Review Essay

Interculturality in Intellectual Practices: Art, Politics, Philosophy and Worldview

Antoon Van den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerley and Nicole Note (Eds.), *Intercultural Aesthetics: A World Perspective,* Springer (Springer.com), 2009, pp. 217.

The editors of this volume inform that what they call *intercultural aesthetics* was formerly called *comparative aesthetics* and assert that this branch of knowledge is indispensable to enrich the nature and scope of current concepts of worldview. They quote Leo Apostel, a Belgian philosopher influential in the 20th century for defining a worldview: "A worldview is a coherent set of bodies of knowledge concerning all aspects of the world. This coherent set allows people to construct a global image of the world and to understand as many elements of their experience as possible. A worldview can in fact be perceived as a map that people use to orient and explain, and from which they evaluate and act, and put forward progresses and visions of the future" (p.1)

A century before, Wilhelm Dilthey spoke of "world views" (*Weltanshaungen*) as patterns of understanding (interpreting) life:

> The human world exists for the poet in so far as he experiences human existence in himself and tries to understand as it confronts him from outside…in understanding he projects all his inner experience into other human beings, and yet at the same time the unfathomable alien depths of another great being or a powerful destiny lead him beyond the limits of his own; he understands and gives shape to what he would never be able to experience personally. ("Poetry and Experience" 278).

But Dilthey confines the patterns of understanding life strictly to the Western intellectual history. His Eurocentrism considers only three such patterns —positivism objective idealism and daulistic idealism. Apostel's "world view", on the other hand, is a "global image" beyond any geographical or political topology, that is triggered by the current process of globalization in almost all the areas of human activities beyond the confinements of race, gender, religion and language. But can culture be globalized this way losing its very foundations (of race, religion and language) on which it stands, and the criteria by which it is identified? It seems rather too ambitious and ethereal to be acknowledged as a cognizable proposal. Certain cultural items might be or ought to be globalized, but not culture as a whole, a proposal completely absurd and meaningless. What is absolutely necessary is the process of cultural reciprocation, the very slogan and foundation of comparative studies in the whole range of intellectual pursuit ignoring any *centre* or *centrism*, predomination of either the East or the West. This reciprocation will bring up an healthy understanding of different intellectual ideas and doctrines without any aspiration for universalism, for, as Sussan Bassnett has correctly asserted, the very notion of universalism is an imperial or colonial "world view" to which cultural globalization falls a victim.

It is true, as the editors of this volume note, that one cannot ignore the increasing worldwide cross-fertilization and interpenetration of different cultures:

> The traditional leitmotiv of cultures that are profoundly embedded in nationalism is increasingly being challenged by new modes of post-national or even cosmopolitan citizenship. This global tendency toward differentiation and heterogeneity seems to be driven by new notions, experiences and expressions of cultural identity. In this sense contemporary art could be considered worldwide as a laboratory for building and exploring new *hybrid world views.* (P-2)

This *hybrid worldview* is not simply a juxtaposition of parallels, but construction of an integrated, organic perspective not only in the field of aesthetics, but in all other areas of learning as well. The central issue is the abolition of cultural binaries – superior/ inferior, white/black, Eastern/Western so on and so forth. But the absolute abolition of cultural barriers with a view to founding *one* culture is not only a utopia, but also a contradiction in terms that does not deconstruct culture but destroys the very idea of culture that presupposes the barriers of language, religion and race. It would be like reducing all the seven colours into only one: This vision of cultural reductionism is as fatal as the gradation of individual cultures. The editors write:

> Therefore, this book was conceived as an incentive to develop a truly intercultural aesthetics, which looks at art and the aesthetic experience in a cross-cultural setting, making room not only for new conceptual articulations but also for a new awareness of the pre-conscious and pre-conceptual ways of world-making… Indeed, the prospect of inter-cultural aesthetics is also intimately linked with the *intercultural turn* in Western as well as in non-Western philosophy. (p.2)

But the editors are trapped in a contradiction that cross-culturality or interculturality is not formation of a *hybrid culture* because the phrase implies differences in individual cultures structured in historical and social environments that are peculiar to those cultures. Before an ambitious amalganation of Abhinavagupta and Kant the editors/ authors ought to agree with David Fenner (2008 : qv) that the idea of the "aesthetic disinterest" or "aesthetic distance" emerges in the historical events of foundation of museums during the 16th-18th centuries. This decontextualization of art is absent in the history of classical India that originated the *rasa* theory and the ideas of *sâdhâra´¤kara´a* that can be compared with Kant's *senses communis* or *Einstimnung* or the "aesthetic disinterest" excepting only in terms of abstract philosophical perspectives. The scope and limits of transculturality or inter-culturality in aesthetics were attended to by the present reviewer in his paper read at the Bologna conference (2000). All such comparisons ought to be aimed at only reciprocation, but never at forming an hybrid aesthetic point of view. For example, the Sanskrit concept

of *adbhuta rasa* might be explained in terms of Kantian dichotomy of beauty and the sublime. But the ambitious critics must be warned that the concepts are never identical or even share an *equal* critical perspective. Besides, what I have repeatedly pointed out, Kantian notion of aesthetic experience/ attitude as *disinterested* is absolutely alien to the Indian view of *rasa* experience which is categorically distinguished from any sense of indifference. Abhinavagupta emphatically uses the expression *na tâ°asthyena* and states that the theatrical audience participates (*svâtrmânupraveúa*) in the performance: The *Bhagavadgit¢* asserts that all *sâttvic* actions are performed with enthusiasm (*uts¢ha* or interest), and theatrical experience is a *sâttvic* activity-- as Mammata andVisvanâtha state, *rasa* can be relished only when consciousness is dominated by *sattva* component (*sattvodrekât*). The editors' observations on this point are therefore notably superficial. Similarly, Rosa Gomez, in her chapter in the book, fancifully interprets *sth¢yîbhâva* as an archetypal emotion ignoring the fundamental idea that, according to Patañjali, followed by Abhinava, emotion is a function of *consciousness* (*citta-v¨tti*), whereas an archetype, according Karl Jung, is a phenomenon of collective *unconscious* (obviously, excepting this superficial interpretation, the chapter by Gomez is only a rehash). On the other hand, there are some critics (one which referred to by Grazia Marchiano, p.14) who interpret *rasa* experience as savourng an emotion deeply : "whoever deeply savours an emotion feels that hardened clot of one's individuality dissolve." Savouring an emotion deeply explains no definite experience, the adverb used here being vague and uncritical. Precisely, *rasa* is an emotion *savoured* or relished (*âsvâda*) and there is no difference between savouring of deep level and that of surface level.

To put the point precisely, an emotion is not *savoured* in our ordinary experience, whereas it is *savoured* in theatrical experience. Several other superficial approaches to the *rasa* theory (such as Kathleean Higgian, *JAAC*, 65.1, 2007) and their correlation with the Western critical tradition rather weakens the ground for an intercultural proposal.

Henk Oosterling prefers the term *inter* to *trans* on philosophical grounds: "I prefer the qualification "intercultural" and will avoid 'transcultural'. The latter at least in one meaning of *trans*- suggests an overarching discourse that 'unites' in transcending West and East. I think processes of interculturalization are far more complex and layered. No identity but differences trigger these processes of adopting and adapting, of informing through transformative performance. (p-20). As a successful strategy of the interculturality he cites an example of the war strategy of Colonel Rotkoff who used the traditional Japanese 17 syllabic haiku style to express his feelings about the chosen war strategy. Rotkoff is a Jewish intellectual working for the American intelligence since 2002 in preparing the invasion in Iraq. The very process of his operation is intercultural, because a Jewish intellectual utilizes Japanized Chinese knowledge of meditative verse in exercising a successful war strategy proving that war is an art and its success depends on intercultural practices- temporal and spatial transformations that are presupposed in this process of cross-cultural adaptation and cultivation.

"As an *inter* a medium seems transparent and neutral". Thus the term *inter* semantically covers the function of *trans* in mediating between cultures. Derrida says, every translation is always an interpretation. But interculturality serving as a medium of transportation of cultures is never neutral, because, to return to the Indian tradition, in order that a relationship be *sattvic* it must be sincere and cordial founded on tolerance, patience and enthusiasm. Similarly, interpretation should also be free from neutrality. Oosterling remarks that the methodological and ontological analysis of the *inter* in postmodernist thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Irigary, Deleuz, Lyotard and Nancy share the Nietzschean inspiration that art expresses differences in a non-discursive, experimental way enabling another communication. Thus art and aesthetic experience are the paradigms of interculturality. But in saying so when these thinkers refer to the origin of this interculturality in Japanese zen practices such as that of Dogen's *shotrogenzo*, traced particularly in Lyotard's analysis of Kant's sublime and his art-based proposal of an 'immaterialist materialism', they forget that the very root of Zen practices is the Indian Yogic meditation (Zen=Sanskrit *dhyâna*=meditation). Any way, Oosterling explores that the philosophers of difference (postmodernist) have gradually shifted their attention from the other to the inbetween, i.e., from respecting radical difference to the sharing of an in-between space, an *inter.* This is most explicitly formulated in the work of Jean-Lue Nancy. But whomever one reads finally they end up connecting an 'artificial' *inter* with a life style that Foncault coined 'aesthetics of existence'." Thus the *inter* now abolishes the differnce between the self and the other.

II

An important point in critical interaction and transaction is the conversion of critical idioms. For example, interpreting the Sanskrit poetic theories of *alañkâra* and *vakroti* as formalism and structuralism, or *dhvani/ rasa-dhvani* as ontological issues in terms as they are used in the Western critical tradition, might raise the question of validity and propriety. This method neither presupposes the critical domination of the Western tradition, nor does it aim simply at presenting the Sanskrit ideas for the non-Sanskrit, particularly, Western readers; nor is it also a critical adaptation. Even the method does not aim at *universalizing* the Western critical concepts and theories. Critics would object that this decontextualization of the millennium-old Sanskrit ideas by presenting them in the twentieth century- European critical idioms involves a serious anachronism — violation of the sociological principles of an individual culture. The objection sustained. But, then, interculturality appears only an hallucination or a utopia. On the other hand, interculturality is bound to be a decontextualization; it is different from transculturality in so far as no culture is transplanted on the other. This interculturality as a cultural transaction is inevitable for the survival and progress of intellectual relativity as is commercial transaction inevitable for the survival of human life itself.

Thus, presentation of the critical ideas of different cultures on a single platform spontaneously exhibits the requirements that are shared mutually by way of intellectual transaction. One might call this platform a global market of cultural ideas open for

voluntary *exchange* of commodities rather than coercive *imposition* of any dominating producer or salesman. Interculturality is a market for exchanging commodities where a skilful salesman is responsible for convincing the consumers or co-salesmen about the value of the commodity he deals in. Obviously, this exchange of commodities does not aim at universalizing the value of any commodity, although any such universalization is only a possibility depending upon the choice, need and taste of the consumers. Millennium-old commodities can very well cater to the need, choice and taste of the contemporary consumers eager to appropriate, adapt and assimilate them in their life-style, and, therefore, they can most reasonably be updated in their relevant perspectives.

III

Interculturality is, then, exchange or transaction of traditions without any interference with each other's identity. This reciprocation needs tolerance in understanding and sensibility in appreciation of the characteristic features of different individual culturs — an activity that might help reconstruct and reorient some of them as necessary for human relationship, not with any ambitious programme for univeralization. There are certainly some characteristic features of a culture that cannot be assimilated into those of another, as, for example, Oosterling observes, Japanese *geido* cannot be integrated into Western aesthetics, nor can Japanese spirituality be traced in European continental philosophy. (p.35).

Robert Wilkinson writes on aspects of the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro drawing from it some *general lesson* (?). But his discussion projects that such genralization is impossible. Nishida's view of aesthetic experience as identical with the European Romantic aesthetics does not match the classical Indian view that distinguishes between the two. Similarly, Nishida does not agree with the Kantian difference between formal beauty and beauty that depends upon content: "In my view, there is no beauty without content", Nishida writes, "in the beautiful, there must be an internal life that can be expressed, and the expression of pure internal life is always felt as the beautiful." (p.71) Interculturality, therefore, does not aim at any generalization or universalization of aspects of individual cultures. Projection of differences (as Willkinson does) is also a function of interculturality. The observer thereby clarifies the specificity of aspects that cannot be interculturally transacted, although a suggestion for rethinking and revision is always there.

But some of the essays collected in the volume do not reflect any points for intercultural perspectives. There are of course some other essays that highlight a conceptual issue in its multidisciplinary perspective as treated in two different countries, for example, Everlyn Nicodemus's treatment of trauma experience in literature, visual arts, cultural studies in Australia and Netherlands. The volume thus appears a noble venture in presenting the ideals and objectives of intercultural studies in the areas of aesthetics and literary criticism.

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Book Reviews

Paul Crowther, *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in the Era of Doubt,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, pp.268.

In the era of anti-foundationalism the value, canonical status and the future of art have been suspect. The analytic treatment of art during the second half of the twentieth century denied the experiential aspect of art, and the colonial elitism defined art in terms of its formalistic aspects that are only "significant". The European "Enlightenment" also sounded a strong colonial voice in the guise of intellectual domination. When the formalist and symbolist (expressionist) theories faded out by the influence of Duchampian tradition that ignored the Aristotelian concept of art as a "making" (*poçsis*) in favour of a "thing" designated by the artist as also enfranchised by a group of people (an institution) as art, Aristotelian *mimesis* lost its metaphysical status (not physically made by artists but available as "readymades") in favour of a social function of serving as "props" in games of make-believe. The last century thus witnessed a great exhibition of theories that tended to allow the audience by their fashionbable and fanciful decoration rather than explore the fundamentals of the truth behind them. In fact, when the very notions of fundamentals and foundations were questioned and in the style of the jesting Pilot, were rejected callously, the fundamental notions of truth, canon, value, utility were all declared meaningless and deceptive illusions — ignoring the very truth that proposers of these notions were themselves in great illusions and very soon they would be trapped themselves in the network of illusions when truth would reveal itself.

The denial of any property specifically "aesthetic", that defines "art" in favour of a context-oriented view of art (the so-called "institutional theory"), as also the "cultural theories" involving feminism, post-colonial, Frankfurt School Sociology, Michael Foucault's historical anthropology, Jacque Lacan's post-structuralist psychoanalysis, has questioned two vital issues: (1) whether art's canonic values can be philosophically justified and (2) whether art has a future? Crowther answers these questions in the positive and asserts that there is a conceptual connection between the answers.

Another important factor that determines the issue of normative value of art is what the author calls *cultural exclusion* either *implicit* or *explicit*. The dominating aesthetic thought is guided by the supposedly superiority of Western critical tradition that excludes the ideas of non-Western cultural heritage. For example, the concepts of 'art' and the "aesthetic" are themselves of Western origin, and till the end of the twentieth century the Eurocentric cultural tradition has been the ruling impact. At least one of the remarkable impact of Derrida's deconstructionism has been the abolition of binarism in all spheres of thought. Its anti-foundationalism has also abolished the superiority-inferiority, self-other, white-black racism, gender division, and though in association with Marxism, the class division as well. Critics, on the other hand, have misused / abused the ideas of Foucault and Marx in their efforts of universial application whereas they are meant for the Western context. Foucault's archaelogy of Western culture and Marxist class theory have limited application in so far as they have propounded their cultural and social theories on the basis of the history of European culture - not of world culture in general. Marx's three-phase social history comprising slavery, feudalism and industrialisation cannot be applied to the history of other cultures with equal strength. Indeed, feudalism as a phase in the history of Indian society has been duly controversial. Similarly, Foucault's study of sexuality and other cultural features, though highly persuasive, as is also Althusser's State Apparatus theory, their claim to universiality cannot be asserted. Susan Bassnett has even observed that the very notion of cultural universality is a colonial attitude - no phenomenon of a particular culture can claim universality, and, therefore cannot be considered as a model in any critical discourse.

Crowther's observation that the ideas of 'art' and the 'aesthetic' are strictly European (Western) is mostly justified. At least in the Indian context, as the present reviewer has studied much earlier (1977, 2003), these ideas have no parallel concepts. Art as derived from the Latin *ars* (Greek *technç*) originally means skill whereas the Sanskrit word *œilpa* means a collection. Similarly, there is no word denoting a property or experience in the Sanskrit vocabulary that can be parallel to the English term 'aesthetic'. When the different categories of *œilpa* are counted as *art*, it is only an adaptation of a critical term, and conversion of critical idioms that sometimes leads to a presupposition that the Western culture is superior to the Indian.

The two major philosophers of art Crowther attacks are George Dickie, the "Institutional theorist" and Arthur Danto, the "Designation theoriest" both of whom are exclusionists because they have ignored other non-Western cultures while defining art exclusively on their contemporary Western artworks (such as that of Duchamp) only. Kendal Walton is also another target of Crowther who proposes to define art in terms of its intrinsic significance :

> Institutional definitions of art and antifoundationalist approaches both misrepresent the nature of art's high cultural status. I justify its status on normative grounds. This involves explaining why art is intrinsically significant, and how this significance becomes an object of appreciation. I start from the fact that the image, qua sensible or imaginatively intended object, is an aesthetic configuration. *When an image's style of making is original (or, at the very least individual) it characterizes its subject matter from the creator's view point and thereby creates a distinctive kind of aesthetic unity which cannot be derived from other sources. This is art.* (p.9)… My definition … focuses on the origins of artistic meaning as well as its specialised pursuit through art as a social practice. For this reason, my defination is better described *per-functional* in Davies's terms. (p-5).

Crowther thus accepts the definitions of art taken into account by Stephen Davies (1991). Art according to him is an "aesthetic image" made for its own sake distinguished

from the images meant for other purposes such as providing information, pursuasion and practicing rituals, and *style* is the link between the aesthetic structure and image as also the very core of art's interpretative power. He claims that his normative approach to art privileges the intrinsic significance of art that is absent in the institutional and antifoundational approaches. "This is a more complex approach than formalism or expressionism. It is based on that which enables formal and expressive qualities to be significant. In particular, it conceives art as a mode of *making images* wherein the world is interpreted rather than reflected."

It seems, the author proposes an anti-realist approach to art as an image of reality, coming back to the Aristotelian "probable imitation", interpretation of reality following always the principles of probability and necessity: "In historical terms, the concept 'art' has developed around a distinctive class of mimetic artifacts… Now, of course, developments in twentieth- century Western modernism indicate, superficially, that a mimetic approach is no longer viable. But this conclusion has been drawn much too readily. *The explanatory scope of mimesis has been left undeveloped rather than refuted."* (64) Thus, according to the author, the Duchampian modernist visual art extends the scope of mimesis rather than reject it, and this tradition counts art in a peripheral or honorific sense. Art is a making (*poiçtikç*) by the artist, not "ready-mades" (simply arranged by the artist). Style as a linking factor is related to medium, subject matter, composition and comparison of one art work with another — depending upon the taste of a person shaped by and shaping a particular cultural context. Therefore stylistic originality, in a comparative historical context, forms an axis of art's normative significance.

The Aristotelian mimesis as the core factor of art, once again, points to the universality of this issue which the present reviewer expounded long ago in 1977. The Sanskrit term *œilpa* that might be taken connotatively parallel to the Western concept of *mimetikai technai,* or art is interpreted as a *pratirÂpa* or image -*Yadavai pratirûpam tatchilpam. Úilpa* might be literally different from *art* but conceptually both the terms refer to an image. However, Crowther's extension of image beyond its visual arena is nothing new. Much earlier, W.J.T. Mitchell's illuminating discussions of the concept of image in its multidimensional perspectives are still fresh. Moreover, his use of the word significance in the expression "normative significance" is as imprecise as Bell's epithet "significant" used for form.

David Fenner, *Art in Context: Understanding Aesthetic Value,* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008, pp.350.

The book is a critique of value of an artwork, and its author argues that this value is to be accounted for in terms of the context, as a whole, not in terms of the formal properties only or the objective aspects of the artwork. Rejection of formalism is again, only one perspective (not all) of the contextualism that the author proposes to propound. Along with the consideration of value of the object itself, value of its experience is also considered by rejecting formalism per se in favour of contextualism.

Attached to this formalism is also a critical perspective of *disinterested* attention which the author proposes to avoid in assessing the value and experience of an artwork. Finally, he clarifies that his investigation is empirical, and he takes account of history of art, art world and the history of Western aesthetic theory, particularly focusing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the period when the *disinterested* theory and art museums were on the ascendancy.

The author's correlation of the historical events of the installations of art museums with the theory of *disinterestedness* is really of great insight, which to my knowledge, remained unexplored so far. The idea that the most popular Kantian theory of the *aesthetic disinterestedness,* continuing its influence till the philosophers like Geoffrey Bullough, emerges in the historical practices of setting up art museums, is most convincing. In contrast to this Western perspective, as I have shown in 2003 (my essay in *Art and Experience*), the classical Sanskrit aestheticians propounded the *participation* theory i.e., the audience *participates* in the theatrical performance without any *disinterestedness* (*na tâtasthyena*). The decontextualization of artworks by placing them in museums or any exhibition was not in the classical and medieval Indian practices. Art has been always contextualized – in the temples, shirnes, palaces and royal courts, and they were all appreciated in their respective contexts. Thus the classical Indian sculpture on the temples cannot be appreciated appropriately when taken out of their religious contexts. Similarly, the musical *rÀgas* in the medieval period cannot be appreciated isolating them from their courtly/political contexts. Besides, the author rightly asserts that the dimensions of context are various – ethical, social, sexual, emotional, imaginative and religious so on and so forth. The sexual postures carved in the temples and the sexual pictures in the bed room of a *nâgaraka* (civilian) or in the brothels carry different meanings and must, therefore, be valued and experienced differently. Pages 2-16 provide a useful reading adding to our knowledge of the historical facts and events that enrich our understanding the foundation of such a powerful theory as the *aesthetic disinterest* that covered a large part of the modern Western aesthetic thought. The author writes:

> What I find historically interesting about the fact that aestheticism and aesthetic disinterest theories were rising at around the same time as art museums were being founded is that they all seemed to be about the same thing. At the start of the disinterest theorizing – this is the case for both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson — disinterest primarily had a negative sense: if one could eliminate from one's concerns anything personal (personal advantages, personal associations and connections, and so forth), one could judge properly. Later theories, including Kant's and, into the twentieth century, that of Jerom Stolnitz, incorporate a positive element: consider the object for its own sake, on its own terms. What all these theories recommend is a removal of an object of aesthetic consideration from any contemplative context that is impure, tainted by situation, circumstances, personal psychology, function, purpose, or instrumentality. What is it that the art

museum does? In large measure, the art museum provides the physical vanue for encouraging precisely what the disinterest theorists recommend. (p.10)

Consider the difference between John Keats's viewing the Grecian Urn in the British Museum and a Greek audience's viewing it in its Athenian context. Similarly, one viewing the sculptural images on the body of the temple of Konarka and the same one viewing it dislocated and exhibited in a museum. Museum is a place of preservation, not the context of creation of artwork. In fact, museums are responsible for the rise of formalism in philosophy of art (at least in the Western context); and formalism is responsible for the origin of the modifier *aesthetic* that stresses the sensory aspects of experience, right from Alexander Baumgarten to Stolnitz through Lord Shaftesbuy, Francis Hutcheson, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer: If Kant believed that by one's aesthetic attitude (disinterested perception) one would be in a position to make "correct" aesthetic evaluation, Schopenhauer and Stolintz replaced this correct aesthetic evaluation by focusing on the conditions for aesthetic experience. Thus aesthetic evaluation is now replaced by aesthetic experience (by adopting the "aesthetic attitude") implying that any object can be viewed aesthetically if one adopts a specific attitude toward it, i.e., the *disinterested attitude*. Paradoxically, this view emerging out of formalism rejects formalism itself. By that way, finally, the whole world would appear as an artwork rejecting completely the difference between art and nature.

The critical situation reminds the one in the Sanskrit tradition I have discussed in my 2003 book. Abhinavagupta speaks of a kind of attitude necessary for a theatre-goer: "today I am going to watch a theatrical performance in an auditorium where actors and actresses would be playing the roles of different characters accompanied by music and dance." This attitude (*abhisandhi*) is not any specifically psychological phenomenon that can be modified by one "dramatic attitude" or so. According to the Sanskrit philosophers no general modifier can be used for the attitude of the audience of all kinds of artwork. Bhattanayaka of course thinks of an attitude that a man must have to perceive the whole world as a theatrical performance (*jagannâtyam*). But his is the attitude of a philosopher who aims at experiencing the ultimate Reality (Brahman) not any artwork. The difference between these two kinds of experience has been amply elaborated upon by Abhinavagupta (10^{th} c. A.D.)

The author's account of the twentieth century avant-garde art – that of Marcel Duchamp or Andy Warhol – that gave rise to the theories of two influential philosophers such as George Dickie and Arthur Danto, the theories known popularly as the institutional theory and art-world theory respectively, refers to them by a single word *challenge*. Both the artwork and the theorists *challenge* the traditional notion of art as made by the artist with formal properties. *The Fountain, The Readymades* are not *artifacts* with any formal properties, but simply acknowledged as artworks institutionally or by a group of people constituting an art world. These theorists disregard the aesthetic value that is called instrumental or what the author names *production* value, i.e., value lies in certain subjective states that are produced through attention to the artwork. Monroe Beardsley, for example, talks of production of aesthetic experience in the

audience; Nelson Goodman talks of producing a certain cognitive experience; Leo Tolstoy points to the production of emotional state. Similarly the author also takes account of some contemporary accounts of the definitions of art that defy the traditional (mimetic) ones – there is no single definition; no single feature is shared by all art objects, but various art objects share some common features with other art objects making a family out of art. Morris Weitz suggests that art is a concept that continues to grow and evolve. Danto says artwork is an object of interpretation by a collective body consisting of artists, critics, patrons, audience, art historians, curators, producers/ directors. Jerold Levinson's art-historical theory asserts that an object is called an artwork if it is produced on the model of artworks produced earlier, in other words, it follows the traditional criteria — hardly an improvement over Dickie and Danto, excepting that his definition places art in the tradition context. Kendal Walton's view of involving relational properties is also a contextualist stand. Besides the issue of definition, the author also takes several other issues such as power of art, meaningfulness and science into account, and focuses on the Marxist, feminist, nationalist, religious perspectives as they form the contexts of art that make it valuable.

David Fenner's continuous pursuit of aesthetical scholarship for over decades has endowed him with an insight that explores new perspectives in justifying the creation and appreciation of art as an important human activity. What is most interesting in his exploration is the fact that, although artwork is a contextual phenomenon, the modern theories of art origin in its decontextualization. The Aristotelian ghost still threatens the modern theories of art that any attempt at deviation from his mimetic and cathartic theories will pull down the theorists to the fathomless bottom of the ocean where they would grapple with their very existence.

Abdul Razak Gurnah (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie,* Cambridge: University Press, 2007, pp.200.

Cambridge University Press acknowledges the literary merit of Salman Rushdie by placing him among the great authors of global renown who constitute the dignified series of the Cambridge Companion. It is a rare tribute to Rushdie indeed!, keeping aside his controversial aspects in the history of literature in English.

Rushdie's literary popularity is situational through his detour in the areas of journalism, TV performance, acting, history of Islamic religion and social activities. The path from the Cambridge Master's degree in history to the course of a novelist has been rather smooth and natural as has been his journey from Bombay to Britain with a brief stay in Pakistan, and his postmodernist vision in contributing to the tradition of intertextuality has also been a timely event. But the subject matter of his representation has remained only topical as suitable for the postmodernist challenge to anything eternal or universal. Rushdie intertwines three categories of texts -- history, cinema and narrative fiction – projecting the postmodernist triumph of multiplicity and fragmentation over oneness and integrity, triggered by his experience of Indian culture as dominated by its syncretism, and what his literary texts represent are sarcasm, satire and parody that

expose the religious fundamentalism both in India and Pakistan. His cultural citique is founded on religion rather than on language, and for that matter, his cultural paradigm is Islamic which has misguided him in understanding the true spirit of Indian culture, which is more linguistic than religious. Brahmanic ideology continued to survive by its linguistic identity by its religious rigour, as evident in its compromise with several religious groups in the course of its growth and progress, whereas, on the other hand, Islamic culture is absolutely identified by its religious principles. Arabic, Persian, Egyptian, Spanish, Malaysian, Urdu all are under the umbrella of Islamic religion. But, as Patanjali has said, Aryan or Brahmanic culture is identified by the language of the Vedas and non-Vedic texts as they are *used* by the people of this Âryadeúa. However, it is a paradox that the very point which popularized Rushdie – his fragmented vision of the cultures of India and Pakistan – has made him most reasonably controversial: he is a superficial observer, and postmodernism believes in this superficiality rather than in any depth. Thus we can never expect a Gjellerup or an Hesse in Rushdie's experience of Indian culture that starts with the Bollywood cinema industry and ends in the journalistic treatment of the cultures that he proposes to represent. He only ridicules himself when he claims to be one among Gogal, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado and even Swift. (p.30)

Treating Indian culture in its fragmented-colonial and postcolonial perspective- is certainly a parochial and prejudiced attitude notwithstanding the postmodernist emphasis on imperfection, with only one justification that the treatment is satirical set against India's glorious past going beyond the medieval Mughal rule to its classical and post-classical period. The Bollywood cinema industry with its Raj Kapor and K. Asif traditions has entirely brought a qualitative degradation in the Indian cultural values, in spite of India's response to the Western technological developments. Vijay Mishra's chapter in the volume highlights Rushdie's literary sensibility originating in the Bombay cinema culture exhibiting at the same time the degraded status of this origin in contrast to the cultural level of Calcutta culture of Bengali films exhibiting a shining contrast between Raj Kapoor's *Sri 420* and Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* – which one should measure India's cultural values? A particular case of Rushdie's failure in appreciating the aesthetic representation of sexual passion in the Indian tradition is his description of sexual behaviour of Pia and Nayyar (*The Lovers of Kashmir:* 1948) what he calls "indirect kiss" (*MC*, 142) – kissing not one-another as in the Western Cinema, but *things*. Not only kissing, all other signs of sexual behaviour must be this way represented in the theatrical (and so also in cinema) shows, a method amply and most successfully used by Satyajit Ray – the semiotics of sexual love approved of as early as the 3rd century AD by Vatsyayana. There is no point in treating this method sarcastically. Rushdie should have noted the archetypal character in Anarkali's mother (a type of Kaikeyi) when she keeps the award declared by Akbar reserved for an appropriate occasion. Similarly, his parodical conversion of Shelley's "If winter comes, can spring be far behind" to "If Gibreel dies, could India be far behind" (TSV, 28-29) lacks in an aesthetic taste excepting wit and sarcasm.

The constituent parts of Rushdie's aesthetic are, as Peter Morey notes (p.37), secular Islam, aspects of Hindusm, third world liberationism and lukewarm socialism; but can there be a secular Islam? Rusdie's anti-fundationism, anti-foundamentalism and anti-nationalism in a postcolonial context are most remarkable and warmly welcome; but to expect a secular attitude from a religion-based culture is as self-contradictory as utopiac, and therefore an unreachable destination except ending in sarcasm and parody. Morey's placing him with a possible comparison with Charles Dickens is only an illusory possibility. Similarly his applying Samuel Deane's observation about Joyce to Rushdie (p.40-41), "The British imperium was overcome by parody, taking the tradition of literature as it has expressed itself in the novel, and scrutinizing its silent assumptions" is rather too superficial to be accepted as is his comments that the English tradition in Rushdie brings us back to the global perspective.

Amina Yaquin's cross-examination of the issue of gender in Rushdie's writings is quite an attractive feature of the volume. She agrees that Aijaz Ahmed usefully draws our attention to the class bias in Rushdie (male figures are eliminated from the oppressed sections of society in highlighting the oppression of women) focusing the elite, politically aware middle and upper classes. But she complains that Ahmed falls a victim to a fixed understanding of sexuality and women, and is rather simplistic in reading women as a substitute for the absent underclasses : "By contrast Rushdie is concerned to highlight the specificities of gender oppression in his version of Pakistani society, which are to do with women's domestic roles, child-bearing and socially enforced passivity in relation to active male characters." (p.65) In contrast to Ahmed, Yaquin recommends Joan Scott's Foucauldian approach to the identity of "women" tracing the specificities of the term in given contexts ; and in that context the feminist historian should discover that "*women* refers to so many subjects, different and the same". (p.65)

Ib Johansen, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Brendon Nicholls, Goel Kuortti, Deepika Bahri, Minoli Salgado and Anshuman Mondal study the individual texts *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Vesses*, the noevella *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a story collection *East, West*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury.*

Gurnah's study of *Midnight's Children* is, in its details, a very sincere and sympathetic treatment that examines its intertextuality provoking varied responses in various readers: for Western readers a fantasy, and for the South Asian readers a history, besides dealing with "politics, social history, farce, filmic extravaganza, uncut comedy and a tragedy of loveless families." Rushdie's technical mentors are *The Tin Drum* (published in German in 1959) and *Tristram Shandy*, but his intertwining facts and fantasy to subvert the language of authority and overturning hierarchies by allowing the impossible to happen draw upon the Bakhtinian 'Carnivalesque'. The failure of Nehru's promise of freedom ending in Indira Gandhi's Emergency, also puts an end to Saleem's delusion of responsibility for India's history. Rushdie's greatness lies in his skilful dealing with history as a fiction – in parodying Indira Gandhi's efforts for

making history that wipes out Nehru's optimism pitiably. The complex fragments put up in a non-linear and interrupted form are instances of Bakhtin's heteroglossia where a multiplicity of voices and meaning are brought into an unofficial discourse. Thus Rushdie's technique in constructing a complex plot is indeed no less powerful than that in *Tom Jones*. Undoubtedly, there is a lot of technical innovations and experiment in structuring the theme of the novel, but what the reader grapples with is the author's world view, his vision of the human existence itself that correlates the past and present and proceeds on to future.

The same also is true with his reasonably controversial work *The Satanic Verses* studied by Joel Kuortti: "The novel will be discused here as a text: first its structure, characterization and stylistic features, then the wide range of themes it discusses its intertextual reaches. The discussion will close by considering the ethical issues Rushdie's novel raises," (p.125). Absolute religious fundamentalism voiced by Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* has evidently been overruled by the literary merit of the work as it has overcome the time of crisis. Kuortti writes: "Through the use of postmanteau and deconstructive devices and strategies such as postmanteau words and *historiographic metafiction*. Rushdie manages to create a heteroglassic, multi-voiced narrative which **–** explicitly as well as implicitly**–** plays ironically with the readers' expectations." (p.128) The technique of heteroglossy has already been exercised by the modernist poet Thomas Eliot, but, as Homi Bhabha warns, "the evocation of such multiplicity is also a risky matter, for "there is always the threat of mistranslation, confusion and fear'." (p.128) As regards the ethical aspect of the novel, Kuortti quotes relevantly Rushdie: "a poet's work…to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep." Clearly, the voice is that of a satirist, may be a postmodernist match for the *enlightenment* satire of Swift. Rushdie thus relevantly parodies C.S. Lewis's fourth love 'agape' (the first three being affection, friendship and eros) or love of God subverting it to 'love of a dream'.

While studying *Shame* Brendon Nicholls highlights the political issues of post-partition and racism in Britain during the early 19080's and comments that the creative imagination displayed in such cultural translations enables literary criticism as a political act within its own place and item. (p.109) But the most insightful observation that Nicholls's study of *Shame* reveals is:

> Rushdie engages with some of the most significant tensions and concerns at work within formulations of postcolonial nationhood. Central to Rushdie's is the sense that a national narrative founded upon repression inevitably exhibits a crisis of plausibility. As such, any cultural claim staked upon the homogeneity of the nation already authorizes the alternatives, detours and embellishments that antagonize its intention. To put this another way, since the authoritarian state actively suppresses possibilities within its own puritanical narratives, it at some level unconsciously imagines-into –being the very same cultural contestants that it seems unable to avoid.

> Appropriately enough, in *Shame's* imaging of a heavily fictionalized Pakistan, Rushdie must seek an adequate literary form through which to convey collective experiences and to indicate the consensual silences that allow such collective experiences to operate. In Pakistan, he suggests, a fundamental silence surrounds the subordinate position occupied by women within the national corpus. This silence forms part of the larger patterns of repression that texture national political life. (p.110)

Shame might be less complex in its structure than *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children,* but it is less controversial in its theme as Rushdie handles the political problematic in a postcolonial nation applicable to all other similar nations. Thus the social scenario dominates over the religious fundamentalism, and therefore the satirical tone is more relishable in its literary appeal.

As noted earlier, Rushdie's literary popularity is situational and its topicality, despite its richness in narrative techniques catering to the postmodernist taste, is unable to rise to the level of a standing merit appreciable for all times. However, the contributors to this Cambridge Companion series have done their best in assessing Rushdie as he deserves, focusing the vital issues in postcolonial nations that disturb the humanity as a whole.

A.C. Sukla