

THE HINDU THEORY OF BEAUTY

Beauty in Indian literature is usually equated with *rasa*. It is the essence of experience. Brahman is *rasa*, the ultimate essence of all existence and all life and being. There is another meaning, a more literary one, namely that it is 'literary delectation' or 'poetic sentiment'. This limitation of beauty delectation or poetic sentiment is not correct, but obviously since all manifestation or expression of reality is the expression of the essence of a thing its *rasa* in one word, and since this is the supreme function of art and poetry and drama the word has got a limitation of meaning. However used in a philosophical sense it must be made to cover all aesthetic experience. It is a vast blossoming of the mind, an expansive and understanding consciousness that has penetrated the inmost core of an object and has got itself thus thrilled and exhilarated. It is the finest point of intensive intuition, an at-oneness of with an object, with its body and its soul. These features of subjective experience in a sense constitute beauty. In beauty both the subject and object find and realize an oneness; our mentality flows out of itself towards the object, the idea, the image or suggestive gesture or to anything that ingratiate itself; we expand into it, clasp it to our soul, bathe it with our tears of joy or ecstasy, and find an immense peace, a fulfillment of our own nature, in the contemplation of the *rasa*. *Rasa*, however, is not a static fact; it is a dynamic process.

Rasa for the Indian aesthete includes both the subjective and the objective features. It is true that the subjective features are more pronounced than the objective. There are events, situations or invariable conditions that provoke the sense of beauty. These in a fundamental sense govern our appreciation of beauty. The factors involved in *rasa* are four in number. They are the stimuli (*Vibhava*), the permanent moods (*sthayabhava*), the secondary or transitory moods (*vyabhichai-bhavas*) and after-effects (*anubhavas*). *Rasa* then is aroused or rather manifested by the close intermingling of these four – fold factors. It is, in other words, a total experience within which we find on investigation these four-fold factors, than, is necessitated. There is the objective situation; it is not a mechanical stimulus but a constellation of several types of stimuli.

That is the object that provokes a response from us. It is not unanalysable total whole, but it is whole that holds within its bosom significant factors which individually and cumulatively demand a response, an effective cognitive and conative response, whether this object is a perceptual datum or a psychic idea, it stands out of its background summoning us to attend to it. It is thus the stimulus whatever be its nature that urges the consciousness to expand (*vikasa*).

The associative features related to the object are vividly brought into action and play upon our consciousness. Not merely are events revived, many times even the very events are re-inched. When the stimulus is just a gesture, all the memories flood into our consciousness to give it a fullness and overflowing conceptual and imaginal concreteness. Remote and near similar are recollected and fused into the getting, this nucleus, this suggestion,. Like a torch one simple suggestion or look or mild gesture lights the whole alley of our conscious and unconscious experiences that have gone before. Much then depends upon the stimuli determine the fundamental emotion, the nature of the force to be released and the types of memory to be recalled; in any case a whole context; stands and acts as the background of the unique experience of the *rasa*.

It is therefore necessary to have stimuli which we have described are ideas suggestions, actions descriptions or gestures or natural objects.

Indian artists and aestheticians, though very good appreciators of natural beauty as every page of Valmiki and Kalidasa and others would show, usually pay more regard to the creative activity of the individuals, of man who seeks to realize nature of God through creative imitation of nature.

It is because it has been taken that wise, that the subjective stress- should we say the solipsistic stress – has been more in evidence than the objective realization of the grandeur of the starry heavens, in Indian esthetics. The subjective view makes beauty dependent on the individual exclusively. His value is the final value, his measure the final measure. Natural beauty, however, is the corrective to the subjective view. Subjective creations lack that stupendous objective reference that natural objects reveal. All the same, as all true creative artists know, the idea or the intuition that chooses them

as a vehicle of manifestation is as much objective as the outer sense that strike us so vividly. It appears as hanging suspended by a fine thread from a height and from a great beyond, beckoning men's mentalities to express it to represent it, to clothe it and to enjoy it through reproduction. The subjective creation is not something that is confined to the individual, but belongs to a higher mind, beyond our mind is a God's creation patterned by man in the image of the Divine archetype, to adopt plate' expression to represent spiritual objectivity of value.

Our consideration then turns towards the nature of the subjective forces released. First and foremost, what is released is the memory of the past. Memory includes tendencies and habits and instincts, *vasanas* and *samskaras*; it includes learning and traditional knowledge and social habits, in one word, culture. Each experiences has an emotional content due to prior responses conditioning their first appearance. On the least occasion of the repetition or revival of the previous or even similar situation there occurs emotion that attended it. We might have to admit with MacDougall that every instinct has as its accompaniment a fundamental emotion, though what exactly that emotion is likely to be is a very disputed and debatable point. Every instinct, at least at the human level, is linked up with other instincts and what we arrive at is a constellation or pattern of instinctive integration, an organic system of instincts rather than a pure atomistic instinct. This integration determines at any one moment what emotion shall dominate and what not, what shall be the background of the rest out of which one shall stand out. If we had once seen a lion (even if it were so placed as to be incapable of hurting us) the knowledge that a lion is a, man-eater makes us afraid if meeting a particular gentleman had been unhappy at first, the second time we meet him, the whole context of the prior meeting is recollected along with the unhappy feeling of familiarity. Thus the forces released are two: one is the memory or the *samskara*, the other is the occasion or occasions. Whilst that memory there is a possibility of universal emotion, that is to say, a constant appearance in all people of one particular emotion, under similar or same condition as in Communal psychology yet it must also be borne in mind that the same event may produce quite different emotions in different minds.

With these preliminary remarks as to the nature of the subjective force released, we shall consider the nature of the fundamental factor that is the emotion and its differentiations. Emotions are classified into nine kinds in Indian Aesthetics. Together they contribute the one fundamental *rasa*, Beauty of *Ananda*. The nine *rasas* according to *Alankara* are *rati* (love), *hasa* (humour), *soka* (pathos), *krodha* (anger), *utsaha* (eagerness), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsa* (disgust), *vismaya* (wonder) and *santi* (tranquility). These are the fundamental emotions needed to produce the effect, the total whole essence or *rasa*, which must finally be delight. Exuberance is beauty, it has been said, and it is this exuberance that is sought to be conveyed in the final fulfillment of *Ananda*. Any artistic product must be loyal to one of these fundamental emotions since it is held by these artistic thinkers or rather theorists that every individual emotion can individually stimulate finally the *Ananda*. More likely is the view

¹*Śrīngara* in the opinion of most Indian aestheticians is held to be more important, or fitted to play the prominent role than the rest. Another view is that of *Śrī Vedanta Desila* who holds *Santi* as best fitted because most satisfying of its spiritual nature. All the rest are subsidiary to the one or the other, that is *Śrīngara* *Santi*.

that there happens stage after stage an intermingling, a progressive infusion and blending of other emotions into the matrix of the fundamental. Finally as in drama, all the emotions are worked into a mosaic or perfect rhythm with the fundamental emotion as the general halo and the climax over the whole. There is possible as a criticism of these *sthayibhavas* from the standpoint of modern psychology, but since the emotions undoubtedly do differ from one another, we may take to that these nine are fundamental. These nine fundamentals get their help from two other subsidiary emotions, that is to say emotions which overlap these fundamental emotions; for example, despondency and fatigue attend both sorrow and love.

In the experience of these emotions we observe certain changes organic to the emotions themselves. There are changes in voice, in physical expression, trembling, sweat and other physiological changes which are known as *anubhavas*. Physiological changes, relocation or tautening of muscles, contortions and other factors of

expression play a dominant part in emotion, and these reveal and in fact do produce in the act and in his audience what Prof. Cannon calls 'cold' emotion. As he has proved even Adrenalin-injection does not produce anything more than a cold emotion, since in every case emotion is linked up organically with an end-result, with the object. In painting and in sculpture, in dance and in Kathakali, we have the importance of expression clearly and cleverly revealed and utilized. A broad suggestiveness of expression is what happens in these fine arts. What the adept artist does is to bring into clear relief one fundamental emotion, which acts as its nucleus: he makes it rich with the memory of the tradition and suggestiveness by his imagery that recalls this emotion in its concrete setting, throws over it a halo of supreme simplicity and in spite of its variegated colors and nuances convey a sense of completeness and unity that is beauty, utterly satisfying.

The artist, it is said, transfers the *rasa* that he experiences and fructifies in his soul to the audience. He shares it with them. He lives the process; he throbs under its integrating unity, undergoes the tribulations and joys of sorrow and love, revenge and sweet reunion, reveals the stress of separation and the intensity of sublime soul-giving. He has no life apart from his creative subject, as Romain Rolland has said.

Abhinavagupta help that suggestiveness, that is to say, in action description and in gesture, in phraseology and in character alone is capable of effecting this transference of emotion that an artist feels. This suggestiveness, *dhvani* is something over and above the primary meaning of the words. In other words, what is conveyed is not the word merely but the whole contextual constellation of implicit reference to emotions and memories that it has within it. This view should not be confused with the western view that there is something incapable of being communicated in great art, *Dhvani* is not so mystical as that. There is definiteness and there is a definite attempt to suggest something more than what words can intimate. It approaches communication of meaning directly to the knowing and appreciating audience.

But it might be asked what guarantee is there that the meanings conveyed or intended to be conveyed are in fact conveyed by these suggestions? Should there not be

some universal or at least some agreed formula for these suggestions? If so, then we have to come to the conclusion that these suggestions bearing some identical message for all is the real fundamental of beauty. It is well to bear in mind that these suggestions are not all; they depend for their acceptance their recognition by all. Expressions of emotion it has been clearly demonstrated are universal and any simulation of the physical and physiological changes, any make-up in other words, would be suggestive of universal feelings, and since emotions have the peculiar quality of limitability or suggestibility and not merely that which induces these emotions by nearness, they are in fact what are fundamental to any communication all over the world, and all over creation.

Thus in art we find that the stimuli must needs possess some objective reference, invariable and universal in their appeal in order to invariably cause the emotion of beauty or delight. It is through the rich concreteness of meaning that conduits itself through suggestions, be these of the ideal or gastrula type, that transference of emotion is achieved. There is no mystery here. It is the soul which speaks directly to other souls in terms of fundamental emotions.

In placing the criterion of beauty in emotion, and in the universal language of gesture and posture, in suggestion and adequacy of suggestion, Indian Alankarasastra has suggested a supreme truth. The language of suggestion, if we may so say, is the language of emotional fundamentalism. Man rejoices in his moods: some may prefer pathos, eagerness, disgust and supreme peace (santi) that is born out of a life of intelligent suffering. Some others may like the sanguine temperament, Śrīngara; the comic spirit may rollick them and make them happy and buoyant. The two types known to modern psychology as the introvert and the extrovert, soft-minded and touch-minded, schizoid and cycloid, are two divisions that might bring into being either the happiness of a comedy or the peace and understanding of a tragedy. But the infinite variations of the emotional stresses make it very difficult for us to analyse the human temperament or even to determine the psycho-graph of any one individual so as to be able to analyse the human temperament or even to determine the psycho-graph of any one individual so as to be able to judge him and predict about him. Yet a broad analysis does not lead us beyond the two types-the tragic introvert and the comic extravert. So a judicious mixture

which does not violate the integrity of the meaning and wholeness of the situation might be said to achieve the fullest description of beauty (*rasa*). Between these two extremes and in fact subserving these two personality – types we find the rest of the level of subsidiary moods, *vyabharibhavas*. Fatigue and despondency are only, to use Spearman's phrase, the quantitative laws of G. The emotionalist qualitative ness and quantitative ness in one sense pursue intelligence. Beauty seeks to fuse the discovery of correlates with the emotional configuration, that is, of art.

But the theory of Art expounded by the realistic schools of Indian aesthetics does not take into account the possible achievement of the unity of emotion and the meaning in the intuition of a suggestion or an object. It does not give prominence to the fullest realization of the *rasa* in the spiritual experience of intuition into reality that was the goal of the Upanisadic seer, who was the first to speak of reality – experience as *rasa*.

The realistic theory also lost itself in the ways and means of communicating rather understanding the configuration of beauty. Is emotional fundamentalism falls short of the final goal. This is because it loses sight of the objective nature of beauty that consists in the emotional sympathy and cognitive noises which later seeks representation of itself through the medium of the personal consciousness, rich with the perfume of meaning that traditional knowledge native instinct and acquired technique give. It is not necessarily an idealistic description when we define beauty as sympathy with the object, a sympathy that aims at knowing the essence, and at mingling itself with it in direct being, so that it could in recreating it in its own consciousness create itself into new ecstasy.

The Indian theory of beauty is weak firstly in its nine- class distinctions, since most of them could be reduced to the level of subsidiary emotions; secondly, in sympathy of the artist with the object which alone facilitates his expression for others. There is logic for oneself, and there is a logic for others in Indian Philosophy; so also there should be, and there was, as is seen in the writings of the very greatest amongst the Indian artists, first art for oneself, the art of living into, and secondly the art for others, the art of living out of.

It is true that the highest always recedes; the *rasa is anirvacaniya* . The experience is confined to the inner portals of self-consciousness, nothing can conduit it out; helpless indeed are the instruments. Even there emotional quiescence and serenity-that numinous glow reveals depths and height immeasurable. Their experience shines, out but cannot express itself. It is limited to them. Their joy or peace, their soul-delight or suffering or whatever it is of wonder or surrender, fear or awe is so thoroughly introverted that none of us can even by a sense participate in its meaning and flow, even if it be just in the penumbra.