

AESTHETIC APPROACH
TO
REALITY

All experience is inevitably aesthetic or is soaked with feeling. This is the basic mode of consciousness, for it is that to which all appeal ultimately. The other modes of consciousness such as the cognitive and the conative seem to be erected on this basic mode. The incipient cognitivity is aesthetical feeling attention to the object or adaptation to the object either negatively or positively which is said to be a conative mode of consciousness is also based on the aesthetic feeling: the acceptance or rejection of feeling is conativity and as such feeling or aesthetic experience precedes all other modes.

Indian Seers have clearly intimated this primacy of the aesthetic mode of consciousness when they explored the Ultimate Nature of Reality. The *Taittirīya* Upanisad clearly leads the seeker from the food (annam) as Brahman through breath as Brahman and manas (sensorium) as Brahman and knowledge *vijñānā* as Brahman to the Ultimate Brahman as *Ānanda* (aesthetic experience). This is the root of all else: all experience begins with it and ends with it: it is something that is the essence of all existence and in a sense is existence itself. The disjunction between existence and essence, between *Satya* and *Rasa*, is such that there is no existence without essence and all existence derives its power to exist from essence (*rasa*). Negatively, it can be shown that when essence is decreased existence begins to wither even as the leaves and trunk and branches wither when the sap in the roots diminishes in quantity. Therefore could the Vedic Seers assert that *Rasa* is Brahman and Brahman is the *Rasa* of all things.

In Western thought also it is well recognized that the initial experience of reality is through feeling (aesthetic sensation or feeling) called by some as intuition. It is on this basis that all other predications take place. In fact intuition as the basis of all experience or knowledge and action is a recognized fact. It is this feeling that begins to evolve or demand predications and definitions to

become knowledge whether it is for oneself or for communication to others: it is this intuition that is verbalized or in some sense rendered into some medium so as to be objective or an object. The subjective feeling or intuition demands objectification or the status of an object. In other words, if intuition is held to be subjective experience it demands objective stature to be real as an object.

Therefore it is clear that the aesthetic or affective mode of consciousness is the primary mode of existence. Being obviously of this level, when expression of this takes place it becomes identified with the subject firstly and then develops into the object or rather gets expressed in terms of objectivity.

In terms of the aesthetic intuitive level itself it gets the predicate of pleasantness or unpleasantness, tension or relaxation, beautiful or ugly, harmonious or unharmonious, accordant or discordant, etc.: all the predicates here are of the level of sense-harmony and taste and the other sensory predicates may also be applied. Thus there appears to develop an autonomy in this aesthetic field in terms of aesthetic criteria. This is the nature of reality at the level of aesthetic experience and predications. These predications are precisely the subject matter of the categories of aesthetic experience of beauty. Not merely the appreciation of beauty of form and colour and taste in the natural but also the reproduction and recreation of the same happen to fall within the purview of aesthetic experience.

Here are thus operating the triple modes of consciousness – the cognitive that recognizes the forms of aesthetic prediction, the conative the representation and reproduction of the same categories, and lastly, the creative production of the aesthetic objects which would reproduce the aesthetic modes of consciousness. This triplicity at the aesthetic level is confined to the forms of intuition alone, and the problems of truth and good do not enter into this field of the aesthetic. Thus during the course of the development of the aesthetic or the science of Beauty what developed at the cost of Reality, is the concern with the modes of aesthetic experience and their reproduction or recreation alone – how

the forms could be made to stand for or symbolize and thus reproduce or recreation alone – how the forms could be made to stand for or symbolize and thus reproduce aesthetic enjoyment. Aesthetic enjoyment rather than aesthetic truth became important. The aesthetic is indeed the essence of reality and is the truth so to speak of reality or rather than aesthetic truth became important. The aesthetic is indeed the essence of reality and is the truth so to speak of reality or rather its basis, but aesthetic enjoyment becomes selective. However it is seen that great poets and aesthetic writers have firmly held that the real creative production of theirs are real and integral to reality. It is reality itself that bodies forth itself in and through their awakened intuitions. Poetry is reality – and not an illusion or imagination that has no valid reality except subjective experience.

But the reality which is predicated of it is when it is of the imagination merely the reality of its production *or effectuation* or execution. It is also seen that such reality is also clearly capable of producing within the individual the experience which is sought to be produced by it.

There is thus a problem of aesthetics whether aesthetic science is merely the science of reproducing or producing the experience in oneself and in other humans or souls as well-experiences which might be ranging from the most primitive such as fear or rage to the most sublime such a holiness and divine exaltation. The technique of production or exteriorization or objectification might be developed in such wise as to bring out the sought after experiences or sentiments or emotions by appropriate objectification through media of sounds and music, by form and symmetry, by symbolism and suggestion.

The great works of art are merely the creations by imagination of the experienced in the texture or media of sound and stone and canvas. The skill of the artist-creator is revealed by the execution of the experienced, surely, but it is not enough, since it demands that the expression thus given to the experience reproduces or awakens or evokes the same experience in another, or others. Surely this is the test of its universality of appeal – its reality so to speak.

AESTHETIC APPROACH TO REALITY

All the aesthetical theories unfortunately deal only with this aspect of aesthetic reproduction and the means and methods by which this inward experience is exteriorized or objectified the adequacy of the same and the supreme delight that it grants. Thus we find that experience produces or commands or overflows into expression (subjective exuberance) which expression in turn reproduces the experience. And this brings out the relation between the subjective experience (ideal or naturally evoked) and the created experience or rather the experience produced in suggestibility of adequacy or that which helps one to pass beyond the personal to the collective or trans-personal experience through expression would be the determining factor in any aesthetic judgment.

The relation between imagination and experience is one which demands clearly a critique. Imagination increases the potentialities of experience even as experience improved by imagination undergoes dimensional extension in terms of consciousness – horizontal, vertical and evolutionary.

The theory of *Rasa* in Indian Aesthetics restricts itself to poetic composition and analyses the various methods and goals of literary or artistic creation. It realized that the most human of all *rasās* is love or *Śrīngara* and subordinated all other sentiments as capable of being interwoven in the play of human life. But all there are also, shown to be actually present in lie and weave the patterns of living in the context of human relationships.

The existence of the *rasa* (essence) known as peace or the condition that goes beyond the play of opposites and alternations of light and shade has not been doubted. This *rasa* known as the sentiment of peace (*Śānta*) is sublimity or is a transition to transcendence of the human. It is the sentiment or the saint as the Buddha or the *Jivanmukta* who reveals the inner contradiction within the *rasās* that center round emotions such as fear and rage and lust, wonder and wealth and power, death and defeat. Virtue lies in transcendence of the lower

rasās however much they re nearer to the human. The sense of humour is sought to be revealed by the choice of the wrong means and ends—the discovery of the illusion of existence itself. The tragic drama revels the struggle without success of the higher types of beings centered on the values of truth and goodness, pursued unto-death for the sake of the truth and goodness values: but since in the Indian conception the failure of the true or higher values is unthinkable and should not happen though it may take many lives to register success or the triumph, tragedy is merely a to the Ultimate sublimity through struggle and peace, through life and renunciation of life's lower values. Drama reveals this higher comedy through tragedy, and is truer to spiritual life because it recognizes the basic necessity of the tragedy for catharsis or purification, in spiritual evolution towards the ultimate divine *rasa*. The theories of *rasa* which restrict themselves to the lower human undoubtedly reveal the fullest psychological structure and contours of the human beings and their struggles but the very creative reproduction or review of them would also reveal that in themselves they are but distortions of basic sentiments of the higher sublime nature. They undoubtedly grant us excitement and pleasure in distortions, even as in reality men seek the shelter of shadows and illusions and psychological blindnesses. In a sense a great drama may be as effective as any psychotherapy and perhaps they were originally designed by sages of Yore for that purpose. It would graphically bring out the inner inhibitions to the level of one's own consciousness through this midwifery of drama – the drama, of tragedy and the humour (comic).

The very process of inner evolution is *pari passu* established by the artistic creation.

The aesthetic approach in plastic arts is not much different for here there is the same attempt to communicate the inner psychic experience in terms of the forms suggested by the inner intuition. The complexity of inner states and their inner dynamism demands a more dynamic execution which suggests the inner

dynamism in the static. How to exhibit the dynamic in terms of the static media is a problem of dynamic Art - it is comparable to the outer repose revealing inner depths and experience – a calm that contains and reveals the storm of being which is as clearly an art excellence even as the reverse method of revealing in the storm of dance the calm peaks of the soul – existence. The sculptors have been aiming at this objectification of the inner poises that reveal the one in the other: the dualities of tensions or oppositions are sought to be interpenetrating in the organic whole of art-creation and imagination plays the major role.

But all these creations are within the field of creation or reproduction and the real is suggested to have dimensions beyond the perceived sense intuitions and imagined suggestions and forms.

There is in the heart of man a higher seeking or more and more perfection not merely an extension, Consciousness of the larger fields of experience invites the spirit to essay out into domains beyond the human power either of language or execution in plastic arts or dance. All this creative aesthetic is the attempt at once to embrace the domain of perfect creativity that cognitively recognizes the infinite and the finite in organic fusionability, and proceeds to execute the same in terms of motor effects.

It is not so much recognized that the senses alone do not grant aesthesis which is of course of the mental order, Indian philosophy, especially Sāmkhya darsana, has thrown great light on this subject of aesthetic psychology though it must be a matter of great regret that it has not got the attention it deserves.

Sāmkhya holds that the individual soul seeks to know and enjoy the Prakṛti and this seeking to know and enjoy is facilitated by Prakṛti in its three – modes of Sattva, Rajas and tamas exhibiting itself and also providing the instruments through which it can be known. Psychologically the process of unconscious evolution leads first to the widening of the area, of knowledge which has to be explored – this is the *mahat* (vastuniverse) and the agent or instrument of knowing in buddhi. This buddhi or intellect is not clear and is at the

first stage unknowing, ignorant, impotent and lawless. But it is seized with the object of enjoying the unknown, vast world of experience open to it. This intellect begins to select and delimit the fields for its knowing bit by bit and section by section and this is the work of the ego, which atomizes and analyses the experience for closer study. Thus the Outer world is a world of possible experience, vast and indivisible but now divided apparently for the purpose of study and enjoyment. The ego-activity develops into what is usually called the activity of the private or individual mind – the aesthetic phase within the vaster aesthetic – an aesthetic that develops the greater difficulties of having unpleasure, pain and misery and even ignorance. But there is developed also the five-fold organs through which intellect tries to grasp the objects of enjoyment – the senses bring the knowledge of sounds, touches, taste, forms and lights, and smells form the outer world of atomized objects and through them one enjoys the world of sounds and music, touches and tastes, colours and forms and fragrances and also the elements which can help one to reproduce them namely the aether, air, fire – light, water and earth. The motor organs are in fact the most important part for enjoyment – vāk (mouth-speech) for eating and speaking, hands for grasping and shaping and working, legs for reaching out and bringing and running to and fro and also for working as in dance and the organs of excretion or throwing out or rejection and the organs of generation for erotogenic manifestation of production and creation. Thus in a very general sense we can see that Art is concerned with the enjoyment of the knowing process and also recreative process.

Broadly speaking Sāmkhya shows that the entire organism of man has been made to know and enjoy and enjoy and know. But deeper than this analysis is the fact that the triple kinds of action or spiritual activity consist in passing from ignorance to knowledge through doing and enjoying and thus attain that efficiency and skill that liberates man from the lower kinds of *rasa* and leads one to that *rasa* which will also reveal the bliss that lies beyond – the bliss of knowing and reproducing and transcending. The motor organs are organic with the

sensory organs and together they provide the instruments for effective knowledge of Nature and of the self. The activity is integral to knowing or seeing and together they grant the essential knowledge of the object (bhoga) which is experience.

These three aspects of cognitivity have a similarity or correspondence with the three faces or gunas: knowing and doing and enjoying in knowing, and doing are indeed the major parts of experience.

Thus it becomes important to realize that the analogy of Sāmkhya, that all this like the dancer's steps and rhythms are for enjoyment of the purusa.

This is of course the aesthetic statement. However it is clear that through many lives alone one realizes the wise way of doing and knowing and enjoying and realizing that the unwise way of knowing and doing and enjoying is capable of causing misery. This is the attainment of buddhi or intellection that is sattvic or reality – which is according to the law of being, knowledge and detachment and poer (*dharmajñānā vairāgya* and *śakti aiśsvarya*). Sovereign enjoyment of Rasa is the resultant of effective and skilful art and based on detachment and jñānā and knowledge of the laws of Nature.

We shall not of course enter into the detailed study of the purpose of the Sāmkhyan enquiry at this place but show that all real aesthetic rasa is a product of the threefold activity of creation, knowledge and enjoyment that is natural and not perverse or defective and privative.

There therefore a clear enunciation is of the fact that in the knowledge and enjoyment of Nature there are included the creative imaginal activity of the mind which operates through aesthetic intuition. This is also to be assumed in respect of the Vedantic knowledge which also is based on this experience which leads to the ultimate Experience of Moksa, or liberation.

All life is said to be samsāra – or total or integral essence (*sāra*) though this meaning has been almost transformed by the use of it as detailing the misery of the trans-migratory life of change and death and birth, frustrations and failures. But it is through the experience of samsāra that one arrives at that knowledge and existence of being beyond all this process of nature. This is the path by which one goes to the One Rasa that transcends all *rasās* and to which all other lead. It is the fact of total knowledge extracted by and through Experience of all Nature in all its forms – in the form of all dualities and sense.

Therefore the aesthetic revulsion against Nature and enjoyment of it or even the representation or creation of it for the sake of one's enjoyment or reproduction of the same for personal experience is an important discovery for the self for the enjoyment of oneself (*ātmarati* or *ātmabhoga*) is greater than this dependence on Nature and her instruments. This is an enjoyment different in kind from the former that arises out of enjoyment or experience of Nature.

Therefore in the aesthetic approach towards Reality as Nature there is the enjoyment for one through Nature and its instruments and one's creative enjoyment is to improvise and enjoy the materials of Nature in terms of Nature itself – here the gunas operate in terms of gunas (*gunah gunesu* variant) as the *Gītā* states.

It is true that one cannot avoid the consideration of the aesthetic approach as leading to the experience of the difference between the objective nature, objectification of the personal experience and subjective experience of the subject both in the experience of the object (given), and in the experience of the creating and experiencing of the created or imagined and created.

Such are the prospects of the knowledge through aesthetic experience – the real as given, and as created and real and as experienced. They are integral to one another and they give a kind of truth whose dimensions stretch beyond the given as such or logicalised as such.

The Aesthetic Approach is said by some serious artists themselves to claim for its object beauty and not anything else. In fact the philosophic artist or poet considers that the criterion of reality should be beauty and not truth. But it is to make aesthetic experience the sole criterion of truth as well as beauty.

For example, Rabindranath claimed that for him all is beauty but this must be considered in the context of the other claim that All is verily Brahman, and that includes that both the external world of change and impermanence and finiteness as well as the inner world of imagination and experience are Beauty itself. The loveliness of all things is what one should behold: there is no ugliness that is not capable of becoming beautiful: only one should develop one's insight and intuition that breaks through the shell of obstruction that distorts the beautiful and makes one see its negation – it is the poet's and artists' job so to speak to restore the beauty to the objects of the external and the internal worlds which man's grossness and practicality and even preoccupation with logical thought has deprived them of. Thus the high sensitivity is sought to be developed by means of sympathy and empathy and an intuition that seeks to dive deep into the nature of the object from the high vault of ideal beauty. But it may also be seen that this intuitive sensitivity is something that grows with the evolution of consciousness itself and the aesthetic consciousness has to pass beyond the pure sensory to the super sensory perception that reveals the real beauty secret in all existence, concealed or veiled in all being and in all particulars.

His beauty-perception is soaked indeed in the Upanisadic concepts of the OMNIPERVASIVE Reality as Beauty which he recognizes and realizes in all that he wrote and spoke and painted. His philosophy of beauty realizes the experience of beauty in all and not merely in any particular being or object and this is because he has seized the eternal experience of Brahman indwelling in all.

The experience of the indwelling presence of Brahman in all things both moving and unmoving is clearly the secret of Beauty. But it is seen as beauty

experienced as delight, not merely for the seer verily. It is delight for itself that helps the seeing and the experiencing and the seenness too.

It is this search for the Divine Omnipresent Reality in all that has to be itself based on delight and search for beauty. This is the secret of the aesthetic approach in the poets and seers who had discovered that the Ultimate Omnipervasive Reality is to be known and seen and entered into by this path of Beauty, and delight.

Just as the concept of *Sat* (existence) is inclusive of infiniteness and Immortality, and *Cit* (Consciousness) is inclusive of the power that makes for both receptive and creative evolution, so too Beauty and *Ānanda* are correlative inseparable qualities. Thus Reality whose nature is expressed in and through Existence and Consciousness and Bliss includes the factors of immortality, power and beauty, and infinity. It is in this sense the early aesthetic knowers of the Infinite had held that the Divine has six attributes or natures such as *jñānā-bala*, *śakti-tejas*, *aīśsvarya* and *vīrya* which are infinite and each one of them though paired with the other promote the experience of the Beauty and Bliss.

The Vaisnava – concept of the Divine as Beauty-Bliss reveals that; for the seer poet there is every where beauty-bliss and in all things one can experience this when awakened to and being. Rabindranath has indeed exemplified this approach to Reality which is a positive search and experience and expression of beauty in all however minute or great. The experience of beauty in the finite and the infinite, in the *anu* (atom) and in *mahat* (cosmos) brings all into one single Harmony and reveals the structure of such experience as one of the Organic reality.

There is this self-validity of this experience of beauty and bliss which confers on it the truth and reality and the good of all; it does not reject anything not even the foul and the sinful and the ugly and the false for with the seer-poetic

perception directed through beauty they assume their real nature as blissful beautiful truths.

But it must be conceded that such perception and representation of the beauty-bliss in all things living and moving and non-living and unmoving when it is sought to be conveyed through forms and concepts undergo a finiteness which points to something that is infinite or exceedingly more. This intimation inherent in the particular of that which exceeds and is more is the birth of the symbol in respect of particular experiences and myth in respect of the more embracing living or life of individuals and societies. The symbolic in order to be truly significant and valuable must not render the finite still more finite and an idol but suggest the infinite and the ideal. The sensuous representation which is what normally for human beings is the manner of representation of the sensation and intuition of experience whether subjective or objective must lead to the transcendence of the sensuous not by denying it but by making it more and more meaningful that is infinite and ideal.

The struggle between the ideal and the idol is in fact the struggle between the sensuous and the intellectual perceptions. The usual dichotomy or severance that is made between the sensory and the intellectual has hardly any real basis in aesthetics and in fact it is seen that the sensory and the intellectual are but two ranges or levels of the Ultimate Experience which though differing yet are unseverable – one embodies the other and the more the dynamic nature of this embodiment or organization of ideal or the intellectual or meaning in the form or idol or the sensory the more profound is the bliss-beauty experience. The intellectual apprehension of the aesthetic philosopher is different from the intellectual knowledge or knowledge through general ideas of the logical philosopher. Since this distinction is not made we have confusion in both quarters. This is so true of the western way of aesthetic and philosophic philosophers that Blake had to differ from them and assert his opposition to the theory of general ideas as real at all. So too one can assert that Croce profoundly

claimed that the aesthetic concepts are not of the same order as the logical concepts – the pseudo-concepts of empirical philosophers. Hegel indeed only demanded that abstract concepts are not the substance of reality, the real are the concrete concept which have not divided from the aesthetic experience but assimilated it. Perhaps Plato's criticism of poetry as the representation of a representation through abstractions stems from this dichotomous division of the aesthetic experience from the intellectual, reducing the former to the pure sensory and the latter to pure thought – unreal thought or abstraction.

Thus we have pointed out that the problems of aesthetic approach to Reality demand careful scrutiny of the several aspects of experience and expression.

Most aestheticians are concerned with the problem of expression and the manner of expression rather than experience itself. This is of course understandable because the experience itself is something that is not within the individual's power to have. The transcendence which the intuitive stimulus or cause has over the individual is of course recognized by one and all. It is in fact because of this transcendence of intuition recognized and experienced as above man's mental power that makes it an object of adoration and seekings; itself beyond all knowing it seems to be the cause of all our knowings and seekings. Rightly this has been recognized as Overhead or above man and therefore a godly power. But the vastness of this consciousness overhead is also something felt and discerned when we find that what we hear and see and admit into our consciousness is very much little, a fragment – of that Vastness. Further there is hardly any reason to think that no can discern the All Of it - as the Veda puts it the three-fourths that is in Heaven – *tripad – vibhūti* or only that which it reveals to us do we see or hear or listen to. The Vast Beyond – the Bhuman –is verily something suggested by the very fragment-condition of our experience. The experience of fullness of the All is only in correspondence rather in absolute

reality. This too we owe to the seer poets (*kavis*) who have told us that the Reality which we discern or envision is Vastness itself.

One assurance we have however. The experiences of the individual in his sensations and reasonings got through the media of senses, motor organs and *manas* or *antahkarana* inner organ are such that we cannot speak of these sensations and emotions and other imaginations as real as such for there can hardly be any possibility of checking the truthness of beauty-quality with the original stimuli of the sense-organs. We know only the effects of stimuli but not the nature of the stimuli; therefore a sensory conception of reality is beyond us – there can be no judgment about its truth. In this higher Seervision the Reality that stimulates the Experiences is one with the experience – direct knowledge reveals the identity between Experience and Reality – Reality is the Experienced in Intuition – that is unmediated by sense-organs and the mind.

This does not mean that the Reality is void of all colours and smells, forms and tastes and sounds. It is a mistake to hold according to the seer-poets that it is the senses that grant us this knowledge; they are selective of some rather than all because of the limitations of their organic make dependent upon the selective choice of them through desire for exclusive enjoyment. The Real contains all in an immense measure for it is *sarva sabda*, *sarva-rasa*, *sarva-gandha*, *sarva rupa*, *sarva-sprsa*, as Upanisad says.

It is a transfigured world of forms and natures where the purest luminous stuff are experienced. This is the assertion of a world of Pure Ideas of Plato, the *Nitya-vibhūti* or eternal manifestation of transcendent forms and radiating unmixed bliss and beauty. But this experience is alas impossible without the thorough purification of the entire being; not until one becomes a *suddha-sattva* or *brahma-bhuta* and beyond all *brahma* that the sensory and mental are the ultimate matter of experience, does one enter into these luminous worlds.

The luminosity of that transcendent world has about nothing of this world – though there are indeed descriptions of that being or the Divine Person appearing with a radiance of a million Sunas – that he is Āditya-varna – or a lightning in the dark heavens and so on. The non-sensory is the source of the sensory undoubtedly and has within all the potentialities of the latter in it; but it is different verily in kind, and requires the dedication of an absolute kind.

The Divine Reality thus is beyond the senses and the mind; but the senses and the mind do intimate in intuitive awakening that beyondness. A new consciousness awakens in one and urges the seeing beyond and behind the perceived and the sensed and the minded; this is the birth of the poetic (*upamāna*) consciousness that is above and beyond the *anumna* (reflecting consciousness – reflecting from sense). The poetic consciousness however misses the truth when it becomes just natural poetry – and senseless – but real poetic consciousness crosses the barrier of sense and arrives at a sense or intellectual – non sensory intuition – and void also of the reflective movement of thought. The consciousness grows into identity with Reality and plunges into it or is sucked into it as it were and a new birth of Vision and passion spiritual take-place; a world vaster more infinite than finite, a supreme Oneness pervading all and supporting all appears and all things are seen in their eternal essence (*Rasa*).

Thus one goes beyond the natural poet and the psychological poet and becomes a divine Seer of Beauty – a poet divine.

Such is the attainment of the Divine Rasa – through transcendental vision –attained through the search for Beauty – Bliss.