
Aesthetics beyond/within Aesthetics : The Scope and Limits of Aesthetics in Indian Antiquity

A.C. SUKLA

Today the Hegelian definition of 'aesthetics' as the philosophy of art is questioned and proposals are made to extend the scope of aesthetics much beyond this limit so as to accommodate the areas of learning originally suggested by Alexander Baumgarten's definition of aesthetics as the 'science of sensuous cognition' which retains the meaning of its Greek original *aisthesis*: But the limiting of the scope of this science to the philosophy of art in the post-Baumgartenian intellectual history was due to Baumgarten's own illustration of the aesthetic perfection or the perfection of sensuous knowledge by the arts, particularly poetry.¹

Immanuel Kant made a three-fold division of cognitive faculties- understanding, judgment and reason, and observed that there are two kinds of judgment -determinant and reflective. The first kind of judgment applies a concept or a rule to a particular while the second kind of judgment discovers a rule from a given particular. A species of this reflective judgment is the aesthetic judgment, i.e., judgment of the beautiful, sublime and taste. Aesthetic judgment reflects on the particular facts of the beautiful, sublime and taste and this judgment is determined by the feeling of disinterested pleasure. Taste is the ability to estimate the beautiful, "to respond with immediate pleasure and unclouded vision to beauty in nature and art, and further, to communicate this pleasure to others who are capable of sharing it... and the exercise of this ability is the judgment of taste."² The aesthetic judgment, while calling something beautiful, does not simply feel that it pleases, but claims that it pleases necessarily, that it is an object of universal delight. Aesthetic experience or the experience of the beautiful as disinterested pleasure is for Kant an autonomous experience and is different from and independent of moral and cognitive experiences that are forms of determinant judgment.

The post-Kantian idealist philosophers such as Hegel, Bosanquet and Croce followed Kant in considering aesthetics as the autonomous branch of philosophy that establishes the relation between the sensuous and the beautiful, between the beautiful and the ultimate reality. Hegel defined the beautiful as the sensuous *semblance* of the idea (the Ultimate Reality) : "... the sensuous in works of art is exalted to the rank of a mere *semblance* in comparison with the immediate existence of the things in nature, and the work of art occupies the

mean between what is immediately sensuous and ideal thought ... the sensuous in the work of art is itself something ideal, not, however, the ideal of thought but as thing still in an external way. This semblance of the sensuous presents itself to the mind externally as the shape, the visible look and the sonorous vibration of things ... In art these sensuous shapes and sounds present themselves not simply for their own sake and that of their immediate structure, but with the purpose of affording in that shape satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, seeming that they are powerful to call forth a response and echo in the mind from all the depths of consciousness. It is thus that, in art, the sensuous is spiritualized, i. e., the spiritual appears in sensuous shape."³

According to Hegel, therefore, aesthetics or the philosophy of art is subordinate to metaphysics or the philosophy of the Spirit/Idea since he defines the value of art in terms of its expression of the spiritual significance. But Bosanquet and Croce, while accepting the Hegelian concept of beauty as the sensuous manifestation of the spirit, reject the Hegelian subordination of aesthetics to metaphysics. When Hegel observes that among the manifestation of the spirit—thought, beauty and moral goodness—thought is of the highest value, Bosanquet and Croce argue that all of them are equally valuable and individually constitute different realms of experiences; therefore the question of any qualitative comparison among them does not arise. If nature is not an elevation over art, metaphysics is not superior to aesthetics.

Bosanquet defines aesthetics in his preface to *A History of Aesthetic* (1892):

Aesthetic theory is a branch of philosophy, and exists for the sake of knowledge and not as a guide to practice. The present work is, therefore, primarily addressed to those who may find a philosophical interest in understanding the place and value of beauty in the system of human life, as conceived by leading thinkers in different periods of world's history. It is important to insist that the aesthetic philosopher does not commit the impertinence of invading the artist's domain with an *apparatus belli* of critical principles and prospects. The opinion that this is so draws upon aesthetic much obloquy, which would be fully deserved if the opinion were true. Art, we are told, is useless; in a kindred sense aesthetic may well submit to be useless also. The aesthetic theorist, in short, desires to understand the artist, not in order to interfere with the latter, but in order to satisfy the intellectual interest of his own.⁴

Since Kant and the post-Kantian idealist tradition, aesthetics has gained an autonomous status in the realm of human thinking for investigating the nature of art objects as creations of different artists, their relation to Nature and Ultimate

Reality, the value of the experience of their beauty by the audience in terms of disinterested pleasure and finally, for determining the criteria for their appreciation and criticism. Monroe C. Beardsley views aesthetics from the point of the critical statements about the works of art. While distinguishing aesthetics from criticism of the arts, he observes that aesthetics is not criticism, but philosophy of criticism or *meta criticism* :

As a field of study, aesthetics consists of a rather heterogeneous collection of problems; those that arise when we make a serious effort to say something true and warranted about a work of art. As a field of knowledge, aesthetics consists of those principles that are required for clarifying and confirming critical statements. Aesthetics can be thought of, then, as the philosophy of criticism, or *matacriticism*.⁵

As ethics is philosophy of moral statements or an examination of the meaning and proof of moral statements since, for example, it does not state "it is wrong to kill", but seeks for the meaning of 'wrong' and 'right' or as philosophy of science does not provide us with the theories of particles and electrons, but asks whether these particles really exist independent of human mind, so also aesthetics does not state "*Hamlet* is a wonderful play" but inquires into the meaning of 'wonderful' and into the nature of a 'play' as distinguished from the epic or the novel and so on. Aesthetics consists of value judgements. It does not simply state that Shakespeare is a better playwright than Webster, but states the criteria for a good or bad play.

The subjectmatter of aesthetics being more or less the same, the nature of its investigation and inquiries has changed on par with changes in the modalities of the different schools of thought that set the very ways of thinking during the whole of the 20th century. Idealism, Marxist Realism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Pragmatism and Neo-Empiricism all have had their own modes of enquiry, as they thought, to fulfil the demand of their own quest. Thomas Munro, for example, summarises the need for a "programme of making aesthetics a rigorous and broad-gauged discipline" advocating for "a scientific, descriptive, neutralistic approach to aesthetics; one which should be broadly experimental and empirical, but not limited to quantitative measurement; utilising the insights of art criticism and philosophy as hypotheses, but deriving objective data from two main sources - the analysis and history of form in the arts and psychological studies of the production, appreciation, and teaching of the arts."⁶

But a call for broadening the gauge of aesthetics such as this, demanding a convergence of several disciplines on explaining the issues in aesthetics as defined by the Kantian tradition was not a call for emancipating aesthetics from

the boundaries of academic disciplines, allowing even a layman for participating in discussion on art and beauty. The 13th conference of the International Association of Aesthetics in Lahti, Finland (August 1-5, 1995) on the theme "Aesthetics in Practice" called for bridging the gap between academic research and phenomena of the everyday world, for extending the scope of aesthetics far beyond the philosophical or even all kinds of intellectual perspectives so as to include the issues other than theoretical, the issues of taste in all kinds of our cultural practices such as fashion in garments, costumes, preparation of food, maintenance of the body, preservation of the forest, gardening and expressiveness in everyday life of the common man and disciplines like biology, agriculture, forestry, horticulture, politics, law, economics, marketing and commerce were brought to bear upon the issues involved.⁷ To put it precisely, the thrust of the conference was not so much upon theories as on the practical or applied aspects of aesthetics as a science of beauty and taste, as a style of living, as a key to understanding and fashioning the contemporary reality itself. The *homo sapiens* is now the *homo aestheticus* and 'aesthetics has become the new currency in the reality trade.'⁸

Aesthetics today has gone beyond aesthetics in its traditional sense of philosophy of beauty in Nature and Art. But is this idea of man as the *homo aestheticus* the result of a historical necessity or a discovery of man's cultural differentia unnoticed earlier? The present essay intends to answer this second question in the positive by referring to a significant chapter of the Indian cultural heritage. Long ago, in the 3rd c. A.D. Vátsyáyana, the author of a treatise on erotics, viewed man as the *homo aestheticus*, and in understanding the reality of human life in terms of aesthetic behaviour he did not suggest to enlarge the scope of aesthetics beyond aesthetics, rather comprehended the whole of man's being within the area of aesthetics - considered man's life as a piece of art. This view of Vátsyáyana was not a determinant judgement in Kantian terms because he was not a philosopher. As a social scientist, his observations were based on the actual life-styles of Indians continuing for several centuries that preceded him. But before coming to Vátsyáyana we must note the exact area of Indian thinking that might be defined in terms of what the European tradition named 'aesthetics'.

Aesthetics as Philosophy of Art/Metacriticism

The earliest Indian text on art is a treatise on the drama ascribed to a mythical sage named Bharata who was tentatively a contemporary of Aristotle (4th c. B.C.). But the significant difference to be noted is that while the pioneering Western thinkers on art—Plato and Aristotle, are primarily philosophers and their

reflections on art form a part of their total system of philosophy, Bharata is not a philosopher. Like other two great thinkers of his age Pánini the grammarian and Kautilya the socio-political scientist, Bharata was also a descriptive thinker rather than a prescriptive theorist. Aristotle's method in his *Poetics* is descriptive too. But his observations on different forms of art are to be understood in relation to the system of thought that he developed in his treatises on several branches of knowledge such as metaphysics, politics, biology and rhetorics. Therefore he and his predecessor Plato may be called philosophers of art or aestheticians. But this is not the case with Bharata. As Panini did not prescribe the grammatical rules, but formulated rules as he found them in the actual usage of the Sanskrit language of his time, and systematised the language on the basis of such rules, so also Bharata systematised ten forms of the drama out of several other forms that were prevalent in his time. Simultaneously he also systematised the structure of the drama primarily as a performing art with its several constituents such as dialogues, music, dance, histrionics and costume. He also made observations on the drama as a literary form with its constituents such as plot, character and emotional contents. Aristotle, as a philosopher, builds up a definition of art and formulates a sister arts theory interconnecting these individual arts on the basis of a generalisation that comes under the framework of his philosophical system. As a philosopher, therefore, he considers spectacle, the theatrical aspect of the drama, insignificant in his theoretical perspective. Bharata's, on the other hand, is a comprehensive treatise, so exhaustive as to cover all the aspects of the drama as an object of art in itself and in its relation to the audience for whom it is composed and performed - in as many as thirty-six long chapters. If aesthetics is a philosophical system, then Bharata is not an aesthetician. Philosophical reflections were scattered all over the Vedic scriptures, particularly in the final parts of the Vedas called Upanisads. But the philosophical schools or systems developed about three centuries after Bharata.

Nonetheless, in defining the drama and determining the nature of its experience by the audience Bharata takes recourse to the terms and concepts as used by his predecessors particularly in the Upanisads. One such major term and concept is *Rasa* which forms the central issue of his own treatise and shapes the ideas and theories on different forms of art in posterity. The Sanskrit word *Rasa* literally means 'juice', primarily referring to the juice of a creeper named Soma famous for its gustatory delicacy and mild intoxication and for its use in the Vedic sacrificial rituals. Metaphorically this term is used in the Upanisads for describing the beauty of the experience of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality by a sage. Gradually, an epistemology of this experience is implied on the analogy of tasting or drinking the Soma Rasa, i.e., both of them are direct or

perceptual cognitions of the gustatory order; and finally the ontology of Brahman is also described in terms of this experience, the beauty due to drinking of *Rasa*. When the experience of Brahman is alike the perceptual experience of *Rasa*, Brahman itself is *Rasa*. The situation may be explained somewhat in a phenomenological language - Reality is nothing other than what is actually given in the experience itself or the experience of Reality defines the nature of Reality. Now, Bharata uses this term *Rasa* to describe the experience of the audience and finally describes the drama both as a form of literature and as a performing art in terms of this experience. The delightful experience of the drama by the audience is *Rasa* and, therefore the drama itself is also *Rasa*.

But Bharata does not develop any logical structure to systematise this peculiar experience differentiating it from other kinds of human experience as Kant does. At least on this point Aristotle and Bharata are on par insofar as Aristotle does not develop a logic for his catharsis other than implying its analogy with the catharsis in mystic rituals and medical treatment. Bharata also defines the drama as representation (literally *anukrti*, *anukarana* meaning imitation) of the events of the whole creation. But excepting for a few stray uses of the word *anukrti* in the pre-Bharata Vedic texts implying the creation of man after the image of God or Reality, there is no logic of imitation as found in Plato and Aristotle to explain the relation between Reality and Phenomena.⁹ Another key term used by Bharata is *Bháva* which means primarily 'existence' (Reality) or (state of) being (*bhavanítí*). In its causative it also means that which brings something to existence or reality or being (*bhávayanítí bhává*) and Bharata uses the word *bháva* in this causative sense meaning the phenomenon which brings *Rasa* into existence by means of acting.¹⁰ He counts *Rasa* and *Bháva* as two out of five elements of the drama and stresses the interdependence of *Rasa* and *Bháva*: "Without *Bháva* there is no *Rasa* and without *Rasa* there is no *Bháva*. In acting each is attained by the other. Even as the aggregate of different curries and spices makes food tasty or seed begets a tree and a tree bears flowers and fruits, so also *Bháva* brings *Rasa* into existence and vice versa."¹¹ The same point he repeats in a different language: "*Bháva* brings the aims of poetry (i. e., *Rasa*) into existence."¹² Poetry (*Kávyam*) does not refer here to any autonomous genre but the dramatic text (or the dialogues) which is to be read (*páthyam*) by the actors and actresses at the time of the theatrical performance. Bharata wants to say that the aim of the dramatic text is not to be read. Its aim is *Rasa*, and *Bhavas* bring this *Rasa* into existence through acting.¹³

Having thus defined *Bháva*, Bharata counts its number as eight : love, laughter, sorrow, anger, courage, fear, disgust and wonder, and now it becomes

clear that *Bháva* means a (permanent) mental state or emotion.¹⁴ It is in this sense that Bharata's commentator interprets *Bháva* as *Cittavrtti* (literally 'mental states')¹⁴. Corresponding to these eight emotions Bharata mentions eight *Rasas* and states that in the theatre when determinants (characters and situations), consequents (gestures and postures or histrionics) and transitory mental states (the facial expressions of different feelings) are combined *Bháva* (or *Stháyi Bháva*) brings its corresponding *Rasa* into existence (or generates *Rasa*), i.e., *Bháva* (Emotion) of love generates *Rasa* of Love, *Bháva* of Anger generates *Rasa* of Anger etc. The sole aim of the dramatic performance is in fact the generation of this *Rasa*.¹⁵

Bharata describes the nature of *Rasa* as a direct perceptual experience on the basis of the nature of its sensory character. *Rasa* as a delicious juice is experienced by our gustatory sense organ. So also the dramatic *Rasa* is experienced by the audience, as it were, gustatorily. Bharata writes:

As people delightfully eat the food prepared with several ingredients (curries, spices etc.) and are therefore called *Sumanasah* (persons with delightful mind), so also the audience, who relish (or taste) the permanent emotion in combination with verbal, physical and mental acting are called *Sunmanasah*. (like the varieties of food eaten delightfully the permanent emotions are also relished in the theatre; these permanent emotions are) therefore called dramatic *Rasa*.¹⁶

The use of *Rasa* for the relishable permanent emotion or *Stháyi Bháva* in the theatre is therefore metaphorical. The language that Bharata uses is obviously Upanisadic i.e. the language of metaphor and therefore the whole of his composition contains descriptive accounts of the several constituents of the theatre and a poetic account of the emotional delight of the audience. His hedonistic account of the dramatic experience is also very clear in the very first chapter of his *Nátyasástra* where he describes the nature of the theatre by an analogy of toy-Brahmá, the proto-creator, devised the theatrical art as an audiovisual toy (*Krídáníyaka*) meant for an innocent enjoyment of the audience.¹⁷ Another purpose of the theatre is of course to provide an overall information about the human culture as a whole including the law of causality. But this is only secondary, the primary object of the theatre being wholesome delight. Viewed from another angle, Bharata's treatise was granted the status of authority (*Sástra*) because it aimed at a mass culture, at an enlightenment of all classes of the contemporary Indian society through the theatre. In other words, as an antidote to the enlightenment by the rigorous contemplation of the Upanisads and moral practices of the Pali Buddhism, the theatre as a mass medium served the purpose by harmless hedonistic means.¹⁸

Bharata's language was inevitably uncritical because he had no philosophical background to provide him with the tools for systematic critical vocabulary. By the time he composed his treatise there were only two sources of thought available: the Upanisads and the preachings of the Buddha in Pali language. If the language of the former was poetic, the latter had no impact upon the orthodox Hindu culture¹⁹. Among the orthodox philosophical systems Sāṅkhya is the oldest one which had its origin in the Upanisadic poetry and developed to a system two centuries after Bharata - in the *Mahābhārata* (2nd c. B.C.), Caraka (78 A.D.) and Isvarakṛṣṇa (100 A.D.) - taking a course of three centuries for its sizable growth. Similarly, the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism that exerted a great influence on the later orthodox systems of logic and metaphysics was born more or less five centuries after Bharata. It is therefore futile to expect any critical strength from the language of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. However, Bharata's idea of a combination of determinants etc. generating the dramatic *Rasa* in the audience might have been an analogy framed after the Upanisadic creation of the world as a combination of different elements such as fire, water and earth and the Pali Buddhist idea of the five *Khandhas* or aggregates of physical and psychical states as categories of understanding.

The first critic who suggested a logic of emotions is most probably Patanjali (2nd c. B.C.) who in his axioms on the Yoga system thought of the mental states (*cittavṛtti*) in terms of psychospiritual logic. There are five mental states or the functions of the mind: valid cognition, invalid cognition, imagination, sleep and memory. Permanent emotions such as love, fear and anger are the memory-contents and are basically the impressions (*samskāra*) of the mind's experiences of different events and objects in terms of pleasure, pain and indifference. Patanjali believes in the cycle of an individual's births and deaths through which the mind remains constant in accumulating the impressions of experiences from eternity till date and this whole mass of impressions is called *Vāsanā* (lit. desire). Therefore it does not matter whether a man has experienced an emotion in a particular life time; an emotion is permanent in the sense that if not in a particular life, one must have experienced it in one previous life and therefore must have retained it in form of *Vāsanā*.²⁰

Although Patanjali does not deal with the theatre, his system of the mental states provides, perhaps for the first time, a critical support for the relishability of an emotion. He mentions that the five states of the mind may be either afflicted or unafflicted according to one's attachment with the experiences (as caused by ignorance or *avidyā*) leading to suffering, and detachment from the experiences (as caused by wisdom or *raṁbharā prajñā*) leading to liberation.²¹

When applied to Bharata, Patanjali's notion of the unafflicted mental states illuminates the *Rasa* nature of a permanent emotion insofar as it explains that an emotion with an individual attachment, such as found in our day-to-day life, is afflicted and therefore causes suffering. If it is free from any individual attachment it is unafflicted and leads the limited ego toward the absolute consciousness which is wholesomely delightful. This is what Bharata wants to say precisely when his Brahma advises the demon audience to avoid their individual identity with the events and characters of the theatre.²¹

Patanjali's classification and criteria of mental states may be said to break the ground for an epistemology of aesthetic experience and as evidenced by history, Patanjali's philosophy of mind, consciousness and self was of great significance for the origin of aesthetics and for its later developments. Patanjali's own time was also of great importance for the rise of Indian epic in its oral form. *The Rámáyana* and *The Mahábhárata* were composed during the 2nd century B.C. following which two great Sanskrit poets Asvaghosa and Kálidasa established the written epic tradition that continued till the end of the 7th century A.D. This was also the time when Sanskrit drama rose to its apex both in its literary form and theatrical performance. Besides, all the art forms—verbal, visual and musical—attained their autonomy freeing them from subordination to the dramatic art of pre-Christian era. Alongside, different philosophical schools of Sanskrit Buddhism and Orthodox Hinduism had their prolific growth and remarkable sophistication. But aesthetics as the philosophical inquiry into the conceptual issues in different art forms did not proceed beyond the inaugural hints offered by Patanjali. Of course poetics originated in its rhetorical form with Bhámaha (7th c. A.D.) belonging to the age which marks the end of the great classical epic tradition of Bháravi and Mágha. Far from being philosophical - searching the ontological, epistemological and linguistic issues in the art of poetry - *Bhámaha* and his successors continuously for two centuries to follow engaged themselves only in enumerating the formal properties of the language of poetry. The beauty of poetic art, they thought, lies in the figures of speech or verbal ornaments (*alankára*) relating both to the sounds (*sabda*) and the senses (*artha*) of language. Commenting on this situation professor S.K. De, an authority on the history of Sanskrit poetics observes :

Sanskrit poetics started as a purely empirical, and more-or-less mechanical study. It took the poetic product as a created and finished fact, and forthwith went to analyse it as such, without pausing to consider its relation to the process of poetic creation as the expressive activity of the human spirit. It chose to deal with what was already expressed, never bothering itself with the whys and

wherefores of expression..... never quite drew away from its analytic verbal formalism into a truly theoretic discipline of aesthetic.²²

From Professor De's further observations it is made clear that the poeticians' methodology was along the descriptive technique of the great grammarian Pánini who thought of 'words as natural, mechanical facts to be collected in their greatest possible variety and grouped in fixed classes and types.'²³ Professor De insightfully interprets the rhetoricians' conception of poetry framed on the analogy of painting that had already attained its culmination in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora and also found mention in the canonical portions of *Visnudharmottarapurána* (6th c. A.D.). It is not improper to think that the Sanskrit notion of 'picture-poetry' (*citrakávyá*) was construed on the formal similarity between poetry and painting. De writes :

The standpoint is similar to that of an art of painting which confines itself to a collection of information about the techniques of tempera, oil painting, water colour, and pastels about the proportions of the human anatomy, and about the laws of perspective, forgetting that a painted picture is more than a mere ingenious application of such knowledge or device. It regarded poetry as a more or less mechanical series of verbal devices in which a definite sense must prevail and which must be diversified by means of prescribed tricks of phrasing ... As the botanist or the zoologist labels and classifies every new representative of flora or fauna, the Sanskrit *álankárika*, pretending to find universals, calculates the particular species from the original four ornaments of Bharata to more than a hundred of Jayadeva.²⁴

The rhetoricians have, quite probably, adopted a joint method of Pánini's generative semantics and the combinatorics of painting. But while the generative principle is useful in grammar, it creates a chaos in poetry by exploiting the inexhaustibility of individual poetic expressions to an infinite number. "The universals of a formal analysis are of a doubtful theoretic value for explaining the principle of concrete individual expression itself."²⁵

A moment of reflection on the theoretical hints on the visual arts as made by the *Visnudharmottara* surprises the reader that while Bharata's notion of *Rasa* was applied to the visual arts,²⁶ the poeticians were completely silent about this application although they followed the formal techniques of the visual arts. One might be tempted to interpret the Sanskrit figures of speech in the light of the modernist account of poetry as painting. But before doing so one must remember that the imagist critics had a definite ontological perspective in attributing a spatial character to the verbal arts. The idea of poetry as figures of speech may refer to an epistemological system which advocates for man's

experience in terms of images and may argue for a theoretical base of the figures of speech in differentiating common man's perceptual knowledge from the poet's under the criterion that while the common man understands the subjects in their own terms, the poet understands the subjects in terms of analogues. Since the analogues vary according to the changes in various cultural complexes, the number of the figures of speech may change or increase infinitely. In that case the rhetoricians' idea of the figures of speech as ornaments warns the critic for an immediate approval of this epistemological view of the figures of speech. The whole notion of the rhetoricians is based on a presupposition that ornaments make a woman beautiful. If poetry is a verbal form, then verbal ornaments can only beautify it. Therefore poetry is a body of ornamental language. But when this major premise is rejected, as has been done long before by Kalidasa who viewed beauty as a unique form which does not need any embellishment - rather embellishes the very ornaments put on it,²⁷ the whole theory crumbles down. However, an epistemology of images did develop in the later course of Indian thought with which we shall be acquainted soon after.

When the ornament theory was found to be dissatisfactory later critics like Dandī (8th c A.D.) and Vámana (8th-9th c.) attempted some other theories which were once again based on the formal qualities of poetic language. Their attention shifted from only one aspect to another aspect of the poetic language, the method of their enquiry remaining the same. When Vámana defined poetry not in terms of words with various meanings but with different formal arrangements of words (*Ríti*) or Dandī defined poetry in terms of certain verbal qualities (*Guna*), they followed the same method of Pánini's generative semantics - falling prey to enumeration of infinite number of qualities or formal arrangements based on empirical data and arbitrary labelling. If poetry is defined in terms of formal arrangement of verbal expression peculiar or popular in a particular geographical zone then question will arise as to the number and justification of such zones. The point is that these critics failed to found a system of linguistics that would justify their claim that only particular type or types of verbal composition can be called poetry, not others.²⁸

From the failures of these critics in founding a system or systems of aesthetics what emerges as the most significant point is that these critics were already grappling with the relevant areas of learning that would constitute the branch what is termed 'aesthetics' in the contemporary vocabulary. These areas are ontology, epistemology, psychology, linguistics and cultural studies. Indian philosophical systems that started in the 2nd century B.C. the six major systems of orthodox philosophy along with philosophy of grammar fathered by Patanjali

and the different schools of Sanskrit Buddhism with their intellectual debates as well as esoteric practices in mystic rites contributed much to the foundation of an aesthetic system in the 9th and 10th centuries that finalised most of the significant issues concerning the fine arts—their nature, function and values in human society.

II

In the mid-ninth century a critic named Rájánaka Anandavardhana rose to prominence in Kashmir for his treatise on poetry popularly known as *The Light of Dhvani (Dhvanyaloka)*. This treatise was also entitled *The Light of Poetry (Kávyáloka)* and *The Light of Sahrdaya (Sahrdayáloka)* which literally means 'The Light of a Like-hearted Man'. Besides this critical text, Ananda also wrote two narrative poems one of them being in Prakrt, one hundred hymns to the Mother Goddess (*Devísataka*), a commentary on the Buddhist logical text *Pramánaviniscaya* by Dharmakírti (about 635 A.D.) and a philosophical text named *Tattváloka (The Light of Tattva lit. Truth or Reality)*.²⁹ The area of Anandavardhana's authorship is vast enough to cover both the creative and critical endeavours that engaged the Indian mind for the last one thousand years. As evidenced by the only extant text out of the several mentioned- the one on poetics, Anandavardhana was vastly erudite so as to be very well acquainted with the entire range of knowledge from the Vedic ages till his date. Particularly his knowledge of the non-dualistic school of thought called *Trika* (Triadic) system in contemporary Kashmir was profound. And it is on the ground of this system that he framed his poetics which he named significantly *The Light of Sahrdaya*. Poetry is no more a subject of descriptive linguistics dealing with the generation of meanings of individual words or of the meanings of the different arrangements of words. Empirical formalisation is abandoned in the emergence of a poetics with a strong value-loaded foundation constituted by several areas of human thinking at once-ontology, epistemology, linguistics, philosophy of language and human values that are determined in socio-cultural contexts. Following the Upanisadic model Anandavardhana sought for the reality of poetry not in its body but in its soul. Like all other types of discourse poetry is now considered a discourse dealing with the soul or the truth, the Reality and like all other schools of philosophy, poetics is now a school of thought that determines the way by which poetry attains the truth. Poetry is therefore defined by Anandavardhana not in terms of its body - ornaments or types of verbal expressions, but in terms of its soul "Dhvani is the soul of poetry". Appropriately speaking, this is the birth of Indian aesthetics in the modern sense of the term.

This new branch of studies, aesthetics in general and poetics in particular, is now given the name of *Sahrayatattva*. In his commentary on Anandavardhana's treatise Abhinavagupta (10th c.) describes the nature of poetics in the very introductory stanza - "Let this branch of learning called *Kavi-sahrdaya tattva*, Philosophy of Poet and the 'Man of like-heart' (or Reader), be victorious." To put it precisely, aesthetics means, in this (Indian) context, the Philosophy of Art and Audience.

Although initially there is a dualism between the artist and the audience i.e., the poet or artist is differentiated from the reader or audience, ultimately the basic non-dual metaphysics of the Saiva School fuses the dualism of the artist and the audience. A poet generates a poem by his specific non-sensuous cognition which is called *Pratibhá* or *Pratibhajána* meaning literally a 'flash' or 'flash of intuition'. The epistemological status of this non-sensuous cognition was accepted by the great philosophers of language Patanjali and Bhartrhari and was maintained by the Saiva school with some modification. According to Patanjali *Pratibhá* is an extraordinary power of the mind by which it can cognise the non-sensuous objects. By this power one can know everything. But the Saiva school modifies the dualistic nature of this *Pratibhá* cognition of Patanjali in holding that it is not the function of the mind (*citta*) which distinguishes among the cogniser, cognition and the cognised. It is the function of consciousness (*citi*) that negates all sorts of dualism in the subject—object relations.³⁰ In this sense it is non-sensuous and is the only means of experiencing the highest Reality which is nothing other than pure consciousness itself. A poet's cognition is of this kind. He experiences the non-sensuous in its sensuous manifestation and this experience unfolds the evernewness of this non-sensuous consciousness which results in the world of poetry.

On the side of the audience, the same non-sensuous epistemology is also explained by the term *Sahrdaya*. *Hrdaya* or heart is an established metaphor for consciousness in Indian philosophy. Professor K.H. Potter rightly observes:

Indian philosophers use this term (the heart) to mean the place within the body where feeling, willing, thinking and so forth take place. It does not necessarily denote the physical organ which goes by that name in Indian anatomy.³¹

The primary Saiva texts such as *Vijnábhairava* and Vasugupta's *Siva sutras* state:

Hrdaya means the light of consciousness inasmuch as it is the foundation of the entire universe.

He whose mind together with the other senses is merged in the ether of the heart, who has entered mentally into the centre of the two bowls of the heart-lotus, who has excluded everything else from consciousness acquires the highest fortune.³²

Abhinavagupta finally clarifies the metaphor of heart in the following passage:

Hrdaya means mainstay or resting place. According to formerly established theory, the insentients rest in the sentient and the latter rests in the light of consciousness, with which it is one. The place of the rest of this also is the power, the free consciousness. Therefore, in different authoritative texts, the same is spoken of as the resting place of the universe, which ultimately rests in Parama Siva, the highest abode of all. The Heart, the resting place of all, is *Mantra*, which in its essence, is nothing but free-consciousness which also is simply the power of the transcendental speech.³³

The heart therefore is a metaphor of consciousness as the absolute Reality, highest level of language, the seat as well as the body of all-inclusive experience—both immanent and transcendental forms of willing, knowing and feeling. Abhinavagupta explaining the nature of audience as *Sahridaya* applies this Saiva concept of heart which connotes both the ontological and epistemological aspects of the metaphor. Ontologically it means pure consciousness, and epistemologically it is both subjects and objects of knowledge. Abhinavagupta writes: "They are *Sahridayas* who, by continuous practice of reading poetry, have earned the qualification for being one with the narration (of poetry) as reflected in the transparent mirror of their mind."³⁴ Mind is used for heart in this context and it implies the same epistemological situation, i.e., the subject-object fusion, as in the case of *Pratibha*. Both the poet and the reader are in this sense *Sahridayas* and their cognition is non-sensuous in the sense that the word of poetry is independent of the external world of senses, its ontic entity being pure consciousness, and the reader also understands this world without any reference to the world outside. Language and consciousness being identified, the signifier and the signified lose their separation.

Suspending all details for some other appropriate occasion it is sufficient to note that the Saiva ontology and epistemology are specially qualified for founding a system of aesthetics which was not possible in the early phase of Indian history although different ideas remained scattered here and there. The Sāṅkhya dualism, the Vedānta monism and the Buddhist momentary existence could not explain the nature of art since a philosophy of art presupposes the truth of both an art work and the audience and finally explains the relation

between the two in logical terms. This has not been possible for the earlier systems which have failed to relate the dual realities, considered the world unreal and viewed its existence as changing instantly. But only Saivism has consistently argued for the truth of both the worlds - transcendental and phenomenal, the latter being a necessary aspect of the former.³⁵

Abhinavagupta the final exponent of this system made a historic contribution to Indian aesthetics by providing Bharata's idea of *Rasa* with a systematic philosophical foundation and correlating his idea of the audience (*sumanas*) with the reader of poetry on the ground of the Saiva concept of *Sahrdaya* - in a way extending its connotation to an art-audience unity in general. In identifying an aesthetic audience with *Sámájika* (social being) he has also strongly implied the social value of a work of art that educates a man finally for realisation of the supreme Reality. On an integrated aesthetic system by correlating Bharata and Anandavardhana he founded the arts of the theatre and poetry and criticised other arts such as painting and music. This he did by absorbing the philosophical schools of the last twelve centuries—the Sánkhya-Yoga, Buddhism, Grammar, Vedanta and Mimamsa - without ever losing the consistency of his own system of which he was rightly considered the greatest master.

III

A successful correlation of ontology, epistemology and philosophy of language in the Saiva system of aesthetics is evident in its understanding of the art of poetry; and the credit for this correlation goes to both Anandavardhana and his commentator Abhinavagupta. Three alternative titles of Anandavardhana's treatise on poetry make his point clear that poetry is basically an experience of a *Sahrdaya*, i.e., the experience of pure consciousness or the highest level of language. This is the ontology of poetry and is named *Dhvani*. This theory is basically modelled upon grammar, but not on the descriptive grammar of Pánini as was the case with the rhetoricians. It drew upon the fundamentals of philosophy of grammar fathered by Patanjali. But eliminating the empirical, and therefore the dualistic, aspects of his theory it modelled itself upon Bhartrhari's philosophy of a transcendental language which he identified with the highest Reality; its nature being Pure Consciousness. Bhartrhari's system was highly influential on the Saiva metaphysics as a whole and Anandavardhana competently utilised the basic structure of Bhartrhari's system of language in building up his theory of verbal art.

According to Bhartrhari there are three levels of language (i) the highest one which is transcendental *Pasyantí* as opposed to (ii) the lowest which is purely physical or phenomenal *Vaikhari*, and (iii) the mediating one between

these two extremes (*Madhyamā*). The phenomenal world is known or understood by the phenomenal language and therefore the structure of this world is determined by the structure of this phenomenal language. In other words, the world is a linguistic construction the knowledge of which is determined by the language we use. The way we experience the world - by perception, inference and verbal testimony - is the way we construct it linguistically either by external expression or by internal thinking. Knowledge is a linguistic phenomenon: *Veda* (knowledge) and *sābda* (word) are identical both in the phenomenal and transcendental levels. Since the *Veda* (four Vedas taken collectively) is the virtual image of Brahman or the highest Reality, it is the source of all knowledge, of all the sciences and arts and of all the written traditions of human origin. Although Bhartrhari admits of preception and inference as the valid means of knowledge, the status of the Vedic testimony stands highest among them, particularly in experiencing the highest Reality.

Significantly, Bhartrhari considers another means of knowledge - the fourth one' i.e., *Pratibhá* or flash of intuition which is extremely necessary in understanding a text - both Vedic and non- Vedic. This is something non-sensuous as noted in human intelligence of a high order, instinct of birds, animals and spontaneous activities of the babies; and as such its degree varies according to the nature and the impression of the past lives of the being concerned. At one stage, Bhartrhari identifies this intuition with Pasyantí level of language as also with Prakṛti which is the source of the manifested world and the words that structure it. The highest stage in Bhartrhari's ontology is Pará Prakṛti the ultimate Reality which is pure consciousness that transcends Prakṛti or the manifested world constituted by three stuffs or qualities (*gunas* literally constituents or strands of a rope) such as *sattva* (intelligence), *rajas* (energy) and *tamas* (matter). Necessarily this Reality also transcends the three levels of language that correspond to the three constituents. Human enlightenment, as observed by Bhartrhari, refers to one gradual elevation from manifested world of phenomea i.e., world of matter, energy and intelligence/*vaikharí*, *madhyamā* and *Pasyantí/Vyākaraṇa*, *Vaikaranya* and *Pratibhá* to the pure consciousness which is translinguistic and transphenomenal.

The central philosophy of Anandavardhana's poetics draws on Bhartrhari's ontology, epistemology and linguistics. He wants to say that poetry is basically a linguistic phenomenon. But the experience which it communicates does not refer to the worlds of matter (*Tamas/Vastu*) or energy (*Rajas/events/images*) corresponding to the *Vaikharí* and *Madhyamā* levels of language and therefore cannot be communicated either by denotation (*abhidhá*) or by tropes or figures of speech (*laksanā*). It refers to the experience of the third level, i.e., *Pasyantí* which requires

