights into the history and development of metalcraft in Islamic cultures (Venetia, Porter., Mariam, Rosser-Owen. 2012). Overall, metal craft has played a significant role in preserving and showcasing the artistic and cultural heritage of Islam.

Metalcraft in Christianity: Metalcraft is a significant aspect of Christianity, both historically and in contemporary religious practices. It is used to create religious artifacts and decorative items, such as crosses, crucifixes, chalices, candle holders, censers, and processional crosses, with intricate designs and symbols representing aspects of the Christian faith. Metalcraft is also evident in the architectural elements and furnishings of Christian churches, cathedrals, and chapels, such as gates, railings, door handles, hinges, and decorative grilles.

Metal craft has been a tradition in Christianity, with the use of metal and ceramics in various processes. Early English literature, as discussed by Bradley, explores the influence of Christian thought on the portrayal of metal workers in Old English verse (James, Lyons, Bradley. 1987). Söderberg highlights the use of ceramics in early medieval metal craft, particularly in processes like refining and melting (Anders, Söderberg. 2015). Wright suggests that skilled metalsmiths were valued by cult leaders in the Middle Ages, and their craft was seen as supernatural (Duncan, W., Wright. 2019).

Jousmäki examines how Christian metal bands use biblical texts in their discourse, connecting them with the metal music culture (Henna, Jousmäki. 2012). McCormick et al. provide evidence of metalworking in the Early Christian period (Finbar, et. al 1992). These abstracts collectively demonstrate the presence of metal craft as a tradition in Christianity, with its influence on literature, music, and archaeological evidence. Metalcraft is used to create various religious instruments, including bells, cymbals, chimes, and organ pipes, which are used to announce worship and call the faithful to prayer.

Religious jewelry and accessories, such as crosses, crucifixes, medals, rosaries, and rings, are also made from metal craft. Metalwork embellishments like embroidery, filigree, and gemstone settings enhance the beauty and symbolism of these sacred garments and objects. Metalcraft in Christianity often carries symbolic and spiritual significance, as the use of precious metals like gold and silver in religious artifacts symbolizes the divine nature of Christ and the purity of faith. The craftsmanship and attention to detail in metalwork reflect the reverence and devotion of Christians towards their religious traditions and beliefs.

Metalcraft as a tradition: Metalcraft is a tradition that involves creating objects and artworks using metal as the primary medium. It involves a variety of techniques, skills, and cultural expressions passed down through generations within specific communities or societies. These traditions have deep historical roots and reflect the unique heritage and artistic sensibilities of different regions and peoples. They share common themes of craftsmanship, creativity, and innovation. Artisans specialize in specific techniques like blacksmithing, metalworking, casting, forging, engraving, or jewelry making, which they acquire through apprenticeships, family traditions, or formal training. Metalcraft traditions are often intertwined with broader cultural practices, religious rituals, and societal norms. Metal objects may hold symbolic significance in religious ceremonies or serve practical purposes in daily life.

Throughout history, metal craft traditions have evolved and adapted to changing social, technological, and economic conditions. While traditional techniques and designs are preserved, artisans may incorporate modern materials, technologies, and aesthetics into their work. Overall, metal craft represents a rich tapestry of human creativity, ingenuity, and craftsmanship that spans across time and geography.

Conclusion: The present research paper explores the significance of metal and metal craft in Indian religious traditions, including Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity. It highlights the role metal plays in creating sacred objects, architectural embellishments, jewelry, and ceremonial artifacts, embodying spiritual beliefs, aesthetic ideals, and communal identities. The study emphasizes the enduring legacy of metal craft traditions, which continue to thrive in the modern world, enriching religious experiences, fostering cultural connections, and preserving heritage practices. It emphasizes the need to support

and safeguard these ancient crafts to ensure their continued integration into India's religious and cultural tapestry for future generations.

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