

BOOK REVIEW :

The concept of Imitation in Greek and Indian Aesthetics by Ananta Charan Sukla ; published by Rupa & Co., Calcutta, 1977 ; 8vo demy, hard bound, PP iii+308+viii, Price : Rs. 60/-

The book under review is a doctoral dissertation of Jadavpur University (Calcutta) where the author has investigated the origin and development of the idea of 'imitation' in Greek and Indian aesthetics in two independent parts of equal length, and concludes with an ANALOGUE that makes a detailed comparative study of the two sets of ideas. The approach is historical—analytical, scholarship profound and insight illuminating.

Imitation or 'mimesis' is a notorious term in western aesthetics ; and scholars tracing its origin in the writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle have interpreted and misinterpreted it variously for about a thousand years last. In the present century, however, attempts have been made by scholars like Richard Mckeon, John Warry, D. W. Lucas and G. F. Else etc. to present an objective view of the idea without any personal bias of theorists like Croce or Collingwood. But the significance of the present work is that in tracing the origin of the idea in the very pattern of Greek culture—in its imagistic way of thinking that was rooted in the Creto-Minoan and Mycenaian cultures of the western World, it has demonstrated with great cogency that the world and the concept originated neither in Plato nor in Socrates, but are both as old as the Greek thought ; and secondly by setting it against a similar but somewhat different course of thought on the concept in ancient India the work has also tested its universality. Here lies the uniqueness of Dr. Sukla's contribution to the history of aesthetic thought.

The Greek Part consists of four chapters : The first finds the word and the concept in the very geographical settings of Greece, in its earliest culture, myth, religion and literature, the second in Socrates and pre-Socratic philosophers, the third in Plato and the fourth in Aristotle, the last two being the most perceptive and original in their analyses of the concept. Socrates demanded a soul of a product of art "a view that.....was taken up and

developed over by Aristotle which shines as the light post of the Greek aesthetic thought" (P. 52). 'Mimesis' is neither a 'fatal word' nor 'rapped out' by Plato at all (as is described by Wilamowitz). Dr. Sukla's arguments are very much convincing that Plato discarded the idea of an artistic imitation as a mere copy of Nature. It is based on the twin principles of qualitative and quantitative proportions and as such Plato's objections against the imitative arts are from a metaphysician's or a practical moralist's point of view, not from an aesthetician's. The most remarkable portion in the chapter on Aristotle is the elucidation of poetic truth : since "art partly imitates and partly completes Nature" (P. 133), the truth of art is purely imaginary and cannot be judged by the standard of fact ; "as a product of imagination it is neither true nor false like an illusion" ; it is what the author calls a *Conscious illusion*, there being "no end to this illusion — it is ever true and ever false." (P.114)

The Indian part consists of three chapters : the first deals with the ideas of *Śilpa* and *Kalā* in the Vedic and purānic texts showing cogently that both are synonymous and *Śilpa* as a *pratirūpa* is not a mere mimicry but a strange transformation of the prototype ; the second explores the idea in the texts on architecture, painting, sculpture and in the various systems of Indian philosophy arguing, again, that art is not a mere likeness (*sādṛśya*) but a transformation of Nature into an extraordinary creation possessed of what Abhinavagupta terms as *Camatkāra* ; the third is the most critical and systematic of the three analysing in details the texts of Bharata, Abhinavagupta, Dhanañjaya and Viśvanātha etc. arguing out convincingly a case for that most misunderstood of Indian theorists Śaṅkuka, and asserts that "Abhinava's conception of generality (*ābhāsa*) or re-perception differs from Śaṅkuka's notion of 'imitation (*anukṛti*) or artificial representation not so much in essence as in the methods of approach from two philosophers' different points of view Śaṅkuka is a realist while Abhinava is an idealist." (P. 277)

The 'Analogue' correlates the explorations of both the parts with an attempt to universalize the idea of imitation concluding that Aristotle's *mimesis* and Abhinavagupta's *anuvyavasāya* are simply two names of the same process because "although Abhinava's conception of generality is foreign to the realism of Aristotle there is no virtual distinction between Aristotle's imaginative reality and Abhinava's idea of the dramatic characters and events etc. as generic forms or isolated *ābhāsas* since both the ideas indicate loss of their causal efficiency." (P. 298)

To bring under a single critical compass two such widely apart

disciplines as Greek and Indian aesthetics is by itself a stupendous task, and then to use the one to throw some significant light on the other, explaining certain ambiguities and lacunae in the well-known treatises is very much commendable. Except for the printing errors and cluttering foot notes the work is certainly a pioneering adventure in comparative aesthetics and proves a significant contribution to the field.

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Books Received :

(to be reviewed in the next issue)

1. Catara Jathara Jatra—The Theatre
By Dhiren Das, Published by Smt. Padmini Das, Bhubaneswar
(Orissa), 1976.
2. Essays in Philosophical Analysis
By G. C. Nayak, Santosh Publications Cuttack. 1977.