

## NEGLECT OF AESTHETICS IN INDIAN CULTURE

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Aesthetics is a branch of Philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art and taste and appreciation of beauty. It is most scientifically defined as study of sensory emotional value. Many scholars in the field defined Aesthetics as critical reflection on art, culture and nature. In recent times Aesthetics implies new ways of seeing and perceiving the world.

Aesthetics refer to the idea that human conduct ought to be governed by that which is beautiful and attractive. John Dewey pointed out that unity of Aesthetics and Ethics is in fact reflected in our understanding of behaviour being attractive and morally acceptable.

In Indian literature the theory of *rasa* (pleasure), the most difficult theory under the entire area of Aesthetics, encompasses the response of mind, vital feelings, the sense to certain taste in things and their essence. It is defined as the common way by which we get at something that stands behind the spiritual being in us which has the secret of universal delight and eternal beauty of existence.

The new Aesthetics that began with the impact of western thought culminates in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of art and aesthetic experience. Sri Aurobindo also helped in recovering the lost tradition of Indian Aesthetics.

The paper aims to highlight, the Indian Aesthetics of *rasa* and culture in brief and Aurobindo's stand point on Aesthetics, as higher human faculty than Ethics. This is to enjoy and mold ourselves into the harmony of eternal beauty and delight and consummation of our aesthetic need and nature. The paper aims to bring into focus the neglect of aesthetics in Indian familial structure and practice, rural and urban development, religious practice, politics, health services, educational activities, monetary activities and so on.

Aesthetics in Indian perspective has its moorings in literature, dance, drama, music etc. in terms of *rasa* which is accompanied by *bhava*, the emotional flavour crafted by the author and relished by *sahrdaya*, the sensitive spectators. Eight rasas enunciated by Bharat Muni in *natyasastra* such as 1. *Sringar rasa* with *rati bhava*, love, the presiding deity of which is thought to be Vishnu, represented by the *colour* light green. 2. *Hasyarasa* with

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*hasyabhava*, laughter, whose presiding deity is thought to be *Pramata*, represented by the colour white.<sup>3</sup> *Rudram with krodhabhava*, fury, its presiding deity is *Rudra* represented by the colour red. 4. *Karunya* with *sokabhava*, compassion, mercy, presiding deity is *Yama* represented by the colour grey. 5. *Bibhatsam rasa* with *jugupsa bhava*, presiding deity *Shiva*, represented by colour blue. 6. *Bhayanakam with bhayabhava*, horror. Presided by the deity *Kala*, represented by colour black. 7. *Veera rasa* with *utsavabhava*, enjoyment and merry, presiding deity is *Indra*, represented by the colour yellowish. 8. *Adbhutam rasa*, with *vismayabhava*, its presiding deity is *Brahma*, represented by colour yellow.

Later, the Kashmiri Aesthetician *Anandavardhana* introduced another *rasa* called *santam*, the calm and quietness, presided by deity *Vishnu*, represented by colour white. It is a religious feeling of peace arises out of the weariness of the pleasure of the world.

In this *rishi Agasta* pointed out *rasa* or essence cannot be found at one time in one object but spreaded all over the space. *Taba taye pito rasa rajasyanu vishita, dibi batayiba sarita.*<sup>1</sup>

In 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century in non-dual Saivism, *Avinga Gupta* offered the technical definition of *rasa* which is universal bliss of the self or *atmana*. Primarily *Abhinga Gupta* mentioned *bhakti* as the necessary sentiment of *santam rasa*. Indian Aesthetics very much like Indian Philosophy claimed to be known through intuition. All *rasa* is described to be accompanied by colours and deities but such belief in the accompaniment in terms of deity is a sign of faith, bear neither philosophical nor aesthetic significance.<sup>2</sup> If it is said that some colour represent some *rasa* or essence or *bhava*, there can be difference of opinion. In western as well as Japanese and Chinese tradition colour red or pink represent love not anger or fury. Rather green can represent heroic mood instead of love. Green is also a symbol of youth and greenery, as interpreted for Indian National Flag. Every colour has enormous number of shades from lightest to the deepest. If colour blue could represent *bibhatsa rasa* it cannot be sky blue which represent peace and generosity at the sight of it.

Though Aesthetics is defined as a branch of Philosophy that studies nature of beauty and appreciation of beauty, it cannot be defined by or confined into some specific description.

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<sup>1</sup> Pp 60-80 Barrlinge S.S., Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory, D.K.Publisher 2007

<sup>2</sup> Pp 49-50 V.N. Mishra Foundation of Indian Aesthetics Amazon 2008

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Aesthetics depends on the preference and judgement. Aesthetics can be ascribed to and perceived of a Phenomenon. Ascription can be successful if it is accepted by many. Even a smallest part of the world is multicultural which allows multi perspective.

If aesthetics of the culture is concerned and if we take Indian concept of *rasa* and *bhava* into consideration then *rasa* like *bhayanakam*, *bibhatsam* *bhava* like *bhaya jugupsa* all comes into it. But according to Aesthetics Ethics human action should be beautiful and attractive, fair and harmonious to natural environment. Indian Aesthetics which is manifested through dance, drama and literature are not simply ethical and beautiful but manifestation of whole life and reality. Culture in Indian perspective is not realistic but aesthetic. India is a place of multifarious culture.

For five centuries, thirteenth to seventeenth centuries India was under Islamic rule though with varying degrees of effectiveness in different regions of the country. But at no single point of time the country was ruled exclusively by the Muslim rulers. On the other hand, five hundred years of Muslim rule did not fail to influence political and cultural life in all its facets. Muslim rule apart, Muslim contact with India can be counted from the seventh century itself. Naturally the interaction of Muslim culture with Hindu way of life gave rise to a sort of common Indian culture. Islamic influence can be seen in all sphere of life. In architecture, paintings, music and literature; in social institution like marriage, ceremonies, in eating habits, in gourmet and cuisine, sartorial fashions and so on.<sup>3</sup> Many Mughal paintings bear the touch of Ajanta and its regional variations, while *Rajput and Pahari Qualam* adopted a lot from Muslim miniature style. Equally important is the Muslim contribution in the field of jewelry, pottery etc. Instead of sculpting the figure of gods and goddesses or animals, Indian jewelers started to engrave floral design in jewelry and embroidery on garments.<sup>4</sup>

Musicians and poets are patronized by Muslim rulers by giving them high salaries and rich rewards. Numbers of books were translated from Sanskrit to Persian. Some of the rulers were so engaged in poetry and Music that it was done at the cost of the state work. There are many reasons for these phenomena. Indian system of notation was perhaps the oldest and elaborate. There are *ragas and raginis (a restricted notation)* meant to be sung in winter, in summer, in rain, in autumn. There are month wise *ragas* meant to be sung during twelve

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

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months of the year. There are ragas for singing in the early morning, morning, early noon, afternoon and in the evenings. There are *ragas* claimed to light lamp or bring about downpour of rain. All the tunes of these *ragas or raginis* are so effective that it can bring about a matching mood in the mind of a listener of the specific time for which it has been tuned. Dance in its art form is as elaborate as music and is based on hindu *natyashastra*. *Sculptures of dancer and Musician were carved on the walls of ancient and medieval temples, now mostly surviving in South India.*<sup>5</sup>

The Hindu art form being patronized by Muslim ruler got its peak of success in India. Mia Tansen got his highest renown. Amir Khusru was credited for composing songs. Under the Khalji's there were concerts and competitions arranged between hindusthani and karnataki musicians. Indian classical music flourished throughout the medieval period, although classical Indian dacing drifted from the religious sphere into the solons of courtesans and dancing girls.<sup>6</sup>

Folk and tribal art in India takes on different manifestations through varied media such as pottery, paintings, metalwork, paper art, weaving and designing of objects such as jewelry and toys. These are not just aesthetic object but have an important significance in people's life and tied to their beliefs and rituals. Often puranic gods and goddesses are transformed into contemporary forms and familiar images. Fairs, festivals, local heroes and local deities play a vital role in these arts. Folk arts also include the visual expression of wandering nomads. This is the art of people who are exposed to changing landscapes as they travel over the valleys of highlands of India being tortured and uprooted by Hindu as well as Muslim rulers. They carry with them the experiences and memories of different places and feelings of loss. Example of folk arts are Warli and Gonds.<sup>7</sup>

We can see that the whole scenario of Indian Aesthetics comprised of Culture and art are partly the results of patronization partly out of deprivation and hard work of different communities. But what it achieved is the beauty that gives pleasure and satisfaction to the human eyes and ears. We can say that aestheticism is definitely a high human faculty.

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<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

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Rishi Aurobindo gives a different interpretation of aesthetics by considering it to belong to the higher plane of human cycle than ethical plane. But Sri Aurobindo finds lack of aestheticism in Indian domestic and social life. Culture for Aurobindo is opposed to Barbarism. The physical, vital, gross, narrow, domestic life looks only to money getting, procreation and maintenance. Even when the nation and age has developed through science and arts still the general outlook is not governed by knowledge, but by gross, vital, commercial view of existence, is not governed by truth and beauty. This can be a civilized nation but not a cultured nation. To be governed by rule, mentality, sensation, customary idea or opinion or environment and not purified, enlightened, chastened by the law of beauty, is contrary to the idea of culture. Sri Aurobindo thinks that a society which is vigorous, descent, well ordered, successful, religious, moral, is not a free society but an imprisoned one. "A Society following a rule of life may be anything else you will, vigorous descent, well ordered, successful, religious, moral but it is a Philistine society; it is a prison which the human soul has to break."<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo points out a quarrel between culture and conduct. Conduct is also a part of cultural life. Ethical identity is one of the master impulses of cultural being.<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo holds that there is a side of our mentality, will, conduct and character which creates ethical man. Another side of sensibility to the beautiful understanding, not in narrow hyper artistic sense creates aesthetic man. There can be both ethical and aesthetic culture. These two cultures for Aurobindo are opposed to one another. They have mutual distrust to one another. Ethical rules are barrier to aesthetic upsurge. An aesthetic mind accepts ethical rule whenever it is beautiful and have an instrument of creating beauty. There is misunderstanding between ethical and aesthetic culture. Ethical mind finds faults to the aesthetic domain like drama dance and songs. Aesthetic mind sometimes gets repulsed to the ethically disciplined culture. This misunderstanding is inevitable to our natural growth. Sri Aurobindo thinks we should try for this fullest separate growth to the extreme to the whole range of its capacity.

Aurobindo thinks that ethical or aesthetic being is not the whole man. They are merely two powerful elements. Ethical conduct can be linguistically the first condition for

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<sup>8</sup> Page 85, Sri Aurobindo, Human Cycle Pondicherry 1997

<sup>9</sup> Pp 84-86 Ibid

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human perfection. The aesthetic on the other hand is indispensable can be said to be love for harmonious possession of truth, power beauty and delight of human existence. Neither is the highest principle of human order. We can enlarge the sense of ethics by beauty and delight. But such reconciliation can take place only if they are taken up by higher human faculty of reason and intelligent will. Sri Aurobindo says “Without character without some kind of high and strong discipline there is no enduring power of life”.<sup>10</sup>

Above contention of Sri Aurobindo can be instantiated by the higher human faculty like Gandhi who adopts ethicality by consuming as least as possible and at the same time his charka and the voice against untouchability are the marks of aestheticism. But question arises is there any higher human faculty which is nether vital, nor moral, nor religious nor even well-ordered or descent? Sri Aurobindo might have considered successful, domestic and physical as lower human faculty. But question arises what is truth, power delight and beauty? Philosophically truth is either that which is factual reality or that which is universal and transcends individual space and time. We can define power as expression knowledge and command. Delight can be defined as non-pessimistic peaceful mind. Beauty is that which is charming and soothing. By defining truth, power, delight and beauty can we say as Sri Aurobindo says that ethicality and aestheticism cannot stay together except it is taken up by higher human faculty. If Gandhi or Sri Aurobindo himself can be considered as manifestation of truth power and beauty, they are also moral, religious and descent. Aurobindo himself says that without some kind of higher and strong discipline there is no enduring power of life. A domestic life can be beautiful irrespective of space and time if it is peaceful, happy, disciplined, solvent, humble, with proper maintenance of health and hygiene and can be ethical by having an honest means of livelihood.

Question is what is unaesthetic in religious and moral or descent way of living. John Dewey says “humdrum and slackness of loose ends are the enemies of aesthetics”<sup>11</sup>

Humdrum and slackness we may find in individual as well as in group activity. Sri Aurobindo thinks individual and group apart from artistic mind or higher human faculty is neither the performer of the Art nor the maker of the history they may be domestic, religious and engaged in procurement and money getting. In India the domestic men are practicing

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<sup>10</sup> Page 91, Sri Aurobindo, Human Cycle, Pondicherry 1991

<sup>11</sup> Page 44 Yuriko Saito, everyday Aesthetics, Oxford University Press 2007

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religion by ritualistic practice of caste system and sacrificing animals. After a long struggle of Gandhi nobody is ready to clean the filth made by themselves but still today a community is engaged in cleaning and India has not yet been able to overcome it. Indian domestic families are exhibiting lack of ethical and aesthetic culture by having lack of healthy and hygienic habits, by having female feticides, making house without proper drainage system and water facilities, occupying foot paths by building shops, causing traffic jam. Urbanization is getting to be improper right from the very beginning of township in India. Along with the domestic men people in the administration and in government are not showing any ethical or aesthetic sense in urbanization or rural development. Even hospitals and health centers are being made with improper infrastructure and unclean ambiance. Educating mass is getting manifested by building numbers of building with lack of proper infrastructure without aestheticism. Education is being imparted by some indifferent teachers and received by mostly inattentive students. Indian politics is manifested by noisy propaganda, crowded meetings and quarrelsome parliament or a policy making parliament either without having beneficiaries into confidence or without implementation. Money related corruption from all square of life is another feature of India making it unethical and unaesthetic. Money laundering is making a group of people filthy rich and a group of people to live hand to mouth.

Despite having a marvelous culture India could not achieve Ethicality or Aestheticism. The cause of which is the neglect of Aestheticism in one hand and another is the faulty Aesthetic theory of rasa of this grand old culture. Indian aesthetic theory was not an appreciation of beauty or pleasure, rather any kind of rasa or bhava such as bibhatsam or bhayanakam are getting appreciation from the very beginning of the civilization. People are found to appreciate sacrificing animals before God even today in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tribal as well as classical culture are in favour of killing animals in the name of worshipping. All the effort of Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo along with the beauty of Tajmahal and kahjuraho, classical music, classical dance, all is getting faded away due to sheer unaesthetic mass activity. Even lord Buddha and his aesthetic and ethical philosophical religion could not make its place in India.

There is no intention in this paper to minimize the profound effect of art, dance, music in human life but there are other aspects of aesthetic engagement in the world starts from cleanliness, empathy, discipline to the appreciation of beauty and delight which influence our

judgement, decision and action. Aesthetics shouldn't be art centric. We can gain more in our life by considering aesthetics in our everyday life manifested through domestic, religious, social, political, educational life of rural and urban men and women. This down to earth Aesthetics is neglected in India for four thousand years of its civilization.

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