

Indian poetics has developed through centuries of profound thinking by the ancient literary critics and aestheticians around certain fundamental concepts of literature and aesthetics and is characterized by a continuity of concerns and ideas which have been subjected to critical scrutiny. This process of continuous critical examination has yielded a clarity of concepts which may well make them claim for universal acceptability and applicability transcending the limitations of time and place. But it is an irony of Indian life that what was once alien became in course of time our own and what was our very own came to be much less ours. Our critical values have not been shaped by our own traditions, much less in relation to ours. Our critical values have not been shaped by our own tradition, much less in relation to our immediate context. First Saintsbury then Eliot, F. R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooke, R. P. Blackmur and Trilling, later, George Steiner and George Lucachs, have done the thinking for us, and we have made the quarrels of New Critics and Chicago Critics our own. Now we are haunted by the theory of "Deconstruction", "Post-Colonialism", "Environmental Criticism", "Gender/queer theory".

Is it not a sad thing for us whose ancestors had made some of the sharpest and subtlest contributions to the understanding and evaluation of works of art to turn to the west for critical guidance? The purpose of this paper is to examine Indian poetics tracing its origin, growth and development and above all, its relevance to our own time. Drawing upon ancient Indian critical theory is not simply a matter of finding approximate equivalents to the "Objective Co-relative" and "Deconstruction" in Rasa and Dhvani theories etc. What it basically means is reaching the core of quintessential Indian World-View in which the critical theory is grounded.

The Vedic Seers, being Self-conscious poets, made observations on their art. According to "Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics," "The Vedic Seer was called 'Rishi' and 'Kavi', 'Seer' and 'Maker' which as the tenth century Kashmiri critic Tota explained, emphasized that poetry depended both on vision and expression. The hymn was also called Rasa 'essence or most delectable thing' and the Upanishad said that was well done and perfect was indeed the most delectable thing (Rasa)".<sup>1</sup>

We have a very rich heritage in literary theory. Indian scholars have proposed several ways of interpreting poetic discourse. Of these diverse theories, three are of fundamental interest as they constitute independent schools of

thought. These three schools are- the RASA DHWANI theory, the VAKROTI ALAMKARA theory, and the AUCHITYA-GUNA theory.

The Rasa -Dhwani theory originates with Bharat Muni (2<sup>nd</sup> C. BC to 2<sup>nd</sup> C. AD) and culminates with Anandvardhana (9C. AD). In his Natya-Shastra, Bharat Muni explains how each work of art arouses a particular emotion. He mentions basic roots of any given 'Rasa' as "*Bhava (emotion), Vibhava(objective co-relative), Anubhava(response), Sthaibhava(permanent emotion), vyabhicharibhava (transitory emotions) by their samyoga(fusion) awakening resanishpatti (aesthetic pleasure)*"<sup>2</sup>

Bharat Muni has also presented in his Natya sastra the varied interpretation of eight rasas corresponding to the appropriate sthaibhavas- Sringara(love), Karuna( grief ), Vira (courage), Bhibhatasa (disgust), Hasya (laughter), Raudra (anger), Bhayankara(fear), and Adbhuta ( wonder) reinforced by various other bhavas, attain the blissful state of rasa.<sup>3</sup> To this, Shanta, was added later. Thus these nine rasas include all permanent states of emotions.

The Dhwani school led by Anandvardhana (9<sup>th</sup> c) developed Bharat's dramatic theory into a complex form and unified criticism by taking poetry and drama together and applied to all genres of literature the same principles of analysis and evaluation associates emotions with suggestive sounds and musical notes. He maintains that words have a function beyond their meanings. In his '*Dhvanyaloka*', he '*propounds the doctrine of dhvani (suggestion), literally tone of voice, as the most important criterion of poetry.*'<sup>4</sup> Thus between the text and emotions, the only possible relation is dhvani(suggestion), Vyanjana(manifestation) or prakasa (revelation). Dhvani (suggestion) is a unique process and should be employed even in realms where the primary and secondary capacities or words were enough to convey an idea. Anandvardhana emphasized content or emotion as against formal features like style, figures etc., all of which he put in a subordinate place.

The Vakroti and Alankara school have a more formal approach. They study poetic language as a special kind of discourse where words acquire new meanings through contexts. The dislocation of word-meanings (signifier and signified). The collapse of grammar, and the use of grammar gives new significance to poetic expression. The modern avant-garde theories are anticipated by Indian school of Vakroti and Alankara led by Bhamah, Dandin and Kuntaka. Bhamaha in '*kavyalankara*' and Dandin in '*kaavyadarsa*' ( both of 7<sup>th</sup> C. AD) have dwelt on alankara( imagery) and marga(diction) Dandin's marga becomes riti(excellence of word order) in Vamana's hands. Vakroti literally means crooked or indirect speech. In its dislocation of meaning it can be a form of irony, hyperbole, pun or ambiguity. Dandin defines vakroti as all expressions except svabhavokti. Kuntaka ( 9<sup>th</sup> C. )perfected the concept of Vakroti ( obliqueness) as "*an oblique expression peculiar to poetry. It is a clever turn of speech, witty and startling.*" (Metaphysical conceits)

Alamkara is also the oblique expression but it is more dramatic. This theory says that all poetic language is metaphorical. A reader has to look at the roots and the context to find the hidden meanings. To understand poetry a reader has to assimilate sabda, artha, abhida and tatparya.

Finally there is the Auchitya school led by Ksmendra. 'Auchitya' literally means propriety. In this sense poetry has to be true to its milieu. A poet cannot deviate from social norms without losing his charm. Secondly 'auchitya' also means the use of proper imagery and emotions according to the theme. There has to be a concord of thought and style to attain propriety.

According to Bharata's "Natyashastra" the formula for the production of Rasa lies in comingling of the "Vibhavas"(the causes) the anubhavas" (the effects) and the "vyabyicharis"(the transitories). Bharata has stated emphatically that the "sthai" becomes Rasa when it gets worthy of being relished. That is, Rasa is the enjoyment of a permanent emotion which is evoked in the heart of the reader so as to overtake his entire psyche as a result of the poet's skillful delineations. This state is called "Rasanubhuti"(realization of 'Rasa') which is characterized by the essence of any other knowledge, and is integrated with "Anand"(Transcendental Pleasure) which is fraternally related with the spiritual relish of Communion with ' Brahman' the Ultimate Reality. This realization of 'Rasa' has been said to partake of nature of a 'Chamatkara' or thrill.

How is rasa (aesthetic pleasure) awakened? As Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah has rightly suggested that "*the mind of the responsive reader is attuned to the emotional situation as portrayed in the work of art (hrdyaya samvada)*

is then absorbed( *tanmayata*) in its portrayal and this absorption results in *rasanubhava*(experience of aesthetic pleasure). The organization of the poem should all the significant emotions(*akhandaananda*) not as in Aristotle's pity and fear only but the erotic, the comic, the frightened, the tender, the tranquil etc., though one of them will predominate, as the tender(*karuna*) in the *Ramayana* and the tranquil( *santa*) in the *Mahabharata*.<sup>5</sup> The personal emotions of a poet have to be universalized(*sadharanikarana*) and to do so, "much depends on the poet's 'pratibha'(imagination) and 'vasana'(sensitivity) and 'abhyasa'(assiduous cultivation of the art). So created it gives pleasure immediately(*ramanayata*), while indirectly it helps to transcend the egocentric and presentcentric states(*Alaukika*). In all this the controlling quality is propriety(*auchitya*). If this is not observed there is *rasabhanga*, *rasabhhasa*(*bathos*)".<sup>6</sup>

Two of our modern critics were gifted with a critical mind to make use of ancient Indian poetics. They were - Coomaraswamy and Aurobindo Coomaraswamy, though he did not make a direct use of traditional ideas or critical terms, derived many of them from his studies of architecture and sculpture. Words like 'sreya'(good), 'preya'(attractive), 'smarta'(traditional), 'kritakritya'(well and truly made), 'vastu'(theme), 'tamas'(sluggish) and a unique quality to his writing. He confined himself largely to an elucidation of principles underlying the ancient and medieval art.

Sri Aurobindo's enunciation of Indian critical theory and in his practice as poet and critics takes us to the first principles. In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo says: "For the universal should all things and all contacts of things carry in them the essence of delight...*rasa*, which means at once sap or essence of things and its taste....We attain to something of this capacity for variable but universal delight in the aesthetic reception of things as represented by art and poetry so that we enjoy there the *Rasa* or taste of the sorrowful, the terrible, even the horrible or repellent (the *karuna*, *bhayanak* and *bibhatsa Rasas*) and the reason is because we are detached, disinterested, not thinking of ourselves or of self-defence(*Jugupsa*) but only of the thing and its essence....."<sup>7</sup> Aurobindo's 'Future Poetry' is an outstanding work of critical theory. It is the product of a mind that was soaked in the western literary tradition beginning from Homer and Virgil to T. S. Eliot and was deeply immersed in the ancient lore and Sanskrit literature of India.

Indian poetics also offers a way of reconciling the theories of deconstruction that propose a multiple and relativistic interpretation of all texts. Jacques Derrida believed that deconstruction should be applied as a philosophy that would criticize traditional texts and practices to affect change. A similar approach is adopted by the ancient Indian philosophers who believed that a transcendental consciousness allows multiple interpretations to arise and which can still be unified into a single interpretation. Ancient Indian texts also allow both object referral and subject referral as inevitable in the development of transcendental consciousness.

For many years we have been applying western critical theories in our evaluation of Western literature and some of our regional literatures. The Indian English critic is the right man to give a new dimension to Indian criticism (because he knows Western theory and if he learns ancient critical theories and applies them too. He can bring a change). The Europeans evaluated any literary work in any language from the standpoint of their own critical theories. Let the Indian English critic examine both Indian and European literature from the standpoint of our ancient literary theories. Why not Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shaw and Eliot, O'Neil, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens in the light of *Natyashastra* and *Dhyvanyaloka*. Even L. C. Knight makes such a study in his essay, "King Lear as metaphor" and highlights Dhvani. Wimsatt, Jr. joins issue with Coomaraswamy on the use of critical theories. Christopher Caudwell in his "Illusion and Reality" and Ms M. C. Bradbrook in her book *Literature of Action* have evoked Dhvani, though not with much success. Since no law can govern the obscure process of literary creation and enjoyment Indian English critic should bring a synthesis between the Indian and Western poetics in order to evaluate a work of art. Mimesis and the *Rasa* theory, Katharsis and the Dhvani theory have their significance and variation. For instance, the western concept that of the sublime perhaps has no Indian parallel. Analyzing the source of sublimity, Longinus mentioned great ideas, controlled passion, noble diction and figures, and a flaming unity or Criticality of Organisation to produce on the hearer or reader the shock like effect of sudden illumination and ecstasy. The Indian English critic who is heir to a very developed critical tradition at home and has training in Western critical theories should exercise his tool making the best use of both western and Indian poetics, but not neglecting one or the other.