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**Aesthetics: Beauty and Sublime****Dr. Archana Durgesh***BBD NITM, Lucknow, (U.P.) India***Abstract**

Aesthetics may be defined narrowly as the theory of beauty, or more broadly as that together with the philosophy of art. The traditional interest in beauty itself broadened, in the eighteenth century, to include the sublime, and since 1950 or so the number of pure aesthetic concepts discussed in the literature has expanded even more.

“Sublime” and “beautiful” are only two amongst the many terms which may be used to describe our aesthetic experiences. Clearly there are “ridiculous” and “ugly,” for a start, as well. But the more discriminating will have no difficulty also finding something maybe “fine,” or “lovely” rather than “awful” or “hideous,” and “exquisite” or “superb” rather than “gross” or “foul.” For one can describe works of art, often enough, in terms which relate primarily to the emotional and mental life of human beings; one can call them “joyful,” “melancholy,” “serene,” “witty,” “vulgar,” and “humble,” for instance. These are evidently not purely aesthetic terms, because of their further uses, but they are still very relevant to many aesthetic experiences.

**Key Words:** Aesthetics, beauty, sublime, pure, morality.

Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. Prof. M. K. Naik remarks, “One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West.”

Aesthetics may be defined narrowly as the theory of beauty, or more broadly as that together with the philosophy of art. The traditional interest in beauty itself broadened, in the eighteenth century, to

include the sublime, and since 1950 or so the number of pure aesthetic concepts discussed in the literature has expanded even more.

In all, Kant’s theory of pure beauty had four aspects: its freedom from concepts, its objectivity, the disinterest of the spectator, and its obligatoriness. By “concept,” Kant meant “end,” or “purpose,” that is, what the cognitive powers of human understanding and imagination judge applies to an object, such as with “it is a pebble,” to take an instance. But when no definite concept is involved, as with the scattered pebbles on a beach, the cognitive powers are held to be in free play; and it is when this play is harmonious that there is the experience of pure beauty. There is also objectivity and universality in the judgment then, according

to Kant, since the cognitive powers are common to all who can judge that the individual objects are pebbles.

Morality requires we rise above ourselves that such an exercise in selfless attention becomes obligatory. Judgments of pure beauty, being selfless, initiate one into the moral point of view. "Beauty is a symbol of Morality," and "The enjoyment of nature is the mark of a good soul" are key sayings of Kant. The shared enjoyment of a sunset or a beach shows there is harmony between us all, and the world.

"Sublime" and "beautiful" are only two amongst the many terms which may be used to describe our aesthetic experiences. Clearly there are "ridiculous" and "ugly," for a start, as well. But the more discriminating will have no difficulty also finding something maybe "fine," or "lovely" rather than "awful" or "hideous," and "exquisite" or "superb" rather than "gross" or "foul." For one can describe works of art, often enough, in terms which relate primarily to the emotional and mental life of human beings; one can call them "joyful," "melancholy," "serene," "witty," "vulgar," and "humble," for instance. These are evidently not purely aesthetic terms, because of their further uses, but they are still very relevant to many aesthetic experiences.

R. G. Collingwood said: "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."

The central concepts in aesthetics are here the pure aesthetic ones mentioned before,

like "graceful," "elegant," "exquisite," "glorious," and "nice." But formalist qualities, such as organization, unity, and harmony, as well as variety and complexity, are closely related, as are technical judgments like "well-made," "skilful," and "professionally written." The latter might be separated out as the focus of Craft theories of art, as in the idea of art as "Techne" in ancient Greece, but Formalist theories commonly focus on all of these qualities, and "aesthetes" generally find them all of central concern. Eduard Hanslick was a major late nineteenth century musical formalist; the Russian Formalists in the early years of the revolution, and the French Structuralists later, promoted the same interest in Literature. Clive Bell and Roger Fry, members of the influential Bloomsbury Group in the first decades of the twentieth century, were the most noted early promoters of this aspect of Visual art.

Bell's famous "Aesthetic Hypothesis" was: "What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? Only one answer seems possible— significant form. In each, lines and colors combined in a particular way; certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colors, these aesthetically moving forms, I call 'Significant Form'; and 'Significant Form' is the one quality common to all works of visual art." Clement Greenberg, in the years of the Abstract Expressionists, from the 1940s to the 1970s, also defended a version of this Formalism.

Abstraction was a major drive in early twentieth century art, but the later decades largely abandoned the idea of any tight

definition of art. The “de-definition” of art was formulated in academic philosophy by Morris Weitz, who derived his views from some work of Wittgenstein on the notion of games. Wittgenstein claimed that there is nothing which all games have in common, and so the historical development of them has come about through an analogical process of generation, from paradigmatic examples merely by way of “family resemblances.”

Communication theorists all combine the three elements above, namely the audience, the artwork, and the artist, but they come in a variety of stamps. Thus, while Clive Bell and Roger Fry were Formalists, they were also Communication Theorists. They supposed that an artwork transmitted “aesthetic emotion” from the artist to the audience on account of its “significant form.” Leo Tolstoy was also a communication theorist but of almost the opposite sort. What had to be transmitted, for Tolstoy, was expressly what was excluded by Bell and (to a lesser extent) Fry, namely the “emotions of life.” Tolstoy wanted art to serve a moral purpose: helping to bind communities together in their fellowship and common humanity under God. Bell and Fry saw no such social purpose in art, and related to this difference were their opposing views regarding the value of aesthetic properties and pleasure. These were anathema to Tolstoy, who, like Plato, thought they led to waste; but the “exalted” feelings coming from the appreciation of pure form were celebrated by Bell and Fry, since their “metaphysical hypothesis” claimed it put one in touch with “ultimate reality.” Bell said, “What is that

which is left when we have stripped a thing of all sensations, of all its significance as a means? What but that which philosophers used to call ‘the thing in itself’ and now call ‘ultimate reality’.”

Communication theorists generally compare art to a form of Language. Langer was less interested than the above theorists in legislating what may be communicated, and was instead concerned to discriminate different art languages, and the differences between art languages generally and verbal languages. She said, in brief, that art conveyed emotions of various kinds, while verbal language conveyed thoughts, which was a point made by Tolstoy too. But Langer spelled out the matter in far finer detail. Thus, she held that art languages were “presentational” forms of expression, while verbal languages were “discursive”—with Poetry, an art form using verbal language, combining both aspects, of course. Somewhat like Hospers and Bouwsma, Langer said that art forms presented feelings because they were “morphologically similar” to them: an artwork, she held, shared the same form as the feeling it symbolizes. This gave rise to the main differences between presentational and discursive modes of communication: verbal languages had a vocabulary, syntax, determinate meanings, and the possibility of translation, but none of these were guaranteed for art languages, according to Langer. Art languages revealed “what it is like” to experience something— they created “virtual experiences.”

Like the concept of Expression, the concept of Representation has been very thoroughly examined since the professionalization of

Philosophy in the twentieth century. Isn't representation just a matter of copying? If representation could be understood simply in terms of copying, that would require "the innocent eye," that is, one which did not incorporate any interpretation.

We must first distinguish the artwork from its notation or "recipe," and from its various physical realizations. Examples would be: some music, its score, and its performances; a drama, its script, and its performances; an etching, its plate, and its prints; and a photograph, its negative, and its positives. The notations here are "digital" in the first two cases, and "analogue" in the second two, since they involve discrete elements like notes and words in the one case, and continuous elements like lines and color patches in the other. Realizations can also be divided into two broad types, as these same examples illustrate: there are those that arise in time (performance works) and those that arise in space (object works). Realizations are always physical entities. Sometimes there is only one realization, as with architect-designed houses, couturier-designed dresses, and many paintings, and Wollheim concluded that in these cases the artwork is entirely physical, consisting of that one, unique realization. However, a number of copies were commonly made of paintings in the middle ages, and it is theoretically possible to replicate even expensive clothing and houses.

Philosophical questions in this area arise mainly with respect to the ontological status of the idea which gets executed. Wollheim brought in Charles Peirce's distinction between types and tokens, as an answer to this: the number of different tokens of letters

(7), and different types of letter (5), in the string "ABACDEC," indicates the difference. Realizations are tokens, but ideas are types, that is, categories of objects. There is a normative connection between them as Margolis and Nicholas Wolterstorff have explained, since the execution of ideas is an essentially social enterprise.

That also explains how the need for a notation arises: one which would link not only the idea with its execution, but also the various functionalities. Broadly, there are the creative persons who generate the ideas, which are transmitted by means of a recipe to manufacturers who generate the material objects and performances. "Types are created, particulars are made" it has been said, but the link is through the recipe. Schematically, two main figures are associated with the production of many artworks: the architect and the builder, the couturier and the dressmaker, the composer and the performer, the choreographer and the dancer, the script-writer and the actor, and so forth. But a much fuller list of operatives is usually involved, as is very evident with the production of films, and other similar large entertainments. Sometimes the director of a film is concerned to control all its aspects, when we get the notion of an "auteur" who can be said to be the author of the work, but normally, creativity and craft thread through the whole production process, since even those designated "originators" still work within certain traditions, and no recipe can limit entirely the end product.

The associated philosophical question concerns the nature of any creativity. There is not much mystery about the making of

particulars from some recipe, but much more needs to be said about the process of originating some new idea. For creation is not just a matter of getting into an excited mental state— as in a “brainstorming” session, for instance. That is a central part of the “creative process theory,” a form of which is to be found in the work of Collingwood. It was in these terms that Collingwood distinguished the artist from the craftsman, namely with reference to what the artist was capable of generating just in his or her mind. But the major difficulty with this kind of theory is that any novelty has to be judged externally in terms of the artist’s social place amongst other workers in the field, as Jack Glickman has shown. Certainly, if it is to be an original idea, the artist cannot know beforehand what the outcome of the creative process will be. But others might have had the same idea before, and if the outcome was known already, then the idea thought up was not original in the appropriate sense. Thus the artist will not be credited with ownership in such cases. Creation is not a process, but a public achievement: it is a matter of breaking the tape ahead of others in a certain race.

The origin of Indian culture and philosophy marks the beginning of literary criticism in India. Indian poetic theory bears evidence to the impact of rich, cultural, philosophical and religious heritage on Sanskrit literature. The theory of beauty is not only confined to literary forms of Poetry, Literature and Drama but is also applicable to other arts like music, dance, painting, and sculpture. The Hindus first developed the science of music from the beginning of Vedic Hymns.

The *Samaveda* was especially meant for music. And the scale with seven notes and three octaves was known in India centuries before Greeks had it. Probably the Greeks learned it from Hindus. According to Swami Abhedananda:

“It will be interesting to know that Wagner was indebted to the Hindu science of music, especially for his principal idea of the ‘leading motive’ and this is perhaps the reason why it is so difficult for many people to understand Wagner’s music.”

It is at this point that we come to the essentially Indian approach to poetry and art. The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa* and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis, the soul’s pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. According to Sri Aurobindo, more generally speaking aesthetics is the theory of *rasa*, of response of mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain taste in things or their essence. Passing through mind or sense *rasa* awakes a vital enjoyment of taste, *bhoga* in poet’s consciousness. The memory of the soul takes in broods over and transmutes the mind’s thought, feeling and experience in a larger part of process which comes by this aesthesis but it is not quite the whole thing; it is rather only common way by which we get at something that stand behind the spiritual being in us which has the secret of universal delight and eternal beauty of existence. The memory of poet’s soul takes in this enjoyment – the thought, the feeling and experience and turns it into *ananda*.

The Indian approach stressed more on the principle of delight that the highest reaction of aesthetics is ecstasy than the western approach. Anandavardhana was a great exponent of *dhvani* and he uses the term 'dhvani' for his theory of poetic suggestion. Anandavardhana's magnum opus *Dhvanyaloka* provides for the first time an insight into the secret of poetic beauty at once scholarly and illuminating and his aesthetics becomes the great dividing range between old criticism and new criticism. In Sri Aurobindo's criticism the ancient idea is absolutely true that delight, *ananda* is the inmost expressive and creative nature of the spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, this *ananda* is not pleasure of a mood or a sentiment or the fine aesthetic indulgence of the sense in the attraction of a form, superficial results and incidents which are often mistaken for that much deeper and greater thing by the minor poetic faculty, the lesser artistic mind but the enduring delight which, as the ancient idea justly perceived, in the essence of spirit and being.

The theory of *dhvani* owes its inspiration to the grammarians in general, from Bhartrhari in particular, and thus has a relation with the theory of *sphota*. The eternal sound is *sphota* that alone can convey ideas. Indian language and philosophy – starting from the word, *sphota* comes down to the articulated word which is comprehensive providing for the ascending and descending movements – from the preverbal state which is the source of inspiration of the articulated word back to the inspiration and the source. Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics clearly reveal that if tone and intonation alone determine the meaning of our day-today utterance, is

surely the rhythm that must decide the meaning of a poem. According to Sri Aurobindo, rhythm helps us not only to determine the meaning, realize the richness by drawing our attention to the overtones/undertones/association/suggestiveness of the diction but discriminate and fix the source of inspiration.

Sri Aurobindo has done a wonderful work in believing and exploring the power of inspiration not merely as a theory but a fact of both personal and general creative experience in the field of Indian aesthetics. He believed that inspiration is to be inwardly felt and realized rather than merely understood and grasped by pointing different levels of consciousness namely the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, and the Over Mind each producing poetry of its own particular intensity. The overhead planes and their characteristic powers are more or less spiritual in their origin and impulsion engage themselves partly or wholly, in the certain and communication of beauty in verse form the overhead poetry is born. According to Sri Aurobindo, the voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a Super Mind which sees things in their innermost, and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgence and rapture and its native language is revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and luster. It is the possession of the mind by the Supramental touch and communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that



creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration.

One might almost say that ancient India was created by the Vedas and the Upanishads and poetry was a revelation to the race of life of the gods and man and the meaning of the world and the beauty and power of existence and through its vision and joy and the height and clarity of its purpose it became creative of the life of people. According to Sri Aurobindo, Ananda, the joy of the spirit in itself carrying in it a revelation of the powers of its conscious being, was to the ancient Indian idea the creative principle, and ancient poetry did thus creatively reveal to the people its soul and its possibilities by forms of beauty and suggestions of power.

Sri Aurobindo has been a spiritual force not only in India but also where ever the thirst for spiritual quest is felt. He was fully alive to the *mantric* value of words and used them as vehicles to bridge the gap between the unuttered and uttered, thereby directing into the path of realization of truth. Sri Aurobindo is an evolutionary seer whose synthetic vision has not only recovered the salient principles of ancient Indian aesthetics but their potentialities and thus the ultimate aim of Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics is to lift the humanity to the level of super mind.

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