



Arts

## **EXPLORING PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN INDIAN APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

Art is one of the cultural activities of man through which he reaches his ideas, values, feelings, aspirations and reactions to life. The generic purpose of art is to provide aesthetic experience and enjoyment to the recipient. Art give outlet to the artist himself to reveal and express his innermost aspirations, feelings, sentiments and also the impressions of life. Aesthetics, the branch of philosophy devoted to conceptual and theoretical enquiry into art. Philosophy of Indian art is concerned with the nature of art and the concepts in terms of which individual work of art interpreted and evaluated. It deals with most of the general principles of aesthetic cognition of the world through any human activity. The human concern for art and beauty had been expressed at the very beginning of philosophy both in the East and West and it continues to the present. In India, philosophy of art is designated as *saundaryasastra*, which is evolved with an emphasis on inducing special spiritual or philosophical states in the audience or with representing them symbolically. It deals with most of the general principles of aesthetic cognition of the world through any human activity. The human concern for art and beauty had been expressed at the very beginning. The rich tradition of Indian aesthetics can be traced back to the second century BC with Bharata's *Natyasastra*, the foundation text on *Saundaryasastra*. Indian aesthetics is evolved with an emphasis on inducing special spiritual or philosophical states in the audience.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics; Indian Art; Philosophy of Art; Theories of Art; Saundaryasastra.

**Cite This Article:** Dr. P.K. Rejimon. (2017). "EXPLORING PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN INDIAN APPROACH." *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, 5(9), 217-223. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1002669>.

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### **1. Introduction**

The philosophical support of art is traditional. It represents the complete fusions and synthesis of the consciousness for art and beauty that had been expressed in the very beginning of philosophy and it is continuous to the present day in different forms. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy devoted to conceptual and theoretical enquiry into art. The recognition of aesthetics as a separate branch of philosophy coincided with the development of philosophy of art. The tradition of Indian art has five thousand years of long history. The tradition of Indian art is older than the Greek tradition. The Indus valley civilization brought light to these excavations which provided enough ground to believe that the people who lived there were expert in the techniques of

construction of houses and other urban structures. Besides this, the artisans have given evidence of their skill in making things like the icons of deities, the sculpture of dancing girls, the bangles and other decorative articles. Indian view of aesthetics is designated as 'Saundaryasastra.' Basically there is no branch of Indian philosophy which is developed under the nomenclature of *Saundaryasastra*. The aesthetic sense of *Vedic* man is expressed in his appreciation of beauty and harmony in nature, which also is a sort of understanding nature as a systematic and bound by uniformities which was termed as *rita*, and the source of religious feelings. The religious sculptures of ancient India convey aesthetic standards of form and figure in a very powerful manner. The following examples of religious sculptures convey the entire philosophy of through the artistic activity. The trinity in the Elephant cave, the three heads balanced on the same shoulder expresses the rhythm. There are differences of opinion among philosophers as to whether aesthetics is an independent science or a distinct branch of philosophy dealing with certain issues related to art. This gives rise to different definitions and approaches to aesthetics. The functions of arts are considered to represent life and express the deepest layers of human emotions. Art thus is a human activity with a variety of functions including creating objects of beauty. The arts are an important part of human life. It is a system of expression of man's views and ideas through various media and thus constructs a vital part of the culture of a society. Art is linked with culture and history of the people. It is not an isolated phenomenon; it is a faithful mirror of the life and civilization of period and can be described as a category of cultural activity concerned with intrinsic values. Art is the creation of the soul and to understand that creation; one must develop deep into the soul, when it will be understood that it is the reaction of the soul to the beautiful objects of nature around life. When as the result of such reaction, the emotions and feelings in the soul take a tangible shape they assume the form of art. One's heart is full of love and emotions thus emerges the urge to express itself in the form of art. When one's personality feels an expressible emotion, it breaks out in display and the form of display may be either poetry or music or painting or sculpture. This display of feeling is called art. The aim of all arts is to take temporarily the listener to oblivion and supersensory plane. Art is a byproduct of artistic creation. Arts or artistic creation is an expression of the inner urge of man to communicate with his fellow beings not only to understand or to be understood, but also to feel and to be felt and to share and partake. Art is a sound phenomenon. It is a silent dialogue between one and each of the many, an invisible bridge built to reach another human heart. There must be a medium for every art, where the work is communicated to the recipient, the listener, the observer or the reader. For painting, the medium is the canvas and paint, for the sculpture it is the stone, wood or plaster of parries, but coming to music one is really confused to fix the medium whether it is the written words or sound because in early days when the alphabet was not invented, music flourished and even today without the written script, singers manage to produce good music. So, the natural logical conclusion is that the physical sound waves, by which sensation affect the consciousness of the listeners is the medium for music. In Indian aesthetics the basic sentiments depicted in art called *sthayibhavas* are held to be rooted in the fundamental instincts and emotions or *vasanas* of man, and the judgment of taste though essentially subjective, derives some objectivity from the consensus of the sympathetic observers or *sahrathayas*. However this scope of *Saundaryasastra*, is not limited as it includes names such as *rasa* theory, *Kavyasastra*, and *Alankarasastra* etc one thing that must be made clear that Indian art has a unique identity of its own. It is determined by its long cultural traditions and ideological grounds. It represents rhythm among the principles of creation, preservation and distraction. This is the law of nature and universal truth of how creation is preserved and

destroyed. This is an eternal cycle of birth, growth and death, the cosmic system which keeps the balance between all the three stages. The *Ardhanarisvara* at Elephanta cave is also an example of religious sculpture convey the philosophical ideas. This has one part showing the male body and the other half of female body. This again is symbolic representation of the law of nature which maintains equilibrium between the male and female, it also suggests that creation is not possible without the union of two and that they have equal importance in the cosmic order and system. The Dancing *Nataraja* at the Chidambaram Temple is another example of religious sculpture of India signifying various truths of philosophy of nature. God Siva dances to create vibrations in nature without which creations will not start at all. Dance is also the symbol of rhythm in nature and the small drum held in one of the hand of *Nataraja* is meant to regulate this rhythm. It is also the symbol of sound. He holds fire in the other hand which signifies the necessity of destroying all that is worn out and decayed. The third hand promises and assures security to the souls, the *Jivatmas*, and this posture is called *abhayahastha*. The fourth hand maintains the gravitational equilibrium with the ground. The lifted foot gives liberation to the souls and other foot crushes a demon who symbolizes evil. Rivers flow through the tresses of Siva, signifying that the springs of the rivers are found in the thick forest of the mountains. It is thus clear that this one piece of sculpture reverberates with so many meaning full truth of life.

## 2. Bharatha's Indian Theories of Art

The most important sources of literature on the art of dancing are *Natyasastra*. The purpose of dance according to this treatise is to impart grace and beauty through the rhythmic movements of the body, and the *Natyasastra* provides minute details of the various single postures. According to Bharatha: - *Yato hasta tato Netra, Yato netra tato Chitta Yato chitta tato Bhava, Yato bhava tato Rasa*. Though this is given in the description of dance and equally applicable to all form of arts. Here *hasta*, means to be different from person to person, whatever being the medium of expression. The artist has to devote himself totally to the medium i.e. the artist has to concentrate on his activity and his medium of expression. *Chitta* stands for the mind along with the concentration of the sense organs. The artist has to concentrate on his mind also. Then only will be able to express the *bhava* (emotion). And if there is *bhava*, we can derive the *rasa*, in the highest form of aesthetics, as the controlled and rhythmic expression of emotion. The dance has pure rhythmic movements known as *nrith*, to illustrate the technique of dances; combined with facial expression (*abhinaya*). *Abhinaya* has an unlimited range of interpretation through employing the technique of *sancharis*. A dancer can render *abhinaya* even while seated without any body movement except for the hand and face. No dance in any other part of the world has given so much thought to bodily gestures in depicting expression as Indian *nritya*. Everyone is familiar with the emotional experiences goes through on witnessing the diverse situation in a dance or drama. This is the basis of *rasa*. The theory of *rasa* clearly distinguishes between real life experiences of emotion and the experience that arises in act. This follows the famous *rasasutra* of Bharatha *Vibhava-anubhava-vybhicari-samyogad rasa-nispattih*. *Rasa* is one of the key concepts of indigenous aesthetic system of India along with other concepts such as *dvani* (implied meaning), *alankara* (rhetoric figure of speech), *vakrothi* (evocation, insinuation, sarcasm), and *auchitya* (congruity). It helps to constitute a comprehensive philosophy of art and it is called *astapatati* or school of Indian aesthetics. There are eight schools of aesthetics based on the question of what makes the work of art more aesthetic they are (i) *rasa*, (ii) *auchitya*, (iii) *alankara*, (iv) *guna*, (v) *riti*, (vi) *dhvani*, (vii) *vakrothi*, and (viii) *anumana*. Bharatha said only

about the *rasapatati* in elaboration, because he thinks that *rasa* is the prominent one and the rest seven can be explained with the help of *rasa*. According to him, the remaining schools are explained in the *Rasa School*. Abhinavagupta stands for *aucitya*. *Aucitya*, got a wide range of meaning in Abhinavagupta. It is the power of discrimination in the case of aesthetic experience, expression and appreciation. *Aucitya* is essential for the aesthetic appreciation as far as the *sahrathaya* is considered. Both the artist and *sahrathaya* have a chance to select the most proper medium to a particular aesthetic situation. According to the *alankara* School, is essential for the expression of aesthetic experience can be expressed only by *alankara*. When it is expressed in this sense, then *rasa* itself will emerge from the expressed form of aesthetic experience. *Guna* school says that, *guna* is the essence of the experience from which emerges the *rasa*. The highest form of experience depends on the essence and not on the method by which it is expressed. According to another school *riti*, makes the work of art perfect whatever be the essence of the aesthetic experience it is the *riti* that helps the *sahrathaya* look experience the aesthetic beauty in a work of art so far as an aesthetic communication is concerned. We have seen the nature of *rasa* and the method of expression of such *rasa* at the time of aesthetic expression. Now the question is, does the *rasa* communicated to the appreciator. The answer to the problem is discussed in the concept of *dvani*. The method of *dvani* was employed by the poets to communicate emotion arising in a situation and this method came to be extended to convey both facts and images (*vastu* and *alankara*). Facts and images could be more beautiful when suggested than described. Thus the scope of *dvani* comes to widens when what is suggested in fact called as *vastu dvani*. When a fact which has been idealized and transformed into an image is suggested it is called *alankara dvani*. An emotion can only be and not be described. When a transitory emotion is suggested, the suggested sense is called *bhava dvani*. When permanent emotion (*sthayibhava*) is suggested the suggested sense is *rasa dvani* because the *sthayibhava* culminates in *rasa*. *Dvani* has a place not only in poetry but in other fine arts as well. Ananthavardhana is the greatest exponents of *dvani*. According to him in music even sounds suggest *bhava* and in dance *mudra* suggest *bhava*. They convey feeling and emotions only by the power of suggestion. The school of *vakrokti* elaborates the concept of aesthetic order of a medium of expression. Aesthetic order is different from the grammatical order or logical order. So the genius of a poet depends on the creation of an aesthetic order in his medium of expression. According to *anumana* school of *rasa* occurs from *anumana*. *Rasa* cannot emerge from what is perceived, but it can only emerge from experience. The concept of *rasa* as it is used by Bharatha in the *Natyasastra*. *Rasa* is the realization of one's own consciousness as colored by emotions. Bharatha does not mean by *bhava* something that is confined only to one's mind.

Aesthetic goal of *rasa* is a complex phenomenon resulting from the interaction of subjective and objective factors. Bharatha says there is no *natya* or performance without *rasa* and mentioned eight *rasas* on the basis of the eight *sthayibhavas*. They are: *sringara* (erotic, effulgent), *hasya* (humorous, happy), *karuna* (compassionate, pitiful), *raudra* (angry, inflamed), *vira* (heroic, energetic), *bhayanaka* (terrifying, fearful), *bibhalsa* (disgusting, odious), and *albhuda* (enchanted, wondrous) *santa* and *bhakthi* are added to Bharatha's list of *rasa* by the later writers. *Santa* comes from serenity of spiritual peace and *bhakthi* comes from devotion to God. Each *rasa* has a corresponding dominant or subtle mental state, or *sthayibhava*, which helps produce *rati* (love), *hasya* (mirth), *soka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *utsaha* (enthusiasm), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsa* (disgust), and *vismaya* (wonder) respectively. These eight *rasas*, according to Bharatha, actually fall into two groups of four each. *Sringara*, *hasya*, *vira* and *albhuda* on the

one hand, *karuna*, *raudra*, *bhayanaka* and *bibhalsa* on the other hand. If we examine their *sthayi-bhavas* we will see that the first group is pleasant, while the second is unpleasant. While we all like to experience *rati*, *hasya*, *utsaha*, and *vismaya*, we try to avoid *soka*, *kroda*, *bhaya* and *jugupsa*.

### 3. Rabindranath Tagore- Creative Theory of Art

Rabindranath Tagore has a privileged position in the discussions on art because he himself is a poet, a painter and a musician, three-in-one. But being true to the Indian way of life, to the fundamental genesis of Indian philosophy, he has spoken empathetically and of course correctly, about the role of spirit in artistic creations. Whether belonging to the West or to the East, any serious thinker would readily acknowledge that the greatness in any work of genuine art consists of spiritual activity. It is a spiritual dictum so much so that when art attains the height of perfections, it goes beyond its medium and the artist finds himself realizing that his instruments are not properly adequate to the spirit of what he seems to have tried to say. According to Tagore the intrinsic principle which an artist has to follow, rather unknowingly, can be analyzed into three elements. (i) The element of personality: Every artist, as a creator, has something in him, some inner vision which demands expression through any medium. (ii) The element of style: Every artist, as a son of his time, is impelled to express the spirit of the age designed by the specific socio cultural orientation of the particular period to which he belongs. (iii) The essence of art: Every artist, as a servant of art and master of his unique vision, has to uphold the cause of art which lives a permanent stamp in all ages and among all nationalities.

Rabindranath Tagore's inspiration for art comes from his unifying vision of life, which sees the expression of the infinite in the finite world. He is not for rejecting life and world; rather he acknowledges a relationship of love with this world. Tagore makes distinction between utility and purpose of art. Art, according to him has no utility; it has a purpose, one of providing a sense of freedom and the attendant joy. Tagore holds that "art should reveal the truth about mankind, and this truth lies in what man aspires to be, not in what man at the moment actually is. Man will overcome in time his lower passions; pass them for his nobler ones. Indian art has its birth when there is a felt element of the superfluous in our hearts spiritual relationship with the nature. According to Tagore, Indian art builds for its abode a paradise where only those impulses and feelings are needed that have transcended the earth's mortality. It is normally, accepted that the great art is an unconscious creation. The mind feels pure delight when it comes into intimate contact with existence and then it realizes itself achieves its fulfillment in creativeness. Every work of art is a spontaneous creation, and for this reason it is always occasional. Art is not meant for creation of beauty, but beauty is always present in a work of art because it grows out of proportion, harmony and depth. Nature produces a vibration in the will of man, and not merely in his cognition, which transforms into a spiritual contemplation and resultant enjoyment, and what emerges is a work of art.

### 4. Sri Aurobindo's - Evolutionary Theory of Art

Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics is integral to his philosophy of life and consciousness. Aesthetics for him is not, a source of mere sensuous pleasure; rather it definitely plays a role in man's evolution as spiritual consciousness. Aesthetic sensibility and appreciation provide wings where by the

human spirit soars into the cloudless sky of freedom. Aurobindo multidimensional natures of art covers a whole range of purposes, from the lowest, that of bringing harmony into life, to the purification of emotions and then to the highest, that of opening a window to spiritual experience. The aesthetic evolution of humanity Aurobindo refers to necessary prerequisite to the ultimate spiritual ascent. Aurobindo relates art to the human functions of contemplation, creation and imagination which as he puts, are the centers that see the truth. Art to spirituality is a thrust that may be traced to the Indian philosophy of art and tradition in which the key term *rasa* that stands for aesthetic experience of ultimate reality (*Brahmanubhuti*). Aurobindo approach is that, he talks of art as an integral part of human life and artistic self-expression perfecting the aesthetic evolution of humanity. This view of art has two important implications: (i) The Indian conception of art is not mere imitation or copy of nature. (ii) Nor it is so abstract as to be totally away from our familiar world or nature. Beauty is idealized by drawing from natural elements that are then reconstituted by the imagination to form what is flawless or perfect and yet relatable to the familiar. The Indian concept of beauty and art must be related to the Indian philosophy of art life and world. Sri Aurobindo makes in this regard is our traditional Indian art has comes in for much criticism by the west.

### 5. Ananda Coomaraswamy- Religious Theory of Art

Ananda Coomaraswamy distinguishes Indian art as religious centric. The content of such art is not mere imitation of nature or phenomenal world. Indian art is essentially religious; the conscious aim of Indian art is the intimation of divinity. But the infinite and unconditioned cannot be expressed in finite terms and art unable to portray divinity unconditioned, and unwilling to be imitated by limitation at the humanity is in India dedicated to the representation of Gods, who to finite man represent comprehensive aspects of an infinite whole. In India, art as much as religion is a way of looking at life. Art has a definite aim, function, and values both for artist and spectator. The Western idea of ‘art for art sake’ is neither applicable nor acceptable by Indian art. Indian works of art are not the mere imitation of life or nature. The Indian works of arts are a reflection of the quest for reality through in terms of what may lie beyond the physical appearance. Mere representation of nature is not the aim of Indian art. The empirical reality is *maya* or illusion, nature to the Indian mind is a veil, not a revelation. Art is to be something more than a mere imitation of this *maya*. Ananda Coomaraswamy makes an important distinction between ideal beauty and empirical beauty. In Indian art, there is a unity that underlies all its bewildering variety. The philosophical thinking has gone into drawing the distinction between *rasa*-experience and ordinary experience, as also the significance of such distinction. This also demonstrates the degree of sophistication to which philosophical thinking about art has been carried on in the context of Indian artist tradition. The *rasa*- experience is of the transcendental order and takes one beyond the world of senses, is an important point that is worked out by Indian aesthetics in great detail on the philosophical plain. For the artist above all must be true, for the first essential of true art is not imitation, but imagination. Ananda Coomaraswamy is of the opinion that to think for one is always is to think of one self. This he calls free thought which may be said to be a free union of free contemplation and free enjoyment which is a sublime joy of the human soul in his artistic creativity. The seeming reality of the empirical world is not the ideal world of true reality.

## 6. Conclusion

The evaluation and analysis of philosophy of art, made by this chapter reveals the fact that tradition of Indian art has five thousand years long history and it is older than the Greek or Western tradition of art. Indian tradition of art was a creative expression of Indian society. In Indian context the expression 'Saundaryasastra' is designated as the philosophy of art and it developed through the several theories reflected in the modern times also. When we came to the Western philosophy of art has also a long history. In the course of its development; views on beauty and aesthetics are changed and gave birth to different theories, as like in the Indian context. We have so far taken a stock of these theories of aesthetics propounded from time to time by various schools of thought right from the ancient times. Aurobindo says that critique is because the strong spiritual sense rather than only sensuous pleasure that our works of art exudes is often missed or not understood. The situation with the Greek art or Western art which generally imitation of life and nature. Indian art is in fact identical in its spiritual aim and principle with the rest of Indian culture. The theories of Imitation, Representation and Expression are the most well-known theories about art, based on the historical developments in the philosophical thinking. The origin of Indian art is also in the same spiritual aspiration which has been responsible for music, poetry, architecture.etc. The cults of *shaivism* and *vaishnavism* have brought into the existence of classical dances known as *bharathanatyam*, *kathak*, *manipuri*, *odissi*, *kathakali* etc. In *Vedic* times, dances are said, to have been performed around the sacrificial fire. The association of dance with most important deities in the Hindu religion is an evidence of the desire of the ancient thinkers to enhance the status and importance of dance. India has been exposed to external influences right from the ancient times. It was the Greek style of art which gave a new incarnation to the sculpture in ancient India. The medieval India witnessed the influence of Islamic culture music, architecture and literature. The latter century, opened the gates to the British influence on culture and art. The art in India today is a mixed by the Hindu art, Buddhist art, Jaina art, Muslim art, British art, Bahai art. Finally Indian art is integration of all that is indigenous and also the modern which is assimilated into it.

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