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**Aesthetics in Indian Art :
The Ordering Principles**

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AESTHETICS IN INDIAN ART : THE ORDERING PRINCIPLES

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Backdrop

The word 'aesthetics' in its original greek form (*aisthetikos*) means anything that is connected with perception by senses. Interestingly, to feel or to perceive is more or less the common characteristic of all the Indian philosophies (*Darshan*). Indian *Darshan* is something which draws its references from the "seen", the real world, whereas philosophy (phil+sophia-sophia is assumed) draws its references from assumed contexts. Aesthetics is not an independent system of Indian philosophy (*Darshan*). The former is regarded as the kingdom of the heart and the latter as the realm of the head. Indian aesthetics is supernatural and divine, and to some extent supersensuous also. It may not be always justified by logical propositions. The elements of Indian aesthetics find their roots deep down in the mystic esoteric concept of "Two-in-One", and unveil the secret of how does one's own soul should look back at the 'Paramount Soul', face to face. But the Indian philosophy is natural, mundane and justifiable by logical maxims. It is to convert the pain and suffering into pleasure and peace; the poison into nectar and mundane life into a divine hermitage.

Indian aesthetics is a well-experimented psychoanalytical process of judgement. It is understood today as a science and theory of Beauty and fine arts. Indian logic postulates the perception of (i) the mundane (*laukika*), or perceptible by sense organs, and (ii) supersensuous (*yaugika*) or realisable introspectively. It assures supersensuous taste in relishing aesthetic Beauty and bliss. It is not only concerned with the problem of Beauty but also with the question of art and the enjoyment in art*. The classification of arts in Indian tradition is based on different aesthetic senses. Amongst the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*dr̥ya*) and hearing (*Ūravya*). Architecture, sculpture and painting originate from vision, and music and poetry originate from hearing, and theatre from the two together.

Indian aesthetics has three main streams : (i) literature and poetics (ii) drama and dramaturgy (iii) fine arts and sculpture. But its scope circumscribe almost all the branches and sub-branches of Indian - Arts, Crafts, Sciences, Literature, etc., which entertain our sense organs, satisfy our mind and convey Happiness to our soul. All sorts of literature - Prose, Poetry, Criticism, Drama, Dramaturgy, Dance, Music, both vocal and instrumental, Painting and also allied faculties of arts, which convey joy to an aesthete. It can also be anything which is sweet, bright, beautiful and true in the phenomenal world, even in dream and imagination, because in ecstasy paramount of good and absolute Happiness 'Supreme' reigns.

Basic Principles

The Indian theory of aesthetics is deeply rooted in the triple - principle of *satyam* (Truth), *shivam* (Goodness/auspiciousness) and *sundaram* (Beauty). *Satyam* (Truth) is paired with $\frac{3}{4}tam^*$ (Cosmic Order) in the famous passage of Rgveda (X.90.1) which says that both of these were born of kindled *tapas*. *Tapas* is the basic effort and form of the manifestation of existence, creation and bliss from the basic cause. This relates to primary analysis of creation where Reality is seen in two forms viz. $\frac{3}{4}tam$, the kinetic aspect of order and *satyam*, the potential aspect of Truth. Thus $\frac{3}{4}tam$ is the framework in which the process of creation, sustenance and dissolution operates. Its most important meanings include Cosmic Order, Truth, Nature (*Dharma*), Beauty and Continuous Flow. It regulates the cosmos into a systematic whole.

The term 'Beauty' is explained as the philosophy or theory of taste, or of the perception of beautiful in nature and art. Art and Beauty are originally connected with each other and there can be no consideration of Beauty without the consideration of art. One of its purposes is to define the beautiful and to analyse the attitude of human mind, and this involves very subtle and difficult discussions. Beauty is perceptible in qualities like proportions, symmetry, harmony, balance, rhythm, richness of meaning and conceptual background etc. Beauty is a value which underlines formative standards. It is a mark of success. It is something that emerges as a product of reward, but never presupposed. Logically, Beauty is a mark of a successful practical synthesis of the sublime i.e. the most rational and the particular. Ontologically, it is a realization in a concrete

experience of the feeling of affinity between the sublime as the subject and the object.

Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Happiness are the ends of the human life. Almost all the systems of Indian philosophy - theist, the atheist and the secular carry out the 'divine message' of Truth, Bliss, Beauty and Happiness to the suffering multitudes. The 'supreme good' is realised to be the eternal reservoir of the heavenly 'honey', irrespective of faiths, concepts and continents. In the theory of aesthetics, Tagore operates with four concepts, Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Joy. Along with these there are two further terms, 'expression' (*prakāśa*) and 'art' (*Üilpa*). The last two are notions of a different order from the first four, for it is an expression in art that leads us to Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, experienced through joy or delight. There cannot be a consideration of Beauty without the consideration of art. To Sri Aurobindo the Art and Beauty are part of the process of the human ascent towards an intenser clarity of consciousness. In art lie the deepest life principles. Coomaraswamy reminds us that Beauty is scholasticism, it has to do with cognition, intellection and intelligibility. Beauty consists in harmony, illumination and shapeliness. There is an indivisible relation in between Beauty and the beautiful, like light and luminosity. Apart from making objects visible, a light brings us something more (glory or Beauty or luminosity). In the same way, a piece of art suggests something more than what is represented by curves of lines, brushes and checkered colours. A man of refined taste (*sah³daya*) may enjoy, realise and relish but can have little express in words. Indian aesthetics attempts to give a verbal shape to that nectarous flow of the aesthetic bliss - that waves all over the world.

Beauty is not a fixed notion. It is experienced in various modes and phases and its characteristics determined on logical, psychological and metaphysical basis. It undergoes evolutionary changes according to the levels of experiences at which we realise it. Actually the success of an artifact consists in how forcefully and vigorously and consciously these values are represented. Aesthetic experience (*Rasawadna* or flavour) and emotional expression of sentiments, is the keynote for the appreciation of Beauty of art, and particularly of dance.

Abhinavagupta equates poetry* and drama, since a poetic thought forms a picturesque image on the mental arena, when it is heard or recited. Dance is one of the main factors of dramatic performance. It displays the three out of four expressions : the verbal or vocal (*vŒcika*), the physical (*ŒÆigika*), the mental (*sŒttika*) of a drama, except the extraneous (*ŒhŒraya*).

The fine arts are the media of the union of heaven and earth. Through art and Beauty, earth comes near to heaven. When the gods descend on earth, they come with music and dance, with colour, with light, with flowers and with incense. The [folk] dances usher in the earth, through their art, something of spirit, the atmosphere of the *Devas* (Gods). A [folk] dancer practices the most dynamic art. He moves and makes others also to move in their turn. He stands vigil on the parapet of Bliss, Knowledge and Beauty. He knows what true cooperation is. Folk-dance is the earliest mode of communication between different races, which promote fellow-feeling. It not only establishes a common culture but also a common language, devoid of any parochialism. Music or dancing is a staircase or *sopans* to unite with the supreme being (or for *nirvana*). They are equally externalisation of mental vision evoked in *Dhyana* (meditation) with a view to *samadhi*.

The true aim of the artist is not to extract Beauty from nature*, but to reveal the life within life, the Noumenon within phenomenon, the Reality within unreality and Soul within matter. When that is revealed, Beauty reveals itself. So all the nature is beautiful for us if only we can realise the divine ideas within it. To express the Truth is the virtue of the artist. In it he is not bound either by subjective inclinations or by objects or facts - in - themselves; he is free, what is true is beautiful. What is beautiful is delighting. The freedom of man lies in thus delight. To live this life of Truth is, for Tagore, the way of man's being. The works of art thus enables a man to move from quantity to quality, fact to Truth and utility to Beauty.

Beauty is not embodied in form of matter but it belongs to the spirit and can only be apprehended by spiritual vision. It is subjective and not objective. There is no Beauty in natural phenomena, every object is properly fitted to fulfil its parts in cosmos, yet the Beauty does not lie in the fitness itself but in the divine idea which is impressed upon those human minds which are turned to

receive it. Indian artist always insisted upon spiritual Beauty. The spirit is male (*purusha*) and considered as the highest type of divine Beauty. It is symbolised by male figure. The Beauty of the female divinity is regarded as the reflection and counterpart of the male form.

Elements of Relish

There is a universal appeal of relish. Relish is a kind of experience of the all-blissful entity of the 'Universal Soul'. Relish may be realised at two levels : divine and mundane. Abhinavagupta (10th-11th century A.D.) feels that the relish of all sorts of aesthetics experience is, more or less, like that of the Quietistic. Lord Shiva is the representative deity of the 'Paramount Relish', who combine in Him; Truth, Beauty and Happiness in an all-blissful harmony of eight or nine kinds of relish, as his eight metamorphic phenomenal forms, such as Earth, water, wind, fire, sky, mind, ego and intelligence (a|çanÇeyikas or a|çasakh¶s). The Quietistic is the meeting point of two kind of relish - the divine and the mundane. But the Quietistic of the mundane state is conditional. In this state, one's own mind temporarily enjoys a Quietistic rest, but it comes back to its original position, as soon as the Quietistic trance breaks. But in other state (divine), the Quietistic relish is in different state of mind, when one's own mind enjoys a unbreakable placidity and looks apparently absorbed in wordily affairs. This is the first step of the divine relish, accessible by a ladder from the level of the mundane Quietistic. The mundane relish is practically the literary aesthetic experience, open to all, with a literary taste. On the other hand, the divine relish is the subject of devout aesthetics and is equivalent to a self-bequest. It is supra-conscious and blissfully sweetest relish (*ananda - cinmaya - rasa*). The Shiva and Shakta thought-currents appreciate only two divine relishes : (i) the Quietude (ii) the Servitude. But the VaiĀava school composes of five varieties of the divine relish : (i) the Quietude (ii) the Servitude (iii) the Friendly (iv) the Fondling (v) the Sweet.

Relish is equally experienced both in picture and dance. Indian aesthetics has indicated different relishes in different colours. Things made of a letter as well as a colour (*varĀas*) have equal importance to aesthetic experience. One rests on words and other on experience. The *Īlparatna* and the *ManasollĪsa* explicitly determine the very sight of a picture which revive a feeling and an

emotion (*bhāvacitra*, *rasacitra*) give due exposure to their respective ideas and relishes*.

The concepts of Luminosity preached by Kashmir Shaivism; the doctrine of Beauty and Bliss advocated by Shakta cult, and the maxim of self - conscious Happiness of Bengal Vaishnavism represent three holy (streams) confluences of Indian aesthetics. Abhinavagupta's philosophy of aesthetics reveals his penetrating insight into principles of artistic Beauty and sensibility. He integrated the two concepts in a manner as to bring out the essence of what constitutes 'Beauty'. He uses the term *chamatkara* (miracle) for it which has both metaphysical as well as aesthetic connotations. In Shaiva philosophical terms it is nothing but perfect self-consciousness. In other words, consciousness of self free from all the limitations. In its universal implication it is called "*vimarsha*" which is inseparable from self-luminosity (*prakāśa*). Beauty thus is a state of being and not an object of cognition, and so is the experience of aesthetic relishing or *rasa* in its essential nature. As such "*vimarsha*" is also called bliss (*Ananda*).

Notion of Rasa

Poetry is regarded as the mother of all the creative arts in India. Bharata is perhaps the most complete theoretical statement in the world heritage on the poetic circuit. He has contributed in the field of aesthetic and art activity in his theory of *rasa*, usually translated as sentiment for want of better word. In Sanskrit its (*rasa*) connotations has a wide spectrum including 'taste', 'delight' and 'sap'. But the concept of *rasa* is so inextricably bound with that of *bhava* (emotion) that cannot be understood without the another. The great Shaiva thinker, Abhinavagupta, approached the theory of aesthetics from the historical, analytical, psychological, logical and philosophical point of view and discussed the ends of art and the theory of meaning in his text *Abhinava Bharati*. Looking upon a product of dramatic art as a living human body, he like an anatomist analyses it. He analyses aesthetics experiences into different levels of sense, imagination, emotion, catharsis and transcendency. His analysis begins at the sense - level. But at the level of emotions a person completely forgets himself when he is at high pitch of emotions. It de-individualises the Individual. It raises him to the level of Universal. At this level, emotion experience is completely freed from all objective references as also from temporal and spatial relations, which

are due to limitations of the individual subject. At the higher level of aesthetic experience the duality of the subject and object completely disappears. At this level basic emotions sink into the subconscious and the universalised subject shines in its *Ananda* aspect. *Ananda* is nothing but self-experience of self. It is the experience of itself by the self in its absolute universality. The *Dhvani-Rasa* school founded by Anandvardhana* in the 9th-10th century A.D. and firmly stabilised by Abhinavagupta has been rightly described as the new school of Indian aesthetic with its emphasis on suggestion, imagination and sensibility. To Abhinavagupta all experiences of different *rasa* leads individual to *ÜCenta rasa* by the beauty and bliss to realise fundamental nature of the human spirit.

The theory of *rasa* attempts to analyse the most fundamental aspect of the aesthetic experience. Although the concept of *rasa* has originated in the context of theatre, it relates to other artistic media as well. According to Bharata, drama incorporates into different dimensions, all the other arts - painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music and poetry.

Notion of Bhava

Beauty cannot be shown, it has to be realised by the observer. One has to feel it. A work of art is a statement informed by sentiment (*rasa*). The origin of *rasa* is from *bhava*. *Bhava* (emotion) is a concrete situation and condition for a period of time of some occurrence, and *rasa* is the aesthetic experience of that happening or condition.

The *NCEtyaÜastra* prescribes the directions for the different forms of gestural renderings of *rasa**; the unity of dramatic work and the details of the spectacle etc. It relates to other artistic media as well, and provides a deep insight into the psychology of aesthetic experience. It conceives of drama as the perfect synthesis between all arts and integrates in its form poetic text, histrionics, stage-craft, music, dance, painting and even architecture into an organismic whole, with *rasa* as its soul.

In the Indian artistic tradition and aesthetic theory a very specific theory of emotive significance of colours is found. According to Bharata, the erotic sentiment is represented by a deep green colour; the comic by white; the pathetic

by grey; the furious by red; the horrible by black; the odious by blue and the marvellous by the yellow. Since life - styles influence works of art the choice of colours for different emotions is revealed in artistic forms of different cultures.

To conclude : There arises few questions : can there be a primitive aesthetic theory? Since we have early legacy of man in the form of prehistoric rock art, can there be any aesthetic interpretation of rock art? Can we have a universal theory of aesthetics? The questions raised are of metaphysical in nature. They take us to the higher level of understanding of the ordering of the universe and the nature of man. When viewed at the level of perception and experience, Indian expression of art are held together by an integral vision that makes life an art, part and parcel of a single totality where life functions and creative art are inseparable from myths, rituals, festivals and ceremonies. No dichotomy between the sacred and secular, life and art is found. The human and the divine are in continuum, in a constant movement of interpretation and transformation. Corresponding to this, a man developed temples which are symbols of the world-mountain or, analogically, of the universal man (*Puruṣa*) whose body comprehends the universe. The names of the various limbs of the human body from the foot to the crown of the head are applied in Indian architectural texts to the different parts of the temple structure. But the *Vastu Puruṣa* is lifeless unless the soul resides in it. His real soul being the central image installed on its sanctum being the *garbha griha* or the house of the womb, built in the universe-form of womb. This experience is traditionally justified by the analogy between the dark cave of the heart and the dark space of the shrine where the image appears. Above it rises the high tower, a microcosm of Mount Meru with its vertical thrust leading eye and heart to union with the divine. In the traditional Hindu cosmology the gods are related to the earth by dwelling in the upper reaches of Mount Meru (*Sumeru*), the central peak and axis of the world. They live in one cosmos with mankind and descend to the foothills when needed. Hindu gods are involved in the living world of a man, though they stand for cosmic laws at a higher level of that world. The deities which are the basic energies of the universe can be approached through the perception of created forms. This necessity has led to the representation of the deity in a thousand variety of thought - forms, magic designs, *mantras* and *yantras*, symbols and images. Human ability to construct the images represent the things which may be

regarded as an aspect of his ability to symbolize both at higher (master symbols) and lower (natural symbols) levels.

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