UNIT 4 INDIAN AESTHETICS

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to study the origin and development of art appreciation and experience, classified under the title ‘Aesthetics’ as a distinct branch of Philosophy. ‘Aesthetics’ a borrowed term from Greek, used in Germany for the first time to deal in the field of art experience is most often contrasted to the Indian Art-experience popularly known as ‘Rasa’. In this unit, we shall begin with an analysis of the word ‘Aesthetics’ and its employment in the field of Art. We shall then take a look at the literary development of Indian Aesthetics. In two sections, we shall briefly learn the theory of rasa followed by various other theories primarily dealing with the mechanism of art appreciation and experience. Finally, we shall see the role of Aesthetics in Philosophy and its distinct place as Aesthetico-Philosophy.

By the end of this Unit you should be able:

• to understand the role of Aesthetics
• to get a broad outline of the Aesthetic literature
• to appreciate the various theories of Aesthetics and
• to relate Aesthetics and its Philosophical implications

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO AESTHETICS

Let us begin with the analysis of the word ‘Aesthetics’. Generally, it is associated in the field of Art. The art-appreciation is also known by the word ‘Aesthetics’ and also the art-experience. Though the words ‘appreciation’ and ‘experience’ are inter-related and overlapping, they are
distinguished in the field of art. However, anything related to Art suggests the use of the word ‘Aesthetics’. In this context, let us see what the word ‘Aesthetics’ means. It is a Greek word which means ‘sense-perception’. Anything that is given to the senses is known as ‘Aesthetics’ and later it was used in the plural as ‘Aesthetics’. In 1735, this word was for the first time formally used by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in the sense of ‘Science of Sensitive Cognition’ in the field of Arts. Later, this Science of Art, namely, Aesthetics came to be recognized as a distinct branch of Philosophy under the head ‘Philosophy of Art’. In the Indian context, we have simply borrowed the term ‘Aesthetics’ and broadly applied in the field of Indian Art and thus we say ‘Indian Aesthetics’ generally refers to the art-appreciation and art-experience of art forms. In order to understand the function of aesthetics in art, let us first survey the classification of art forms.

**Art forms**

In the Indian context, the art forms like music, dance, architecture, painting etc., are found mentioned in the earliest available works like the Vedas, Puranas, Itihasas etc. Thus, it is tedious to place historically the advent of art forms, but, we have in a span of 100 years, (18th-19th cent AD) located and arranged one of the earliest treatises dealing specifically with the art form and the mechanism of art-experience known as *Natya-Shastra* attributed to Sage Bharata. The period is roughly from 5th century BC to 3rd century AD. By this time, the art form is classified into three arts, namely, Poetry (*Kavya*), Drama (or Theatre) (*Natya*) and Music (*Gana*). We find classification of arts into 64 that includes stringing flowers, face-painting etc., but the identification of the three arts seems to enhance the study of art-experience elevating it from the physical plane to a spiritual plane. Even among these three, Bharata in the *Natya-Shastra* shows that the highest form of art-experience is Poetry and it can be well brought out by acting. The *Natya-Shastra*, deals with the three main arts and defines the art-experience as “*Rasa*” and provides the mechanism of what came to be known later as rasa-experience. This word ‘*Rasa*’ though profound, reaching beyond the sensitive cognition, however over a period of time has come to be identified with the word ‘Aesthetics’ of Western origin. Now, in the light of the three main arts, we shall survey the literary development in these three art forms. We do have much literature in the other art forms, here; we restrict to these three arts basically to understand the evolution and development of Aesthetics in the Indian context.

### 4.2. A SURVEY OF AESTHETIC LITERATURE

We shall classify the Literature on Indian Aesthetics broadly into three based on the above classification of three art forms, viz., *Kavya*, *Natya* and *Gana*. Firstly, we present the earliest available treatise, that is, *Natya-Shastra* that commonly presents *Rasa*, the experience of any art form and specifically the three mentioned art forms.

*Natya-Shastra* and Its Commentaries

The treatise *Natya-Shastra* attributed to Sage Bharata, deals with the Science of Dramaturgy and we have at least three different editions with 36, 37 and 38 chapters. Considering the 36 chapters work as the earliest, we find the description of characteristics of poetical works (*Kavyalakshanam*) in the 17th chapter, different types of dramas (*Natakas*) also known as
Rupakas, in the 20th chapter and music (dhruvas) in the 32nd chapter. The famous definition of Rasa in the aphoristic (sutra) form is given in the 6th chapter of Natya-Shastra. This is later referred to by the Aestheticians as ‘Rasa-Sutra’.

The available commentary to the NatyaShastra is that of Abhinavagupta (10th-11th cent. AD). The commentary is known as Natyaveda-vivritti and most popularly as Abhinavabharati. Abhinavagupta comments this treatise in the background of Pratyabhijna Shaiva system that is said to have prevailed widely in Kashmir. From this available commentary, we come to know that there had been several earlier commentators to NatyaShastra, like, Udbhata, Bhatta Lollata, Shri Shankuka, Bhattanayaka, Kirtidhara, Rahula, Shri Harsha and others. Basically the commentators differed in the interpretation of the Rasa-sutra and evolved their theories of Rasa. We shall deal with the theories of Rasa in 1.3 of this unit. The other features of the commentaries are the different viewpoints on the nature of drama (rupaka), dramatic presentation (vritti), histrionics (abhinaya), and different aspects of music and poetical compositions. In the broad platform of Rasa theory developed various views on “aesthetically sound” poetical compositions. We shall now see some of the literary contributions in the field of poetry that took a prime place in the gamut of Aesthetic study.

**Works on Kavya (Poetry)**

Bharata describes alamkaaras literally known as embellishments that which gives rise to a beautiful poetry. Based on this later Aestheticians built up theories on producing a beautiful poetry by refining and re-defining the alamkaras. In that order, we enumerate here some of the important works in the Alamkara literature, that fall under the Aesthetic Theory of Poetry. The Bhamaha’s Kavyaalankaara describes Kavya and divides it into three based on the language as Samskrita, Prakrita and Apabhramsha. Bhamaha is considered as the oldest extant exponent of the Alamkara School of Poetics. By this time, alamkara has evolved as a distinct school of Aesthetics in par with Rasa. Dandin, in his Kavyadarsha divides Kavya as gadya (prose), padya (poetry) and mishra (both prose and poetry). In the work Alankara-sara-sangraha, the author Udbhata deals with 41 alamkaras with 90 illustrations. The author Vamana in his work Kavya-alamkara-sutra, declares riti or the special arrangement or combination of words, as the soul of poetry. The Kavya-alamkara is an extensive work of Rudrata. It consists of 16 chapters and reviews the whole field of poetics. He was the first to attempt a scientific classification of the figures as based on certain definite principles. In about, 9th-10th cent AD, the famous work Dhvanyaloka of Anandavardhana took a new form which settled the principles to be followed in poetical compositions. It is considered as the epoch-making work in the history of poetic literature. He introduced the two senses in poetry, viz., expressed and implied. The term he uses is ‘dhvani’ that brings out the poetic beauty in a suggestive language. Rajashekhara’s Kavya-meemaamsa serves more as a practical handbook for poets. Kuntaka in his Vakroti-jivita, is said to have elevated poetical expression with extra-ordinary charm known as vakroti. In the late 14th to 16th centuries we find standard works like Sahityadarpana of Vishvanatha and works of Jagannatha and others that seem to embellish further the theories of poetical compositions. We shall deal with the theories of Aesthetics in the light of poetry in 4.4 of this unit.
Works on Natya (Dramaturgy)

Some of the independent works on Dramaturgy is traced to the early 10th cent. CE, the famous work being Dasharupaka of Dhananjaya, commented by his brother Dhanika. It deals with the ten main types of rupaka as found in Natya Shastra. Another work is the Nataka-lakshana-ratnakosha of Sagaranandin which also deals with dramatic elements. The Natyadarpana of Ramachandra and Gunachandra of early 12 cent AD also focuses on the elements of acting. We find a mention of Natakamimamsa by Ruuyaka, a Kashmiri Pandit but so far this work is not traced. The Bhavaprakasha of Sharadatanaya highlights the bhava or the emotion at the mental level. The Rasarnava-sudhakara of Simhabhupala treats dramatic elements in the closing section of the work. Vishvanatha in his Sahityadarpana, 6th chapter deals with acting and other dramatic elements.

Works on Gana (Music)

The work on music is traced to Pre-Bharata period. Dattila, a Pre-Bharata Aesthetician, seems to have recorded about 18 jatis (species of melodies) while dealing with music. Bharata, in the Natya Shastra, deals with 18 jatis in connection with rasa and bhava. The work ‘Brihaddeshi’ of Matanga is considered as the forerunner of works on music. Matanga for the first time introduces the term “raga” from the root ranj to please. He defines raga technically and assigns the role of deshi music. Another important work on music is ‘Sangeeta-Makaranda’ of Narada. Here, based on emotional feeling or rasa, the ragas are divided as masculine (raga) and feminine (raginis).

In this background, as theories of Aesthetics we shall deal with the following important Schools: Rasa, Alamkara, Riti, Vakroli, and Dhvani. Though mostly, they deal with the aesthetic sense in poetry, to some extent the mechanism of aesthetic pleasure can be extended to other art forms. A distinct Aesthetic theory representing every art form is yet to develop.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Aesthetics. What are the three major art-forms?
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2) Survey the development of Literature of Indian Aesthetics.
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4.3. AESTHETIC THEORIES - 1

Bharata’s Rasa-Theory

Bharata defines ‘Rasa’ in an aphorism in the sixth chapter of Natya-Shastra. It runs as follows: Vibhava-anubhava-vyabhichari bhava-samyogaat-rasa nishpattih. ‘The rasa is established by the combination of the determinants (vibhava), consequents (anubhava) and transitory emotions (vyabhichari bhava)’. Let us explain this further – In the definition we find terms like vibhava, anubhava and vyabhichari bhava that commonly have the word ‘bhava’ with different prefixes. So, let us try to understand the term ‘bhava’ first. Bhava, is generally translated as ‘expression’; that is, bhava is that which conveys a particular rasa through various techniques. The vi+bhava, is the determinant, that is, the rasa to be conveyed is expressed in the form of stage-settings, character’s costumes etc. The anu+bhava, is the consequent, that is, the rasa to be conveyed is further expressed by gesticulation at the physical, verbal levels. The evoked rasa is further sustained by the vyabhichari+bhava or the transitory emotions. Bharata classifies about 33 vyabhichari bhavas also known as sanchari bhavas. The three combined, that is vibhava+anubhava+vyabhichari bhava constitutes in the establishment of rasa. Further, Bharata says that the unexpressed emotion at the mental level (known as sthaayi-bhava) alone when expressed results in rasa. Thus, there is a kind of cause-effect relation between the sthaayi bhava and rasa. Bharata enumerates eight sthayis and its corresponding eight rasas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STHAYI-BHAVA (unexpressed emotion at the mental level)</th>
<th>RASA (the experience of expressed emotion through gesticulations etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RATI</td>
<td>SHRINGAARA (Sentiment of Love)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HASA</td>
<td>HAASYA (Sentiment of Laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTSAAHA</td>
<td>VEERA (Sentiment of Valour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VISMAAYA</td>
<td>ADBHUTA (Sentiment of Wonder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRODHA</td>
<td>RAUDRA (Sentiment of Anger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOKA</td>
<td>KARUNA (Sentiment of Pity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUGUPSAA</td>
<td>BEEBHATSAA (Sentiment of Disgust)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHAYA</td>
<td>BHAYAANAKA (Sentiment of Fear)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The meaning of the words under the Sthayi bhava means the same as that of rasa, the difference is that the sthayi is unexpressed at the mental level and rasa is the experience of the expressed emotion. Further, Natya-Shastra conveys nine rasa (popularly known as “navarasas”), wherein ‘Shaanta’ is the ninth rasa and its sthayi is identified as ‘nirveda’. Later, number of Aestheticians added to the number of rasas, ‘bhakti’ (devotion), ‘vaatsalya’ (motherly love) etc., that are more or less off-shoots of Shringaara rasa and we have schools that enumerate of more
than 41 rasas. But, the two distinct schools of rasa are 1. eight rasas (excluding Shaanta as a rasa) and 2. nine rasas (inclusive of shaanta as a rasa).

Let us try to apply the definition in an art-form, say, visual gesticulation (acting). If the rasa proposed to be conveyed is, say, Bhayanaka (fear), then the stage-settings and light systems create a fearful condition – this is known as vibhava, which prepares the audience to the rasa that is going to be conveyed. Hence, vibhava is said as the determinant. The consequent or anubhava is carried by the actors; their physical movements expressed in the face, limbs etc., convey the fear. The vyabhichari bhava helps to sustain the bhayanaka rasa that is evoked. Now, the puzzling question for centuries and the continued debate is to the locus of rasa and sthayi-bhava and their relation. This continued debate gives rise to various theories of rasa.

Theories of Rasa

The Bharata’s definition of Rasa is quite ambiguous, in the sense, it does not explicitly state the “sthayi-bhava” (unexpressed emotion in the mind) nor does it clarify the word “nishpatti” (establish) that occurs in the aphoristic rasa-definition. Thus, it gave rise to many theories of rasa, and we find four main theories recorded in the commentary of Abhinavagupta to Natya-Shastra. We shall examine briefly, each of these theories one by one. These theories mainly differ in identifying the locus of sthayi-bhava and the rasa.

Bhatta Lollata’s Rasa-utpatti-vada (The Generation Theory of Rasa)

Lollata is said to have flourished between 5th – 6th cent. A.D. He is considered as a Mimamsa Philosopher and also as well-versed in Shaiva philosophy. His commentary seems to be the earliest on Natya-Shastra. He is believed to have commented on the entire treatise, but the work is lost and his theory of rasa is structured from the commentary of Abhinavagupta. According to Lollata, the sthayi-bhava is in the historical character who is portrayed on the stage. When the actor assumes the role of that character, then there is a rise of that sthayi-bhava secondarily in the actor. Then, through the vibhava, anubhava and vyabhichari bhavas this sthayi gets expressed that results in rasa. The word ‘nishpatti’ is understood by Lollata as ‘utpatti’ or produced. So, he states, the sthayi bhava is produced in the original character. Hence his theory of rasa is known as ‘rasa-utpatti vada’ or the theory of generation.

Shri Shankuka’s Rasa-anumiti-vada (The Inferential Theory of Rasa)

The Logician, Shri Shankuka (6th-7th cent.A.D), presented his theory of rasa opposing the view of Lollata. Shankuka tried to explain the rasa-theory on the inferential ground. So, he presents the paksha – the locus consisting of the reason; hetu – the reason that is directly perceived, sadhya – the result or the indirect perception of a thing is arrived at by a universal concomitance or vyaapti. Shankuka applies this inferential syllogism in the following manner;

Paksha – The actors are the locus
Hetu – the various gesticulations by the actors are directly perceived by the audience
Sadhya – the sthayi-bhava is inferred

Vyapti – gesticulations by the actors are possible only when there is sthayi-bhava in the mind of the actors.

By the inferred sthayi-bhava, the audience relish the rasa. This is the rasa-anumiti-vada or the inferential theory of rasa.

Bhatta-Nayaka’s Rasa-bhukti-vada (The Enjoyment Theory of Rasa)

Bhatta-Nayaka (9th-10th cent AD) is considered as a Samkhya philosopher who interprets the rasa-sutra by introducing for the first time the concept of ‘generalization’ or (saadhaaranikarana). He states, the sthayi-bhava in the whole enactment is general; it is identified by the spectators who then enjoy the rasa. He extends the concept of saadharana to the other elements too, like the vibhava, anubhava and vyabhichari bhavas. According to Nayaka, the art forms contain the emotional fervour in general and that is communicated to the audience. Further, for Nayaka, the rasa is relished only when the mind of the audience is calm (vishranti) and detached (samvit).

Abhinavagupta’s Rasa-abhivyakti-vada (The Revelation Theory of Rasa)

Abhinavagupta (10th-11th cent AD) is well-known Pratyabhijna Shaiva Philosopher (popularly known as Kashmir Shaivism). He opposed the above three views on Rasa and borrowing the concept of saadharana from Bhatta-Nayaka and the concept of dhvani from Anandavardhana, and in the background of Pratyabhijna Shaivism, developed his theory of rasa.

According to Abhinavagupta, the vibhava etc., portrayed to the spectator suggests the sthayi-bhava as belonging to someone (as in real life) and the by the imagination (pratibha) of the spectator, these accessories are reconstructed leading to the general or sadharana state. Here, Abhinava postulates the sthayi-bhava in the mind of the viewer too, which gets connected with that of the character portrayed through the actor. There is an emotional experience by the viewers through identification (tadatmya) with the character. There is revival of sthayi-bhava in the mind of the viewer; who is now not conscious of himself, in fact, he gets freed from the ego. Abhinava equates this ego-less state to chamatkara of Pratyabhijna system. Thus, for Abhinava, rasa is the manifestation of the intrinsic bliss of oneself aroused by the sthayibhava freed from obstacles. Thus, sthayi bhava is said to be transferred to rasa, there is the revelation of bliss or rasa. This is the Revelation Theory of Rasa.

4.4. AESTHETIC THEORIES - 2

Now, we shall briefly see the other theories of Aesthetics that developed into distinct schools primarily addressing the Kavya or poetry as the main art form.

Alamkara
The definition of a good poetic composition conditioned with 36 qualities included *alamkara* or embellishments in the form of figures of speech in Bharata’s explanation of poetry. Later, Vamana (800 AD), identified the word ‘*alamkara*’ as a ‘thing of beauty’. Dandin and a host of other Aestheticians used ‘*alamkara*’ in a wider sense. Dandin classified the various aspects connected to *alamkara*. Bhamaha divided *alamkara* as word (*shabda*) and meaning (*artha*). Thus, there emerged two kinds, *shabda-alamkaras* and *artha-alamkaras*. In course of time, from the four *alamkaras* mentioned by Bharata, as much as more than 100 kinds of *alamkaras* were introduced by the end of 17th cent AD. The school of *alamkara*, sub-ordinated the *rasa* and positioned *rasa* as one aspect of *alamkara*.

**Riti**

Vamana, the foremost Aesthetician, developed the concept of *riti* as the soul of poetry. *Riti* means diction, a particular arrangement of words. This special arrangement is again based on defined excellences (*guna*) of a composition. He gives three kinds of *riti*: *Vaidarbhi*, *Gaudi* and *Panchali*. The *Riti* school suggests the enquiry as to what constitutes the essential beauty of poetry. It includes *rasa* among the necessary feature of poetic works. Thus, here too, *rasa* takes a sub-ordinate position.

**Vakroti**

The theory of poetical work further developed which gave rise to another distinct school spearheaded by Kuntaka in his theory of *Vakroti*. *Vakroti* means ‘strikingness in expression different from the general mode of speech’. *Vakra* or turn/twist in the words of poetry was considered as the life of poems. The words in poetry which get a particular twist (*bhangi* or *vakra*) in their use by a skilled poet are seen as poetic embellishment. This *vakroti*, for Kuntaka, demands greater skill and maturity of treatment.

**Dhvani**

Anandavardhana (who influenced Abhinavagupta and many others) propagated the theory of *dhvani*. *Dhvani* theory is seen as an extension of *Rasa* theory. It entrenched the theory of *rasa* in the field of poetry. Anandavardhana states in his famous work Dhvanyaloka that words can convey apart from its conventional meaning, a suggested meaning. In a composition, when the suggested sense prevails it is called *dhvani*. That is, a suggestive poetry is called *dhvani*. Anandavardhana tried to show that *rasa* can be best conveyed through *dhvani*.

### 4.5. AESTHETICO-PHILOSOPHY

In presenting various theories of Aesthetics, it is highly held that the theory of *rasa* as re-defined by Abhinavagupta is the best ever presented theory. His theory is inclusive of the ingredients contributed by his predecessors: there is focus on the character to be portrayed as given by Lollata, there is indirect conveyance method of Shankuka, and the sadharana of Bhatta-Nayaka. Abhinavagupta includes the theory of *dhvani*, as the method of communication as given by Anandavardhana. Thus, his theory is seen as a standard theory of *rasa*. In addition to all, it is
Abhinavagupta who elevates the aesthetic to a philosophical plane in the background of Pratyabhijna Shaivism. Thus, here we shall see the application of philosophical thought that brings about the difference, from aesthetics to what is called “meta-aesthetics”.

In the Pratyabhijna Shaiva system, the universal self is Maheshvara; considered in itself, it is Shiva, of the nature of luminosity (prakasha), consciousness (cit) and bliss (ananda). There is the universal energy (shakti) inseparable from Shiva. Shiva is bliss and also possesses bliss. An individual being is only a manifestation of Shiva. The bliss nature of self is forgotten because of concealment by impurities like ego (ahamkara) etc. Abhinava shows in his theory of rasa that the art form is instrumental in removing the obstacles and there is bliss (ananda) of the self that gets manifested which is termed as rasa. Following Abhinavagupta, there are other Aestheticians who give this philosophical bent to the aesthetic theories.

In this line, we find many philosophers present the aesthetic theory in the light of Vedanta. One such theory we find in the works of Shri Narayana Guru, identified as one of the contemporary Indian philosophers. In the background of Vedanta, Narayana Guru shows that the sense of beauty enjoyed (which we call rasa), is one Atma or self, that manifests as the object, instrument and the enjoyer. He terms the subjective enjoyer as ‘ahanta’ and all the objective enjoyables as ‘idanta’. In the moment of enjoyment, he says, there is forgetting of the subjective and the objective conditioning leading to oneness, that is atma. This he calls as the mysterious ways of the functioning of atma. He describes the creative process of God, in his Darshana-mala, as an art-work. He talks about the horizontal kind of beauty-experience, that is, the experience of beauty is an enjoyer – enjoying and enjoyable. He considers that in both the beautiful and the ugly, the enlightenment is nothing but the unfoldment of one ananda-atma. In this sense, he perceives the entire universe of enjoyment of Shiva as comparable to an epic conceived by a poetic genius. He speaks of both ecstasy and mystery in nature that reflects in art-works.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Bharata’s Rasa and examine the theories of Rasa.

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2) How do you understand the development of “Meta-Aesthetics”?

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4.6. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to present the Indian Aesthetic growth beginning from the treatise of Bharata, that is, *Natya-Shastra*. This is the starting point of any Aesthetcian in the Indian context. We have tried to re-define the perspective of Indian Aesthetics and its extension to the Meta-Aesthetics by the interpretation by Philosophers. In this unit, we have covered the literary development in Aesthetics. We have briefly seen the rasa-sutra of Bharata and the meaning of the various terms that occur in the rasa-sutra. We have covered the theories of rasa, mainly four as recorded in the commentary of Abhinavagupta. Then we saw the theories of Aesthetics in the light of poetry that took the prime place in history of Aesthetic development. The philosophical approach of an earlier philosopher, Abhinavagupta in the background of Pratyabhijna system and the approach of a modern philosopher, Narayana Guru, in the background of Vedanta, gives an insight into the Aesthetico-Philosophical outlook. However, this field of knowledge is to be further explored. The position of Indian Aesthetics is yet to be proved as a distinct identified branch of a systematic philosophy in the Indian context.

4.7. KEY WORDS

*Rasa* – sentiment; feeling; emotional experience through art forms

*Bhava* – expression of sentiments

*Alamkara* – figure of speech

*Riti* – diction; a particular arrangement of words in poetry

*Vakroti* – striking turns in words that is used in poetry

*Dhvani* – suggestion; words conveying suggestive expression other than the conventional meaning.

4.8. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


