UNIT 4 ART EXPERIENCE

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we try to make a metaphysico-philosophical study of art. The title ‘Art Experience’ evokes a lot of problems, as to how best to interpret the two words, ‘art’ as well as ‘experience’ and to correlate the two and reach at a consistent meaning. Is art experience meaningful? Is art really an experience? And if it is an experience, what kind of experience it is? How such experience can be differentiated from the experience which is gained in other fields of knowledge? Further, if art is not an experience, what it is, how is it realized or practiced and in what way? Is art something else, then what it is? Does art lead to an experience or does experience rewards us with art; this is also a debatable question.

Yet another way of dwelling upon the problem is, to explain it in the way that ‘art is as an experience, rather than art-experience.’ From the pragmatic perspective which includes “radical empiricism, instrumentalism, verificationism, conceptual relativity, a denial of the fact-value distinction, a high regard to science and fallibilism,” ‘art of experience’ is a practical domain, of putting a theory into practice. So, it is related to practical arts, rather than a mere theoretical concern.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The word ‘experience’ entails a lot of things when seen in the light of empirical school of thinkers and empiricist brands. Further, experience is a process, an ever growing affair, rather than any fixed affair, or a predetermined something. So there is always a possibility of change and becoming. Art is not a fixed product. ‘Art experience’ is something as realizable experience, rather than a theory. This is not like thesis, or anti-thesis, rather ‘than a synthesis. It is not discursive, rather is unitive, synthetic, comprehensively compromising attitude. It is in its unitiveness that art leads to creativity. In the Indian context of Truth, beauty and goodness, the same truth, which means “unchallenged in past, present and future” is also Beauty and goodness. It is the sat-cit-ananda, comprehensive whole, an Absolute Brahman. It is not that truth is differentiated from beauty or goodness; beauty differentiated and estranged from truth
and goodness; goodness alienated from truth and beauty. Goodness, beauty, truth all are combined, unified; turned into one comprehensive whole. The all encompassing one is not one or the other; not a quality of qualities. It is all, all in one, one in all, it is smallest of the small, the biggest of the big; it is without quality or quantity, but supersedes all measurements. It is, not this, not this, but it is realizable, here and now. The supreme one has been called ‘Ananda’, absolute Bliss, and blissfulness is realizable.

Similarly, art is a realizable experience yet undescribable, un-utterable. It is creativity, like the creator, who is a trinity of truth, beauty and goodness, as well as a trinity of creator, sustainer and destroyer, all in one. Creativity is not categorization. It is beyond all categories. It is beyond the boundaries of words, language. It is to be felt rather than explained through the medium of words. It is beyond ‘habitation and name.’ It is like an experience of deaf and dumb, who taste the palate, who enjoys its palate but cannot explain either the joy of it or the taste of it; not that it is without joy and taste. The taste is something un-explainable in words and language in this case. Does it mean that art is experiencible, feelable, but not expressible to other, as it is merely a subjective affair, realizable by a person, but not to be got realizable or transferable to the other? Does it mean that it is not purposeful to others? If it is so, then does it not imply that art is unpurposeful and meaningless futility? These and other questions are relevant in this context.

4.2 DEFINITIONS OF ‘EXPERIENCE’ AND HISTORY

The word ‘experience’ is used both in its noun forms and verb forms. Collins Dictionary notes its origin and history, that it comes, in late 14th century from old French,” experience” from Latin experimentia, “knowledge gained by repeated trials, “from experientem (nom- experiens) experiri “ to try, test” from ex- “out of it peritus “experienced, tested”, The verb (1953’s), first meant “to test, try; “sense of feel, undergo”, first recorded 1580’s. The Medical Dictionary defines it (noun). “The feeling of emotions and sensations as opposed to thinking; involvement in what is happening rather than abstract reflection on an event.” It is also said to be derived from Latin “experiencia, from emperiri to prove, related to Latin periculum peril. The Word English Dictionary in its noun form means the following, (1) direct personal participation or observation; actual knowledge or contact; experience of prison life (2) a particular incident, feeling etc that a person has undergone: an experience to remember (3) accumulated knowledge, especially of practical matters: a man of experience (4) (i) the totality of characteristics, both past and present, that make up the particular quality of a person, place or people (ii) the impact made on individual by the culture of a people, nation, etc, the American experience. (5) Philosophy: This in turn, may be compared to its other sense as (a) the datum, the content of a perception regarded as independent of whether the apparent object actually exists. (b) The faculty by which a person acquires knowledge of contingent facts about the world as contrasted with reason (c) the totality of a person’s perceptions, feelings and memories. In its verb sense it means to participate in, or undergo as well as to be emotionally or aesthetically moved by; feel to experience beauty. At other place, the definition of the word has been explained thus, (a) direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge (b) the fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation. (2a) practical knowledge, skill or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in particular activity (b) as in the use as 10 years of experience (3a) the conscious events that make up the individual life (b) the events that make up the conscious past of a community or nation or human kind generally
something personally encountered, undergone or lived through (5) the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality. Further, it has been defined “the effect upon the judgment or feelings produced by any event, whether witnessed or participated in; personal and direct impressions as contrasted with description or fancies; personal acquaintance; actual enjoyment or suffering”.

The other definition given is, “An act of knowledge, one or more, by which single facts or general truths are ascertained; experimental or inductive knowledge; hence, implying skill, facility, or practical wisdom gained by personal knowledge, feeling or action; as a king without knowledge of war. It entails, “an event as apprehended,” have first hand knowledge of states, situations, emotions or sensation, “undergo emotional sensation, “mental or physical states or experience”, “to go or live through”. Thus, in the verb experience” it means (i) experiences, sees, go through (ii) know, experience, live (iii) to receive, have get (physical experience, states, get nauseous, receive injury, have feeling (iv) feel (feel regret) (v) have-undergo, In its noun forms of direct observation, or participation, an event, as apprehended, “a surprising experience.

4.3 HIRIYANNA ON ‘ART EXPERIENCE’

Prof. Hiriyanna has tried to explain the expression, Art Experience with the help of erudition in Sanskrit literature of the Upanishads, Vedas, Brahmans, the Puranas, the systems of Indian philosophy, Sanskrit literature on poetics, drama, Art criticism. In the field of art and aesthetics, he has taken up the views of Indian personalities like Udbhat Rudrata, Dandin, Vamana, Bharat, Bhatt, Nayaka, etc. The preliminary account of the reason of causing anyone a leaning towards art is “an attitude of mind which is quite impersonal”. This can be explained by an example, when one attains to an impersonal attitude of mind towards any art object, man takes interest in any art work in the beginning but afterwards, say for example, a show, cinema, he will then be aware of nothing beyond the object on the situation portrayed by the artist”, thus “forgetting himself altogether,” separating himself from what happened then or once.

The secondly Hiriyanna hints that probably as a consequence of such self forgetfulness, the contemplation of art yields a kind of spontaneous joy. Aesthetic attitude of “impersonal,” ranks higher than the everyday or common experience. The every day or common events are characterized by personal interests of some one kind or the other leads to mental tension. The Vedantic philosophy of India speaks about Moksa and experience of art can be compared to the Moksha. But he says that “the two experiences are of the same order and not identical” for the reason that “the former has limitations which are not found in the latter.”

Hiriyanna, says, “art experience” is transient”; “it does not endure.” It passes away sooner or later, depending upon “its continuance upon the presence of the external stimulus which has evoked it.” While the “ideal state” when once attained means the “rising once for all, above the narrow interest of routine life and the mental strain which those interests involve.” But this should not be interpreted in the way that the ideal state should be divorced from ‘social morality’ or that aesthetic experience should remain limited to self centered satisfaction. Prof. Hiriyanna distinguishes between art experience and the ideal state. The impersonal joy of art experience is “induced artificially from outside, while that of ideal stage springs naturally from within. But how this so happens, posses a big question and Hiriyanna takes his cudgel to justify this.
Art depends on external stimulus. The artist creates situations by his imaginations, not from the contemplation of the real. The situation which he creates is self-contained and complete. It deals with whole, like the monads of Leibnitz wherein there can be no additions or alterations. The spectator merely sees or appreciates a particular figure in a drama without reasoning why such thing, have been shown as such. We do not attach value to the show, only see and go out from the place. The impersonal character is represented by the unreality of the incidents. One does not fear by fearful action of the artist represented on the stage, one knows that it is acting.

**The ideal State:** The ideal state is the result of combined pursuit of the values of truth and goodness. A person “possesses comprehensive view of reality as well as a spirit of complete unselfishness”, which requires hard efforts. He says, “The experience of art, like that of ideal condition, is an ultimate value. It is sought for its own sake and not as a means to anything else. Like the ideal condition, art experience is characterized by a unique kind of delight. It is superior to common experience but it does not last long. It passes off (when or as soon as) art stimulus is withdrawn,” while in ideal experience “No such lapse is conceivable………… is permanent.” “Art experience does not require philosophic knowledge or moral worth; it can be brought into being even in their absence.” He says that “aesthetic contemplation can lead to the same kind of exalted experience as that of ideal state, without all the arduous discipline – moral as well as intellectual – required for the latter, may appear to be an excellence of it.” Indian art critics have said that there is no match for the bliss of moksa of the yogin for art, who has to strive hard to attain that state and there is no match for it, nor that state can easily be attained. It is not possible for an artist to attain that state, since the ideal is always bound to be unreal; there is a complete lack of harmony between the world of facts and the world of ideals. To say this is not tantamount to pessimism or world-negation and no Indian thinker can stick to this way of thought. But art can be brought to a particular limit, to realize higher goals in the present life. Art can serve to secure at least, to portray, to escape from the imperfections of common life. It can easily serve as an ‘intimation’ to him to rising permanently above those imperfections. Hiriyana says, “art experience is well-adapted to arouse our interest in the ideal state by giving us a foretaste of that state. By provisionally fulfilling the need felt by man for restful joy, art experience may impel him to do his utmost to secure such joy finally.”

### 4.4 ART EXPERIENCE: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

Prof. Hiriyanna’s exposition of art experience according to Indian traditions is a unique gift to the world of art and aesthetics. His interpretation has the stamp and seal of authoritative person, worth infallible acceptance. Whatever criticism men may throw on Indian philosophy, it has been widely held that philosophy in India is not a pastime, nor ideal game of fictitious fancy but a way of life based on knowledge of the self. Self-knowledge is a discovery not an intellectual assimilation. It is a pragmatic ethics to serve man to reach the highest goal known as Moksha, rather than only a request for knowledge (Tattvajnana). Truth has to be investigated not for keeping it or storing but for its practical application in life. Truth should be in conformity with every day mundane life. Barren truth without its applicability, would slip into dry logistics, empty of content, a casual affair to be experienced and thrown into mist of phantom of mind. Aim of practical ethics which is the favoured goal of Indian philosophy, aesthetics is also a field not divorced from philosophy and ethics. It is fully directed or fully aims at influencing life. This provides unique kinship between ethics and aesthetics, without even the least amount of neglect either of the two. It is a fact and not mere “vague surmises” that Indian works “parallels drawn
from art which imply a close relation of the beautiful to the good” and that “true was not unknown to ancient India.” The Indian aesthetic has its own history quite parallel to that of philosophy.

4.6 ART EXPERIENCE IN VEDANTIC CONTEXT

In the Upanisads the Supreme Brahman has been called “Anandam Brahma.” Ananda is a rasa indicating a taste and it is a savour; a essence; a sap. Self and Brahma are one and identical. Ananda is bliss, celestial joy. When self or Atman is Brahman and are one, then self must also partake of the essence of Ananda, supreme joy. Ananda consists in the realization of harmony between the universe in one’s experience and not in being intellectually apprehended, since there can be no such thing as mediated Ananda. So long Avidya is there, the difference between the self and not self still remains and the real sense of harmony of all is not yet dawned. The man who has become jivan mukta attains the unity in variety and enjoys real Ananda. The man who has not reached that state of poise sees beauty in outer things and symbols. The real beauty lies in seeing through the ‘inward eye’. Outer beauty as it is called is transitory and it partakes of personal character. It has not reached transcendental stage. Sankara says, life is avidya-kama-karma, while Ananda is a stage of desire-less-ness, self-less-ness, Ananda or bliss is inward joy. While ever-recurring series of Kama and Karmas constitute life, the elimination of these can be had by removal of avidya. So long as finally avidya’s veil is not shed off, in some latent form it remains. The artistic attitude is one of “disinterested contemplation” and not of true enlightenment, while the attitude of saint is one of true enlightenment and not necessarily of passivity, but unselfishness.

The Vedantic theory of rasa experience indicates an attitude of detachment which one can have in the creations of art, which required the need and essentiality of rhythm, symmetry etc. The perfect knower, by knowing his self or atman knows Brahma “Brahma-vit, Brahmaiva bhavati.” This is a matter of higher state than the empirical plane. In the lower stage, one realizes the truth of art. In the higher plane, one fully realizes the truth of nature. A perfect knower enjoys perfect beatitude of unity in Nature’s diversity. Real enjoyment lies in identifying everything as one, sarva-bhuta-hiteratah, friendly to all or Suhrid-Sarvabhadatma. There is yet a close resemblance between the two attitudes, Hiriyanna says, “We may well compare the person appreciating art to a jivanmukta. He does indeed get a foretaste of Moksha, but not Moksha in fact, because it is transient, not being based on perfect knowledge.”

4.7 ART EXPERIENCE AND SAMKHYA

Samkhya philosophy is dualistic realism. The two principles which makes Samkhya dualistic system, is the presence of two absolute principles of Purusa and Prakrti, each diametrically opposed to the other. While purusa or self is awareness, pure and simple, Prakrti is Jada, material. Buddhi is a term or principle or apparatus which help the two opposed principles to a point of mediation. The question arises, how Buddhi, itself a product of Jada Prakrti can serve as a connecting link between the two and how buddhi enables the Purusa to realize the ideals of both bhoga and apavarga. This is a complicated question, followed by yet another of the concept of the three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas which brings sukha, dukha and moha. Prof. Sangam Lal Pandey has remarked that Samkhya system is the basis of ‘Medical science’ or cikitsa science’ as well as aesthetics, moral science and liberation or moksha science. Since Purusa is a conscious enjoyer this concept found a deep basis for aesthetics. Bhatt Nayak was a great
philosopher and was deeply influenced by Samkhya philosophy. Samkhya speaks about pleasure and pain on the basis of gunas which leads to the point of experience. Though buddhi is of Sattvic nature, it should have always given rise to pleasure. But “the play of its acquired impulses coupled with the character of particular physical object acting upon it may reverse the result.” The result being the same thing may affect different people differently. What is pleasurable to one may be giving pain to other people. Ordinarily men live in secondary world and often ignore the intrinsic nature of things. The basic cause of this ‘predicament’ is due to mistaken identification of the buddhi with purusa. Until Purusa fully dissociates with buddhi, the mistake cannot be avoided or rectified. Without attaining discriminative knowledge of intrinsic disparateness of pursua and Prakrti no one can attain given mukti or apavarga. Though one cannot fully transcend buddhi, he can not become impersonal even for a while. He can by resorting to art, find temporary release from the natural world. The world of art is “no doubt like Nature, but being idealized it does not evoke own egoistic impulses. The world of art is not made of the three gunas. The “mind is thus enabled to assume self poise attitude of which the automatic result is a feeling of pleasure”. The artist’s function is to “restore equanimity to the mind by leading us away from the common world and offering us another in exchange.” This fact takes us to a conclusion that (1) while everything of the world is consciously or unconsciously related to the individual perceiver (atman) or some one else (a tatastha) but creations of art are wholly impersonal, ordinary man can not transcend personal relation, art by its “impersonalized forms offers best means for a temporary escape from the ills of life arising from such relations” (2) “Samkhya theory brings out clearly that aesthetic delight is the result of contemplating the imaginative and therefore impersonal creations of the poet.” (3) The work of art involves three Vyaparas, or processes – (a) avidha (b) bhavana (c) bhogikarana. The first recognized by all, but the remaining two are ascribed two works of art. Pu rusa is purely passive in Samkhya, all activities are ascribed to Prakrti. The chief functions of Prakrti are (1) to evolve things through pleasure and pain is derived (2) to enable Purusa to experience such pleasure or pain. (4) Aesthetic attitude is the attitude of Samvit, i.e. contemplation dissociated from all practical interest as shown by Visranti-'composure'. The difference between artistic attitude and natural as well as spiritual attitude is that while “the former is not always pleasurable, the latter is neither pleasurable nor painful, art produces a condition of pure pleasure the expression sattodreka is an indication of the theory based on Samkhya philosophy.”

One most striking point of Samkhya is that, how Prakrti which is Jada is active, which gives movement, how the movement stops, how does it tries to work towards the purusa’s apavarga. These are philosophical questions which may not have immediate bearing on aesthetics or for that matter aesthetic experience, but the important thing in view of the present deliberation on aesthetics, is that Samkhya uses the word similar to “dancer or nartaki”. The word is “Rangena Darsayitva”, by showing dance. At least for our purposes of aesthetic the simile of dancer is important. Prakrti after showing her dance does not lead to more and more infatuation but to dispassion and detachment. This leads to what Prof. Hiriyanna has too much emphasized i.e. the impersonal nature of art and Samkhya offers such attitude by the acts of Prakrti. The words used in Samkhya Karika are “Kaivalyartham Pravrtesca,” and “Bhokribhavat.” Samkhya adopts theory of intelligent causation. It is a jnana margi darsana. Samkhya explains the principles of motion as Sankaracharya has said in his exposition and critique of Samkhya by different examples – which he has termed as asmavat, like iron and magnet (2) payavat – like milk flows from cow’s udder (2) ambuvat – like water flowing, (4) andha – pungu vat –lame and blind
cooperating each other. All these are symbolic of naturalism and Samkhya is a naturalism of Prakrti. Nature is fountain of all works of science, art, philosophy, aesthetics, etc, and Samkhya by resorting to naturalism has indirectly emphasized on nature but Prakrti’s acting for the apavarga of the yet conscious Purusa, hints at the impersonal attitude of Samkhya.

The difference between Samkhya and Vedanta lies in the fact that Samkhya is said to be pessimistic. According to it, Nature gives pleasure or beauty but not always. Vedanta is optimistic that everything is beautiful, nothing is ugly since it is a corollary of atman. It derives pleasure from everything. It is ananda-swaroop. Saintly people are the greatest artists. The artist is endowed with peculiar eye and is always directed to open our eyes to what we miss. Both the systems Samkhya and Vedanta induce a mood of detachment. In the final terms, according to idealistic Vedanta “the artistic attitude is characterized by a forgetting, though temporary, of our individuality, while according to realistic Samkhya, it is due to escape from the natural world. According to the former art serves as a pathway to Reality; but according to the latter it is so to speak, ‘a deflection’ from Reality. The one reveals the best in Nature, while the other fashions something better than nature”.

4.8 ART CONTEMPLATION

Prof. Hiriyanna also uses another word in reference to art experience, which is art contemplation. He says, “The view of art contemplation entirely transforms the idea of aesthetic end.” In art contemplation, there is no duality of end and means. No such dualism can any how be recognized. That, “there is only a single self justifying process of contemplation, which represents a progressive appreciation of the aesthetic object. The purpose is thus present throughout the process or is immanent in it, and if we look upon its culminating stage as the result, it is because that stage is marked by the repose of achievement. The value of art accordingly consists not in providing more delight for us, but in the totality of experience for which aesthetic contemplation stands. The feeling of pleasure is no doubt there but as an aspect of that experience.”

4.9 ART EXPERIENCE AND MORALITY

It is quite unwise to hold that art experience keeps morality outside its parameters. “The ethical value of good deed consists in the doing of it and in the right direction of the will involved in it.” This hints towards the applied aesthetics or practical and pragmatic ethics, though this topic is a good topic for an elaborate study. This does not permit a space here, but one thing can be said, that Indian texts speak of truth, consciousness and bliss, goodness or beauty as forming a trinity. Whereby neither of the three can be separately understood but may be understood in an unity, that the good must conform to the standards of values, of morality. Since not to conform to goodness is to go stray and get entrapped in unethicality, ethicality is ingrained in aesthetic experiences, aesthetic contemplation, in aesthetic achievements.

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4.10 LET US SUM UP

In nutshell, the art experience is a unique form of experience. The art experience to be perfect must involve/consist in unselfishness, not only outer unselfishness, but spontaneous and genuine unselfishness, a stage lifted above personal and private self. The aesthetic experience consists in disinterested contemplation of beauty. That art experience yields pure and untainted joy without the least pain. Aesthetic experience is above common or everyday life. The idealists afford escapes from worldly concerns. Values prescribed by the Vedantists are *atmananda* and *rasanubhava*. Art experience is impersonal in full sense of the term. If it is not possible to attain perfect *ananda*, art experience provides *ananda*. “Art is a short-cut to the ultimate value of life by-passing logic.” Aesthetics is ‘a-logical.’ Aesthetics presents a detached view of life without personal whims, tendencies and self interest. To transcend above self-interest is to work in a spirit of unity in diversity, unity and harmony with the rest of the creations of the world. It is one for all, all for one. It is a cosmic unification, cosmic harmony, a rise to the highest ideal stage of spiritual oneness, the happiness of all, “*Sarve Bahvantu Sukhinah, sarve santu Niramaya,*” it is akin to RigVedic dictum, *Aa no bhadra*, let noble thoughts come to all. It is upliftment of all and Sundry, a return to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy based on the Upanishads, to return to Swami Vivekananda’s observations that nothing is Undivine; the divinity is ingrained in man; the only need is to awaken the divinity; to manifest divinity is us. Man is a conscious being, supremely conscious. There are degrees of consciousness and even a stone has some degree of consciousness, as a spark of the divinity. So the well-being of all is the well-being of everyone, singly, collectively or universally.

4.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


