

Study of the Aesthetics of the East and the West

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty. The word ‘Aesthetics’ in the Indian context, means “science and philosophy of fine art”. Aesthetics, therefore, as philosophy of fine art, has to deal with the philosophic views of these arts, known as Rasa-Brahma Vāda, Nāda-Brahma Vāda and Vastu-Brahma Vāda. Hegel recognizes architecture, music, poetry, sculpture and painting to be fine arts. But Indian authorities admit the first three only to be fine arts. Ancient art was largely, but not entirely, based on the nine great ancient civilizations viz. Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, China, Rome, India, the Celtic peoples, and Maya. Each of these centres of early civilization developed a unique and characteristic style in its art. Aestheticians in both the East and the West have recognized emotion to be an essential element in the aesthetic experience, aroused by poetry or drama. In India, it is the theory of Rasa, as the basic emotion, harmoniously united with transient emotions, the mimetic changes and the situation, as incorporated in the famous definition of Rasa that has been followed by all the subsequent aestheticians. In the West also, the theory of Aesthetics has been discussed generally in reference to the emotions, which the works of the poetic or the dramatic art arouse. In this paper, an attempt has been made to study what Aesthetics is all about, the Indian Aesthetics right from Bharata upto Abhinavagupta, Ancient Greek Aesthetics of Plato and Aristotle, Western Medieval Aesthetics as well as Modern Aesthetics.

Key words: Aesthetics, beauty, rasa, east, west, ancient, modern

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty. It is more scientifically defined as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste. More broadly, scholars in this field define aesthetics as critical reflection on art, culture and nature. More specific aesthetic theory, often with practical implications, relating to a particular branch of arts is divided into areas of aesthetics such as art theory, literary theory, film theory and music theory. An example from art theory is aesthetic theory as a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement, such as the Cubist Aesthetic. Any aesthetic doctrine that guided the production and interpretation of prehistoric art, are mostly unknown. Ancient art was largely, but not entirely, based on the nine great ancient civilizations viz. Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, China, Rome, India, the Celtic peoples, and Maya. Each of these centres of early civilization developed a unique and characteristic style in its art.

Aesthetics was regarded earlier, as to be, exclusively a subject of the West. In the *Histories of Aesthetics*, written by Bernard Bosanquet, Benedetto Croce and Gilbert and Kuhn, they confined themselves

to the presentation of aesthetic currents in the West only. Therein, they completely ignored oriental aesthetics; the reason may be that, probably they thought that such subject does not exist in the East. It is not so today, rather, it is a world –wide subject now. The UNESCO has also sponsored a plan to bring out twenty volumes presenting different aesthetic currents including Russian, Japanese, Chinese, Indian etc., in the common title “*Sources of Aesthetics*” under the editorship of Prof. Jan Aler of the University of Amsterdam. The Aesthetics, as a branch of study is very much important as well as interesting. It may be well understood from the modern western theory which considers aesthetic education as an integral part of liberal education and maintains that all round development of the child is not possible without this education. The cultivation of the aesthetic and particularly of the arts is a process by which man can discover a new meaning in life and become conscious of his integrated personality.

Indian Aesthetics:

The word ‘Aesthetics’ in the context of Indian Aesthetics means “science and philosophy of fine art”. Hegel recognizes architecture, music, poetry, sculpture and painting to be fine arts. But Indian authorities admit the first three only to be fine arts. For, they alone have independent being. To painting and

sculpture, they give a subordinate position to architecture. Thus Indian Aesthetics is primarily concerned with three arts i.e. poetry, music and architecture. Aesthetics, therefore, as philosophy of fine art, has to deal with the philosophic views of these arts, known as Rasa-Brahma Vāda, Nāda-Brahma Vāda and Vastu-Brahma Vāda (Pandey 1959). Indian art evolved with an emphasis on inducing special, spiritual or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them symbolically. In the Pan Indian philosophic thought, the term ‘*satyam śivam sundaram*’ is another name for the concept of the Supreme. ‘*Sat*’ is the truth value, ‘*śiva*’ is the good value and ‘*sundaram*’ is the beauty value. This concept of ‘*satyam-śivam-sundaram*’, a kind of Value Theory is the cornerstone of Indian Aesthetics. Of particular concern to Indian drama and literature are the term ‘*Bhāva*’ or the state of mind and *Rasa* referring generally to the emotional flavours or essence crafted into the work by the writer and relished by a ‘sensitive spectator’ or *sahṛdaya*. Poets like Kālidāsa were attentive to *Rasa*, which blossomed into a fully developed aesthetic system.

Rasa theory blossoms, beginning with the Sanskrit text *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Sarma, 2008) (*nāṭya* meaning ‘drama’ and *śāstra* meaning ‘science of’), a work attributed to Bharata Muni, where the Gods declared that drama is the ‘Fifth *Veda*’ because it is suitable for the degenerate age, as the best

form of religious instruction. Bharata presents Brahmā to be the founder of dramaturgy on the basis of the material borrowed from the *Vedas* and the *Upavedas* and imparted to him (Pandey op. cit., 1959). Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*NS*) is divided into thirty six chapters variously said to be thirty seven. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* presents the aesthetic concepts of *Rasas* and their associated *bhāvas* in Chapters VI and VII respectively, which appear to be independent of the work, as a whole. Eight *Rasas* and associated *bhāvas* are named and their enjoyment is likened to savouring a meal, *Rasa* is the enjoyment of flavours that arise from the proper preparation of ingredients and the quality of ingredients. The word *bhāva*, in dramaturgy is used in the sense of mental state only, which is of forty-nine types (Ibid., 1959). Bharata’s famous *Rasaśūtra* runs as follows – *vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisamyogādrasānispattiḥ. NS, VI. 32*

The Aesthetic object i.e. *Rasa*, according to Bhatta Lollata (Singh, 2003), is nothing but the unity of a basic mental state in the midst of multiplicity of i) emotive situation, ii) mimetic changes and transient emotions. However, this is the traditional view of *Rasa* (Pandey op. cit., 1959). There is nothing original of Bhatta Lollata in it. According to Śrīśaṅkuka (Singh op. cit., 2003), the scenic arrangements together with skilful acting

give rise to the consciousness of identity of the actor with the hero, he impersonates. Aesthetic experience is due to the objective perception of the aesthetic object and that; this theory is maintained by some western aestheticians also (Pandey op. cit., 1959). It may be further noted that Śrīśaṅkuka has criticised the theory of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (Singh op. cit., 2003), unlike his predecessors maintains that both the cognizing self and the cognized object, are free from all limitations, which give individuality. He is of the opinion that the poetic language has three powers e.g. *Abhidhā*, *Bhāvakatva* and *Bhojaktva*.

The theory of the *Rasa* develops significantly with the Kashmiri aesthetician Āndandavardhana's classic on poetics, the *Dhvanyāloka*, which introduces the ninth *Rasa*, *Śānta-rasa* as a specifically religious feeling of peace (*Śānta*) which arises from its *bhāva*, weariness of the pleasures of the world. The primary purpose of this text is to refine the literary concept *dhvani* or poetic suggestion, by arguing for the existence of *Rasa-dhvani*, primarily in forms of Sanskrit including a word, sentence or whole work 'suggests' a real-world emotional state or *bhāva*, but thanks to aesthetic distance, the sensitive spectator relishes the *Rasa*, the aesthetic *flavour* of tragedy, heroism or romance. The 9th-10th century master of the religious system known as 'the non-dual Śaivism of Kashmir' (or 'Kashmir Śaivism') and aesthetician, Abhinavagupta

(Ibid., 2003) brought *Rasa* theory to its pinnacle, in his separate commentaries on the *Dhvanyāloka*, the *Dhvanyāloka-locana* and the *Abhinavabhāratī*, his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Abhinavagupta offers for the first time a technical definition of *Rasa*, which is the universal bliss of the Self or Ātman coloured by the emotional tone of a drama. The *Śānta-rasa* functions as an equal member of the set of *Rasas*, but, is simultaneously distinct being the clearest form of aesthetic bliss. Abhinavagupta likens it to the string of a jewelled necklace; while it may not be the most appealing for most people, it is the string that gives form to the necklace, allowing the jewels of the other eight *Rasas* to be relished. Relishing the *Rasas* and particularly the *Śānta-rasa* is hinted as being as good as but never equal to the bliss of self-realization, experienced by *yogis*. The realization of *Rasa*, Abhinavagupta maintains, being dependent on comprehension of *Vibhāvas*, *Anubhāvas* and *Vyabhicāribhāvas* lasts so long as cognition of these factors lasts and ceases to exist when the latter vanishes (Mukherji, n.d.).

Ancient Greek Aesthetics:

Greece had the most influence on the development of aesthetics in the West. This period of Greek art saw a veneration of the human physical form and the development of corresponding skills to show musculature, poise, beauty and

anatomically correct proportions. Furthermore, in many Western and Eastern cultures alike, traits such as body hair are rarely depicted in art that addresses physical beauty. Plato (427-347 B.C.) is important for Comparative Aesthetics, because of his theory of reflection in the context of both, Metaphysics and Aesthetics. The objective world, according to him, is nothing but reflection of the world of ideas on matter and a product of art is but a reflection of a natural object (Pandey, 1972). Plato's theory is known as Rigidistic Hedonism. Greek philosophers initially felt that aesthetically appealing objects were beautiful in and of themselves. Plato believed that for us to have a perception of beauty there must be a transcendent form for beauty in which beautiful objects partake and which causes them to be beautiful also. He felt that beautiful objects incorporated proportion, harmony, and unity among their parts. Similarly, in the Metaphysics, Aristotle found that the universal elements of beauty were order, symmetry, and definiteness. In his Aesthetics, Aristotle is an exponent of the moral purpose of art, the view that the end of art is to improve its lover morality. His theory is technically called Pedagogism (Ibid., 1972).

Western Medieval Aesthetics:

Surviving medieval art is primarily religious in focus and funded largely by the State, Roman Catholic or Orthodox Church,

powerful ecclesiastical individuals, or wealthy secular patrons. These art pieces often served a liturgical function, whether as chalices or even as church buildings themselves. Objects of fine art from this period were frequently made from rare and valuable materials, such as gold and lapis, the cost of which commonly exceeded the wages of the artist.

Medieval aesthetics in the realm of philosophy built upon classical thought, continuing the practice of Plotinus by employing theological terminology in its explications. St. Bonaventure's "*Retracing the Arts to Theology*", is a primary example of this method. Saint Thomas Aquinas's aesthetic is probably the most famous and influential theory among medieval authors, having been the subject of much scrutiny in the wake of the neo-Scholastic revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and even having received the approbation of the celebrated Modernist writer, James Joyce. Thomas, like many other medievals, never gives a systematic account of beauty itself, but several scholars have conventionally arranged his thought- though not always with uniform conclusions- using relevant observations spanning the entire corpus of his work. While Aquinas's theory follows generally the model of Aristotle, he develops a singular aesthetics which incorporates elements unique to his thought. Umberto Eco's "*The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*" identifies the three main

characteristics of beauty in Aquinas's philosophy- *integritas sive perfectio*, *consonantia sive debita proportio*, and *claritas sive splendor formae*. While Aristotle likewise identifies the first two characteristics, St. Thomas conceives of the third as an appropriation from principles developed by neo-Platonic and Augustinian thinkers. With the shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, art likewise changed its focus, as much in its content as in its mode of expression.

Modern Aesthetics:

From the late 17th to the early 20th century, Western Aesthetics underwent a slow revolution into what is often called modernism. German and British thinkers emphasized beauty as the key component of art and of the aesthetic experience, and saw art as necessarily aiming at absolute beauty. For Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, aesthetics is the science of the sense experiences, a younger sister of logic and beauty, is thus the most perfect kind of knowledge that sense experience can have. For Immanuel Kant, the aesthetic experience of beauty is a judgment of a subjective but similar human truth, since all people should agree that "this rose is beautiful" if, in fact it is. Kant is transcendentalist in his philosophy. He deals with three types of experience-i) theoretical, ii) practical and iii) aesthetic, in his three critiques, i) Critique of Pure

Reason ii) Critique of Practical Reason and iii) Critique of Judgement, respectively (Ibid., 1972). For Friedrich Schiller, aesthetic appreciation of beauty is the most perfect reconciliation of the sensual and rational parts of human nature. For Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, the philosophy of art is the 'organon' of philosophy concerning the relation between man and nature. So aesthetics began now to be the name for the "*philosophy of art*". Friedrich von Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel have also given lectures on aesthetics as "*philosophy of art*" after 1800. For Hegel, all culture is a matter of "*absolute spirit*" coming to be manifested to itself, stage by stage, changing to a perfection that only philosophy can approach. Art is the first stage in which the absolute spirit is manifested immediately to sense-perception, and is thus an objective rather than subjective revelation of beauty. Hegel is the first western aesthetic thinker, whose works contain references to Indian art (Ibid., 1972). For Arthur Schopenhauer, aesthetic contemplation of beauty is the most free that the pure intellect can be from the dictates of will; here we contemplate perfection of form without any kind of worldly agenda, and thus any intrusion of utility or politics would ruin the point of the beauty. It is thus for Schopenhauer, one way to fight the suffering. Aesthetic

experience, according to Schopenhauer, is the experience of idea, the immediate manifestation of will, free from all relations (Ibid., 1972). The British were largely divided into intuitionist and analytic camps. The intuitionists believed that aesthetic experience was disclosed by a single mental faculty of some kind. For Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, this was identical to the moral sense; beauty just is the sensory version of moral goodness. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, aesthetics consisted in the description of a whole culture which is a linguistic impossibility. That which constitutes aesthetics lies outside the realm of the language game. For Oscar Wilde, the contemplation of beauty for beauty's sake, augmented by John Ruskin's search for moral grounding, was not only the foundation for much of his literary career but was quoted as saying "*Aestheticism is a search after the signs of the beautiful. It is the science of the beautiful through which men seek the correlation of the arts. It is, to speak more exactly, the search after the secret of life*".

Wilde famously toured the United States in 1882. He travelled across the United States spreading the idea of Aesthetics in a speech called "*The English Renaissance*". In his speech, he proposed that beauty and aesthetics were not languid but energetic. By beautifying the outward aspects of life, one would beautify the inner ones. For Francis Hutcheson, beauty is

disclosed by an inner mental sense, but is a subjective fact rather than an objective one. Analytic theorists like Henry Home, Lord Kames, William Hogarth, and Edmund Burke hoped to reduce beauty to some list of attributes. Later analytic aestheticians strove to link beauty to some scientific theory of psychology (such as James Mill) or biology (such as Herbert Spencer).

CONCLUSION

The Poetics started as an empirical and normative study; and despite its later search for fundamental aesthetic principles, it hardly ever succeeded in breaking down its scholastic barriers (De, S.K. 1963). If we turn to the word *alam'kāra*, which originally was applied to name the discipline itself as well as to designate the rhetorical figures, we find that it signified pure and simple embellishment, this forms the main topic of analysis in the earliest extant works from Bhāmaha to Rudrata. They approach the subject as a scientist approaches a physical fact. It also appears that Sanskrit Poetics reached the rank of an independent discipline at a time when Sanskrit poetry, in the hands of less imaginative writers, was becoming more and more a highly factitious product of verbal specialists. The divine creator in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures expressed satisfaction and wonders over the mystery of what he had created. Likewise, the Âdi-kavi in the interrogation *kim' idam' vyāhṛdam' mayā* gave expression to the

eternal wonder and curiosity of human mind with regard to his own creation (Ibid., 1963). Going to the comparative aspects of the East and West aesthetics, it is observed that Hegel seems to improve upon the ancient Indian classification of arts in so far as he draws a distinction between the objective art and the absolute, which was not drawn in ancient India; but he agrees with the Indian classification into *Svatantra* and *Upayogini* (Pandey op. cit., 1972). Aestheticians, in both the East and the West have recognized emotion to be an essential element in the aesthetic experience, aroused by poetry or drama. In India, it is the theory of *Rasa*, as the basic emotion, harmoniously united with transient emotions, the mimetic changes and the situation, as incorporated in the famous definition of *Rasa* that has been followed by all the subsequent aestheticians. They have recognized the basic or persistent emotion, the *sthāyin*, to be the central fact in aesthetic experience. In the west also, the theory of aesthetics has been discussed generally in reference to the emotions, which the works of the poetic or the dramatic art arouse (Ibid. 1972). From wonder to enquiry, there is only a step, and when the restless human mind sets itself to solve the mystery, his curiosity leads him to open up new vistas of thought and thereby flourishes both the East and West Aesthetics.

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i) *pranamya śirasā devau*

pitāmahamaheśvarau/nātyāśāstamī

pravakṣyāmi brahmanā yadudahrtaṃ//

NS I. 1. Sarma, Satyaprakasa. 2008.

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ii) *teṣāṃ tadvacanamī śrutvā munīnāmī*

bharato munih/ pratyuvāca tato vākyam

nātyavedakathāmī prati// bhavadbhīh

śucibhirbhūtvā tathāvahitamānasaih/

śrūyatāmī nātyavedasya sambhavo

brahmanirmītaḥ// NS. I. 6-7. Ibid. p. 5

iii) *dharmyamarthyamī yaśasyamī ca*

sopadeśamī sasamī grahamī/

bhaviṣyataṣca lokaṣya

sarvakarmānudarśakamī//

sarvaśāstrārthasampannamī

sarvaṣilpapravartakamī/nātyākhyamī

pañcamamī vedamī setihāsamī

karomyahamī// saṅkalpya bhagavānevamī

sarvān vedānanusmaran/ nātyavedamī

tataścakre caturvedāṅgasambhavamī //

NS. I.

14-16. Ibid. p. 9

Pandey op. cit. Vol. I, p. 7

Ibid. p. 27

In the words of Mammaṭa, the author of

the *Kāvyaprakāśa*, Ch. IV, *Utpattivāda*

of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa runs as follows-

vibhāvairlalanodyānādibhirālambanoddī

panakāraṇaiḥ ratyādiko bhāvo janitah

anubhāvaiḥ
kaṭākṣabhujākṣepaprabhṛtibhiḥ kāryaiḥ
pratītiyogyaḥ kṛtaḥ
vyabhicāribhīrnirvedādibhiḥ
saḥakāribhīrupacito mukhyayā vṛtṭyā
rāmādāukārye
tadrūpatānusam' dhānānnarttake 'pi
pratīyamāno rasa iti
bhaṭṭalollaṭapravṛtayaḥ// Singh,
 Satyavrata. 2003 (Reprinted).
Kāvyaaprākāśa. Chowkhamba
 Vidyabhawan, Varanasi, p. 66
 Pandey op. cit. Vol. I, p. 41
 The *Anumitivāda* of Śrīśaṅkuka is as
 follows- *rāma evāyam' ayameva rāma iti*
na rāmo 'yamityauttarakālike badhe
rāmo 'yamiti rāmaḥ syādvā na vā 'yamiti
rāmasaḍṣo 'yamiti casamyān
mithyāsam' śayasādṛṣyapratītibhyo
vilakṣaṇayā citraturagādīnyāyena
rāmo 'yamiti pratipattiyā grāhye na'e//
 Singh op. cit. p. 68
 Pandey op. cit. Vol. I, p. 48
 Bhaṭṭanāyaka's *Bhuktivāda* runs as – *na*
tāṭasthyena nātmagatatvena rasaḥ
pratīyate notpadyate nābhivyajyate, api
tu kāvyenātye cābhīghāto dviṭīyena
vibhāvādisādhāraṇīkaraṇ
ātmanābhāvakatvavyāpāreṇa
bhāvvyamānaḥsthāyī
sattvodrekaprakāśānandamayasaṃ vidviś
rāntisatattvena bhogena bhujyate iti
bhaṭṭanāyakaḥ// Singh op. cit. p. 72
 The *Abhivyaktivāda* of Abhinavagupta
 runs as follows- *loke pramadādibhiḥ*
sthyāyānumāne 'bhyāsapāṭavavatām'
kāvye nātye ca taireva
kāraṇatvādīparihāreṇa

vibhāvanādivyāpāravattvādalaūkikavibh
āvādisābdavyavahāryyairmamaivaite
śatrorevaite na taṭasthasyaivaite, na
mamaivaite śatrorevaite na
taṭasthasyaivaite iti sambandhaviśeṣ
asvīkāraparihāranīyamānādhyavasāyāt
sādhāraṇyena pratītaibhīvyaktaḥ
sāmājikānām' vāsanātmatayā sthitaḥ
sthāyī ratyādiko niyatapramāṭrgatatvena
sthito 'pi sādharāṇopāyabalāt
tatkālavigalītaparimitapramāṭr
bhāvavaśonmīṣitavedyāntarasam'
parkaśūnyāparimitabhāvena pramāṭrā
sakalasaḥ dayasaṃ' vādabhājāsādhāraṇ
yena svākāra ivābhīno 'pi gocārīkr
taścarvyamāṇ ataiakaṇṇo
vibhāvādivīvitāvadhīḥ
pānakaṛasaṅyāsenā carvyamānaḥ puraḥ
iva paṛisphuraṇaḥ hṛ dayamiva praviśān
sarvāṅgīṇa amivalīṇa gan anyatsarvamiva
tīrodadhad
brahmāsvādāmīvanubhāvayan
alaukīkacamatkāraḥ kārī śṛṅgārādiko
rasaḥ/ sa ca na kāryaḥ
vibhāvādivīnāśo 'pi tasya
sambhāvaprasaṅgād nāpi jñāpyaḥ
siddhasya tasyāśambhāvāt, api tu
vibhāvādivībhīrvyañjītaścarvaṇīyaḥ// Ibid.
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