

Indian Aesthetics : Diverse Religious Cultures And Philosophies

By

Dr. P.S. Sontakke

Assistant Professor of English

Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Karad,

Tal. Karad, Dist. Satara, State-Maharashtra, Country-India

Affiliated to Shivaji University, Kolhapur (India)

Abstract

Hinduism is one of the world's largest religions originated in ancient India. It has its own philosophy, beliefs and rituals. It has a large body of spiritual texts that guide its devotees. The Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads developed Hindutva philosophies for its followers. The greatest epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagwad Gita defined its traditions and practices. Among plenty of its religious theories, Indian aesthetics is a Hindu view or theory of Indian literature. Indian aesthetics refers to the colonial political entity where a large number of diverse cultures exist and co-exist, the composite culture where many traditions have existed. Indian aesthetics had happened during the Maurya, Gupta and other empires. Maurya Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maury between 322 to 185 BCE. Gupta Empire was founded by Gupta dynasty of northern India during mid-to-late 3rd century CE to 543 CE. Later on, diverse foreign influences like Islamic and European made Indian culture less homogeneous. All these religious cultures were producers of art the development of the religions was accompanied by a corresponding growth in vivid imagery. Thus, much Indian art and criticism had a religious form and content. Therefore, it is obvious that these aesthetics had a spiritual base or context. This is evident from the link that one can make between the 'rasa-lila' of Krishna and Gopis and the 'rasa' theory. Also, the artists and spectators-audience show a willingness to accept fantastic representation of the supernatural element. It is noteworthy that emphasis is given on mystic symbolism in the arts, in dance and theatre in particular.

Key Words - Hindu, Krishna, Philosophy, Rama, Sanskrit.

Introduction – Aesthetics is a systematic study in a philosophical way to understand beauty and its manifestation in art and nature. Philosophy analyzes the true characters of beauty in identification with several theories of art. So the religious and philosophical thought is quite significant as a factor in social context of art in any moment of history. In Indian context, the theories of literature come to us in Sanskrit language texts. Sanskrit is an Indo-Aryan language of the ancient India. Sanskrit has a long history of more than 3,500 years. It is the primary predominant language of most works of Hindu philosophy as well as some of the principal texts of Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism is a religion which encompasses a variety of traditions,

beliefs and spiritual practices based on teachings of Lord Buddha who founded Buddhism. Lord Buddha was a religious philosopher and a spiritual teacher of ancient India. Jainism is also an ancient Indian religion founded by Lord Mahavir, also called as Vardhamana. He showed the path of victory in crossing over life's stream of rebirths by destroying '*Karma*' (deeds) through an ethical and spiritual life. Indian philosophy refers to ancient philosophical traditions of Hindutva. The principal schools are classified as either orthodox or heterodox depending on one of the three alternate criteria – *Vedas*, as a valid source of knowledge, *Brahman*, the highest universal principle and *Devas*, refers to spiritual forces behind nature.

An Indian aesthetics is a Hindu view or theory of Indian literature. Indian aesthetics refers to the colonial political entity where a large number of diverse cultures exist and co-exist, the composite culture where many traditions have existed. Indian aesthetics had happened during the Maurya, Gupta and other empires. Maurya Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya between 322 to 185 BCE. Gupta Empire was founded by Gupta dynasty of northern India during mid-to-late 3rd century CE to 543 CE. Later on, diverse foreign influences like Islamic and European made Indian culture less homogeneous. All these religious cultures were producers of art the development of the religions was accompanied by a corresponding growth in vivid imagery. Thus, much Indian art and criticism had a religious form and content. Therefore, it is obvious that these aesthetics had a spiritual base or context. This is evident from the link that one can make between the '*rasa-lila*' of Krishna and Gopis and the '*rasa*' theory. Also, the artists and spectators-audience show a willingness to accept fantastic representation of the supernatural element. It is noteworthy that emphasis is given on mystic symbolism in the arts, in dance and theatre in particular.

Most Indian arts can be given a religious interpretation by persons of strongly theistic inclination. Of course, there are many Indian works and their interpretations which include ideal representations of Gods and Spirits which are theistic. Many Indian aesthetic theories run down the '*indriya*' (physical strength or ability) perceptions as '*maya*' (supernatural power wielded by Gods and Demons or illusion). It can be noticed that many works of art employ sensory experiences. Apart from the sensory, naturalistic and humanistic expression have made a mark in India's long philosophical traditions. Aesthetics was preoccupied with the stimulation of '*rasa*' or '*rasotpanna*'. The art was produced and received in the framework of spiritualism of the time. Mural paintings, scrolls and stone or bronze sculptures helped to stimulate the desired attitude as a means of achieving '*moksha*' or '*mokshaprapti*' (release of soul from rebirth). Accordingly, aesthetics was preoccupied with mystic symbolism. The bronze icon of dancing Shiva is a symbol of the cosmic rhythm of creation and destruction. '

The myths and legends of Lord Krishna have contributed to Indian aesthetics in a major way. Krishna is the archetypal Indian God. Krishna is a major deity in Hinduism. He is worshipped as the 8th incarnation of God Vishnu. Krishna is the supreme God in Hindu philosophy. He is considered to be the God of compassion, tenderness and love. He is the most popular and widely

reverted among Indian divinities. A great God, he is also the mischievous child, the divine flute-playing lover and religious-moral character. Indian philosophers have called attention to the importance of '*rasa*' in the experience of creation and appreciation of the arts in general and particularly the theatre arts. They have emphasized that '*rasa*' is not of one kind but many and constituted of many ingredients.

The '*rasa*' theory as it is known to many Indian language-literature critics was originally formulated by ancient Indian thinker Bharat Muni in his treatise '*Natyashastra*'. *Natyashastra* provides a deep insight into the psychology of aesthetic experience. *Natyashastra* is on dramatic art which deals with all aspects of classical Sanskrit theatre. It is believed to be written by the mythic Brahmin sage and priest Bharata Muni during his life time i.e. 1st century BCE to 3rd century CE.

After him, during c. 950 to 1016 CE, '*Abhinavagupta*' developed the theory further in his '*Dhvanyaloka*'. Abhinavagupta was an Indian philosopher, mystic, poet, musician, dramatist, exegete, theologian, logician and aesthetician from Kashmir. *Dhvanyaloka* is a work which articulates the philosophy of '*Aesthetic Suggestion*'. Most of the important ideas of Indian aesthetics have been derived from these two thinkers. Almost all these texts have been handed down to us orally until a time when they were turned into written texts. It is, therefore, difficult to talk about definite texts.

There were many other thinkers in between. They were Bhamaha of 6th century, Rudrata of 9th century, Dandin of 7th century, etc. The Bhamaha belongs to 7th century, was a Sanskrit poetician from Kashmir. He was noted for '*Kavyalankar*' (The Ornaments of Poetry). Rudrata belongs to 9th century, was a Kashmiri poet and literary theorist. He also wrote '*Kavyalankar*'. Dandin belongs to 7th-8th century, was a Sanskrit grammarian and author of prose romances. He is one of the best known writers of Asian history.

The word '*rasa*' was originally used for drink of Gods '*Somarasa*'. In Sanskrit, the word was employed initially in the context of drama and later on to poetry. From Bharat Muni onwards, the term signified and still, does aesthetic pleasure or thrill, invariably accompanied with joy the audience or spectator or reader experiences while witnessing or hearing the enactment or reading of a drama or poem. For Bharat Muni the main purpose of dramatic performance is to create or enact the '*rasas*'. Without '*rasa*' drama can have no appeal to the spectator. '*na rasadrite kaschid arthah pravartate*'. '*Artha*' means 'meaning'. *Rasa* is '*artha per excellence*'. Bharata's famous '*sutra*' is, '*vibharambhava-vyabhichari sayogad rasanishpattih*'. This means that '*rasa*' emanates from a combination or comingling of '*vibhavas*' (causes), '*anubhavas*' (effects) and '*vyabhicharis*' (accessories).

He classified his point by using an analogy, just as '*rasa*' (flavor) issues from the combination of many spices, herbs and other '*dravyas*', so does '*rasa*' in drama, as it comes from the combination of '*bhavas*'. The concoction is made by the combination of such diverse substances

as molasses, spices and herbs, similarly permanent or universal emotions called '*sthayibhavas*', crystallize into '*rasa*' when they are nourished by the accompanying '*bhavas*'. Bharat Muni coined the term '*rasa*' for aesthetic relish because it can be tasted : *rasaaswadan or asvadyatvat*.

This is then an affective theory of art, as Aristotle's theory of Catharsis or Purgation is. Of course, they are very different in their respective conception. The point of similarity is that in such case the theorists are looking at the psycho-physiological being effected on the spectator as the case may be. The two theories are not about the text or performance, but about the composition or performance has to be such that such an evocation or production of '*rasa*' or pity and terror would be the result. Bharat Muni's explanation of '*rasa*' may not answer all problems arising out of it, but these problems were extensively discussed by many of his interpreters, such as Bhatta Lollata, Bhattanayaka and Abhinavagupta.

Bhatta Lollata is the first philosopher to comment on Bharata Muni's Rasa Theory. He is a 9th century Kashmiri philosopher. He is of the view that a '*sthayibhava*' (stable emotion), when intensified by poetic description or histrionic representation through '*vibhavas*, *anubhavas*' etc. becomes '*rasa*'. The '*rasa*' primarily resides in original characters like Rama and Sita, since they were the first to experience a wide range of emotions from love to grief. But through '*anusadhana*' (a mental activity and act of imagination) the actor attributes to himself the role of original characters and thus experiences '*rasa*' secondarily. Lollata ignores the poet and the audience in this transaction of '*rasa*'.

Shankuka considered the effect of '*rasa*' on the spectator through the latter's involvement in the action (inference). This is explained through the analogy of a picture horse. When we see the picture of a horse or wooden horse, we accept it as a real horse. This is the case the spectator sees the faked emotions or *rasa* of the performer. However, it is Bhattanayaka who clearly asserted that *rasa* affects the spectator and developed the theory further by saying that poetic language is different from ordinary language. He imposed on the *rasa* theory a system of theology and philosophy. He spiritualizes it to a great extent by saying that through *rasa* the spectator's self becomes one with the divine soul, the Paramatma. Through this, he achieves a flash of bliss. He treats the *rasa* experience in terms of Swarupananda, which is a kind of infinite subjectivity. The individual soul becomes the supreme soul. What is achieved is self-realization : *atma-sakshatkara*.

The word '*Dhvani*' means '*sound*' literally, but does not deal with the function of sound in the musical sense. The theory was first propounded by Anandavardhana, the 9th century thinker, in his treatise '*Dhavanialoka*' (*Dhvani* + *aloka*). The *Dhvani* theory considers the indirectly evoked meaning or suggestivity as the characteristic feature of literary utterance. This feature separates and determines the literary form other kinds of discourse and is an all-embracing principle which explains the structure and function of the other significant aspects of literary utterance – the aesthetic effect or *rasa*, the figural mode and devices (*alamkara*) and so on. In Indian scholar Kapil Kapoor's words, 'all the subsequent literary theorists in the tradition found

combination of *rasa* and *Dhvani* theories both adequate and sufficient to analyze the constitution of meaning in literature'. In his treatise 'Anandavardhana', he has given a detailed description of structural analysis of indirect meaning. In his 'The Soul of Kavya is Dhvani', he says, 'if we can explain how indirect meanings arise systematically, we can claim that all potential meanings inhere in a text.' 'Anandavardhana' uses the term '*dhvani*' to designate the universe of suggestion. His preference for the term sprang from the fact that grammarians before him had used the term to denote several concepts. First, to denote the sound structure of '*sabda*' (words). Second, to denote the semantic aspect of '*sabda*' and third, the complex of the now revealed suggested meaning and the process of suggestion involved. Thus, '*dhvani*' theory is symbolic in meaning. The thrust of this theory is towards claiming a greater value for the poetry of suggestion. 'Anandavardhana' integrates the theory of the '*rasa*' with his '*dhvani*' theory that is as he states, '*dhvani*' is the method through which the effect of '*rasa*' is achieved. '*Rasa*' is the effect of suggestion.

Conclusion – Indian literature traditionally, like other ancient literatures has been oral. In the context of orality, literature was an act of public communication. It has been a kind of performance. The theory of '*Rasa*' is mostly applicable to dance-dramas. The combination of different emotions is reflected in *Rasa*. The theory of '*Rasa*' forms aesthetic underpinning of all Indian classical dance and theatre such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Manipuri, Kudiattam, Kathakali and others. Later on, classical Sanskrit poets from 5th century CE like Kalidasa were attentive to *rasa* which blossomed into a fully developed aesthetic system. When a dramatist portrays these *rasas* on stage, they are categorized in three sub-emotions used during the performance – *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabicaribhava*. Even in contemporary India, the concept of *rasa* is fundamental to many forms of Indian art, including dance, music, musical theatre, cinema and literature, the treatment, interpretation, usage and actual performance of a particular *rasa* differs greatly between different styles and schools of *abhinaya*, and the huge regional differences even within one style.

Works Cited –

- 1) Wikimedia Foundation. Indian Aesthetics. Dec. 2016. Web. 11 Apr. 2020.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_aesthetics>.
- 2) Yamini Chauhan. *Rasa Indian Aesthetic Theory*. 1 Oct. 2015. Web. 11 Apr. 2020.
<<https://www.britannica.com/art/rasa>>.
- 3) www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english-literature/literary-movements/aestheticism-in-literature/
- 4) www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/victorian-art-architecture/pre-raphaelites/a/the-aesthetic-movement