

AESTHETICS IN INDIAN ART

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Abstract

Art is the best speculum for any given society which helps to understand the essence of civilization. It is the expression of a man's feelings, emotions and imagination through a medium. When both are given a form, it is called art. In a civilization its philosophy, culture, religion, societal, its loftiest ideals and even its lowest vices are contemplated in the art. It's man's nature to find expression in artistic work. The thing which captivates an artwork is the pleasure felt in artwork. It is not foremost to capture reality but the introspection behind it. The prism of art, in which lies the strokes of a canvas, the curves of a sculpture, the folds of a costume or the lines of a poem are indubitable truths about the nature and life of man across cultures. India's protracted and boundless aesthetic heritage stands as evidence of its vibrant civilization. India's art has gone through various stages which have been silently documented from Bhimbetka cave paintings to Chola temples, from Harappan craft to the poetry of Kalidāsa, from Bharatanatyam to the Mughal miniatures all these are the breakthrough of Indian culture, the reflection of its deep rooted philosophy. How was this art put together? How were the regulations decided? What was its objective? These answers have surfaced from the study and analysis of Indian philosophy as a whole and Indian aesthetics precisely. This paper aims to present the recapitulation of aesthetics in the heritage of Indian art, as it has been presumed right from the vedic to this day.

Keywords

Art, aesthetics, civilization, culture, heritage, indian, philosophy, vedic.

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Introduction

The word “aesthetics” belongs to the field of the science and philosophy of fine art. Fine art has the capacity to present the “absolute” in sensuous garb and aesthetic relation. Indian aesthetics is primarily concerned with three arts—poetry, music, and architecture—however, sculpture and painting are also studied under aesthetic theories.

The first seekers of aesthetic gratification were the avid followers of Vedantic principles. Vedantism seeks contentment in both attainment and renouncement, yielding it a unique attribute. Unfortunately, the whole idea of Hinduism has been dispersed primarily through one channel of the *Veda-Upanisad* philosophy, in particular, through ĀEkara’s monistic-monolithic idea of Advaita- Vedānta. For the Indian aesthetic culture also, this idea supplied the primary motifs through which to interpret aesthetic experiences, which itself presents the impossibility of an aesthetic environment in this environment. And why, instead of going against the *Veda-Upanisad* tradition, leading early schools of Indian philosophy (except *Lokāyata*) were anti-aesthetic and there was pessimism towards life behind all their claims of moral, principled and ethical beauty.

Vedic and Other Ancient Percepts

The corpus of Vedic literature forms the basis of ‘Aryan’ thought and culture. Indian aesthetics to derive their elementary basis from the Vedas. Two concept triads form the very foundation of Indian art. The first triad is that of *Satyam, bīvam, and Sundaram*, which correspond to the truth, purity/goodness and beauty. These ideals used to describe the absolute are also used to describe artistic manifestations. An extension of this set is the next triad of *Satyam* (truth), *Ritam* (rightness), *Brihat* (vastness) or in some cases, *Vāmam* (beauty), *Satyam* (truth) and *Bhadram* (goodness). The subsidiary branches of knowledge viz. *Dharma, Darśana, bāstra*, and *Kalā* grew around these ideals.

What man saw, he depicted or imitated and these produced works of art. Identification with and imitation of nature was the first obvious step in this direction. The *yakci* sculptures found in later periods were nothing but nature or nature spirits embodied. Kalidāsa’s poetry too is an example of the near divine status the Indian artist granted to nature.

The earliest cave paintings and artifacts were images of animals and people, but a great many of them seem to have ritual implication. It can thus be deduced that art has had a chiefly religious purpose in Hindu art from the very beginning. With the growth of spiritual thought, the aim of art shifted from mere replication to contemplation. Art became not just a creative exercise but a meditative, mystical

one. Internalisation and visualisation of perfect spiritual ideals became an artistic obligation. That serves to explain the lack of realism – as the West understands it – in Indian art.

Another important timeworn concept that has determined the nature of Indian art was that of Yoga. Yoga in the sense of mental concentration has long been associated with the creative process. This mental concentration or *dhyâna* would enable an artist to realize the true nature of his subject, to transcend the difference between subject and self, and finally become the subject in perfect consciousness.

Further, the idea of *Yogakshema* is identical to art. The term is usually understood to be ‘well-being’ but its components offer a deeper insight into its meaning. Yoga means to enjoin (and thereby create), and schema means to preserve. Creation and preservation, therefore, characterize life and art in the Hindu view. Conservation of tradition through meticulous learning and then creativity through non-conformism and improvisation was the path decreed for the Indian artist.

Creativity, according to ancient aestheticians like *Rajashekhara*, *Anandavardhan*, and *Abhinavagupta*, depended on the following factors:

1. *Rasa – Aesthetic sentiment*
2. *Alamkara – Figures of speech*
3. *Riti – Style*
4. *Dhvani – Suggestion*
5. *Vakrokti – Oblique expression*
6. *Aucitya – Propriety*

The importance of traditional knowledge is emphasized in one of the *bilpa Shâstras*: “The bilpan should perceive the *Atharva Veda*, the thirty-two *bilpa bâstras*, and the Vedic mantras by which the deities are invoked. He should be one who wears a sacred thread, a necklace of holy beads, and a ring of *kuca* grass on his finger; delights in the worship of God, is faithful to his wife, avoids strange women, piously acquires knowledge of various sciences, such a one is indeed a craftsman.”

Within the larger context of aesthetics, some of the Hindu views of beauty were also derived from ancient Indian texts. For example, the *Samudrikâ bâstra* gave us the ideals of physical beauty when it spoke about *Mahâpuruca* (the great man) and *Mandasmitâ* (the ideal woman). With a background rooted in Vedic scriptures, the idea of aesthetics in India found its grand culmination in Bharata’s *Nâmyaiûâstra*.

Rasa, The Essence of Art

If there is one text that defined the course of Indian art history, that has to be the *Nāṁyaūāstra*. Composed by Bharata Muni, around the 3rd century CE, the treatise is a supposed compilation of the work of masters before him. It deals comprehensively with all aspects of music, dance and drama as also poetics and meter. The greatest contribution of the text is the concept of *rasa*. While some scholars have argued that *rasa* is related only to poetry, most Indian art continues to be viewed in the light of *rasa*. *Rasa* is an ethereal concept, that hundreds of scholars have tried to determine.

Bharata muni described eight kinds of primary *rasas*, to which list Abhinava Gupta added a ninth. These can be briefly described as follows:

1. *bringāra rasa*: The *rasa* deals with love, attraction and acts pertaining to them. The presiding deity of this *rasa* is *Vicnū*, while the color attributed to it is green.
2. *Hāsya rasa*: Laughter, humor and mirth are included in the *Hāsya rasa*. It is associated with the colour white and the deity *Pramatā*.
3. *Raudra rasa*: Anger and fury are encapsulated in the *Raudra rasa*. Naturally, it is associated with the Lord *Rudra* and its colour is red.
4. *KaruGa rasa*: Compassion, tragedy and pathos fall under the purview of *KaruGa rasa*. With grey as its colour, the *rasa*'s deity is *Yama*.
5. *Bhatia rasa*: The emotions of repulsion and horror comprise the *Bibhatsa rasa*. *Āiva* is its presiding deity, while its colour is blue.
6. *Bhayānaka rasa*: The deity *Kāla* reigns over this *rasa*, which is about fear, horror and terror. The colour given to it is understandably black.
7. *Veera rasa*: The king of gods, *Indra*, represents this *rasa* of heroism, courage and valor. The colour of *veerya* is a shade of yellow.
8. *Adbhuta rasa*: Presided over by *Brahmā*, the *Adbhuta rasa* brings within its fold the emotions of wonder and amazement. Its colour is yellow.
9. *Ūanta rasa*: This *rasa* was formulated by Abhinava Gupta in his treatise, *Abhinavabhāratī* in 10th century CE. Its scope was the emotions of tranquility and peace, its deity, *Vicnū*, and its colour, blue.

In order to fully figure out the concept of *rasa*, a few other related terms must also be understood. *Rasānubhūti*: The term can literally be translated into 'the experience of *rasa*', and thereby understood to be the aesthetic experience. In his authoritative text, *Sāhitya Darpan*, *Vishwanatha* describes the pure aesthetic experience. He says: "Pure aesthetic experience is theirs in

whom the knowledge of ideal beauty is innate; it is known intuitively in intellectual ecstasy without the accompaniment of ideation, at the highest level of conscious being; born of one mother with the vision of God, its life is as it were a flash of blinding light of transcendental origin, impossible to analyze, and yet in the image of our very being.”

Rasa, then, becomes the foundational concept on which Indian art was built post-Bharatamuni. For example, the Mahabharata was based on the *Ānanta rasa*, the Ramayana on the *Karuṅga rasa*, while works of Kalidāsa exude *bringāra rasa*. Abhinavaguptā, Danin, Sankuka and others elevated the idea to sublime heights. *Rasa* was called pleasure, bliss or repose and even deemed to be a way to break free from *samsāra* – even if temporarily. This indelibly set the paradigm of religiosity in Indian art that was manifest in every form and style.

Perfection and Imperfection

It was this high religion-spiritual status acceptable to it that made for a high level of resilience for flaws in art, when the subject was religious. It has been suggested that the viewer is tolerant for two reasons. Either he is so swayed by the sympathetic that he is uncritical or he is creative enough to bridge the gaps between idea and execution. Here, the *bhāva* of the *Rasika* plays an important role and it is he who takes on the onus of success of a certain piece of art. But that’s not to say that there were no prescribed standards of beauty or prohibitions in Indian art. Treatises on each genre of art have enlisted a number of dos and don’ts for artists and practitioners. The *Kāvya Prakāsa* and *Sāhitya Darpan*, for example, define the degrees of excellence in poetry, *Alamkāraśāstra* dealt with literary criticism, while works like the *Chitrasūtra* and *bilparatna* spoke of proper technique and material in the realms of painting and sculpture.

For example, parameters in painting include *rūpa bheda* (form), *pramāṅga* (proportion), *bhāva* (expression), *lāvaṅga yojanā* (aesthetic scheme), *sadrasya* (similitude) and *varṅga change* (colour scheme). In the context of classical poetry, overindulgence in eroticism, repetitions, loose contemplations, over-description and over ornamentation are considered undesirable.

Conclusion

Defined as ‘the science and philosophy of fine arts’, the subject of aesthetics in Indian art is as boundless as it is complex. With a myriad art and craft forms, which further have divergence and versions, India’s artistic canvas encompasses innumerable hues. The aesthetic problems and components of each genre are therefore different. Without studying an art form and its accompanying literature carefully, it is impossible to comment on its aesthetic and artistic merit.

However, some ground rules consolidated all schools and genres of art, which can be called a universal set of Indian aesthetics. When rasa rained, the tree of Indian art blossomed. Beauty and divinity bloomed on this enormous tree. Indian aesthetics merged the ideas of artistic human creation and divine contemplation, of belief, tradition and innovation.

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