

CONCEPT OF BEAUTY IN VEDANT

Beauty, ever since ancient times, has been a major pre-occupation of civilized man. Beauty has been dealt and discussed by different disciplines like Philosophy, Axiology, Sociology, Mathematics and in modern times even by Physics.

Every System of Indian Philosophy talks about Beauty and the experience of Beauty. I shall, here in the paper restrict myself to Beauty as is being reflected in Vedas and Upanishads. And for this we will first have a clear understanding about the main aspects of Beauty and then Beauty in Vedanta.

To Begin with, let us first understand Beauty - its meaning, concept, the term, the types and nature in general, from Philosophy point of view.

On Beauty :

Meaning and Concept:

The term "Beauty" as a quality of the "Beautiful" is though familiar to everybody, its understanding has proved to be exceedingly difficult. Beauty is, almost by all, agreed and accepted as a "Value" and its first essential quality is to please. Pleasure is stirred up in our soul, whenever we contemplate any beautiful object. This is a very prominent subjective aspect. "The objective aspect of beautiful objects has largely remained a puzzle or mystery. Some aestheticians are inclined to deny its very existence, while others assert that beauty

is inherent in, or dependent on, the object of aesthetic experience; a few even maintain that "Beauty" has transcendent existence in which it coincides with the true and the Good.

The search for Beauty in physics is one of the significant features of the growing interest in modern physics. "A small group of contemporary physicists, the intellectual descendants of Einstein, have extended the forest of the night in search of the fundamental design of Nature. They focus on Symmetry as the unifying aesthetic view point through which fundamental physicists look at Nature. Prof. A Zee, one of the intellectual descendent of A. Einstein says" "But, in fact, aesthetics has become a driving force in contemporary physics. Nature, at the fundamental level, is beautifully designed. Let us worry about beauty first and truth will take care of itself."

An Indian aesthetician Rupa Goswami compares Beauty with "the unlocalised shadowy something of the pearl visible in a body. We perceive it but cannot name it." Abhinavagupta described Beauty as, "the delight which is born with the cessation of thirst."² J.Krishnamurti says, "there is a beauty which offers no stimulation... one comes upon that beauty not by desiring, longig for experience, but only when all desire for experience has come to an end."³

We should note that modern aesthetics begins with A. G. Baumgarten (1714-1762) who first used the word aesthetics. He defines beauty as the end of all sensuous knowledge. In other words, logical reasoning and aesthetic perception differ not in the end, but in the means, of recognising the true and the good. The 18th and 19th centuries were ruled by this concept. Modern aesthetic begins with the concept of beauty in Nature and all of life.

The Term:

The term "Beauty" is loaded with connotations. Beauty means something that pleases through senses. Beauty like Truth and Goodness, is a divine attribute and in its absolute state it co-exists with others. In Indian Philosophy the word "*Sundar*" (Beauty) means that which wets our heart with pleasure. It is an abstract quality in

an object that attracts us and fills our heart with pleasure. According to this meaning beauty is an objective quality, but it has a subjective application as well. The experience of beauty - *Saundaryanubhava* or aesthetic experience also has subjective quality.

One more etymological derivation of "Sunder" believed to have come from - Su + nar- meaning shining. Therefore all lusterous objects are called to be beautiful. Bhanu Dixit on Amarkosa says that su+dar is the root of the word Sundar. Here "dar" means respect. Hence the object which deserves respect from all is called Sundar.

The Beauty (*Sundaram*) in Indian Philosophy is supreme Reality or perfect Being. It is one the three attributes of god.

Some western scholars, capitalizing the lack of mention, feel Indians had no sense of Beauty. In fact this is not so. Shri P. S. Shastri in his scholarly article, "The Rgvedic Philosophy of the Beautiful" published by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, vol. XXXII, has not only detailed as many as twenty two words denoting beauty but has also explained their different meanings as well. The term Beauty also means attractive, proportionate, orderly, rhythmic, symmetrical, charming etc. The term beauty, in fact, is highly ambiguous in its use.

The Types :

The classical understanding regarding the types or kinds of beauty is : Beauty of Nature and Beauty of Art. Both these types have common as well as uncommon characteristics. Considering the objects to which we attribute Beauty we find sensuous beauty, beauty of form and beauty of expression of meaning.

According to Indian Aestheticians, Beauty can be classified only as wordly and divine. Wordly beauty is temporary or fugitive and is through object. It is sensuous and pleasure giving but of inferior nature. On the other hand Divine Beauty is of higher nature. The Indians refer these two beauties as an Inner Beauty and outer Beauty or physical Beauty and Divine Beauty also.

Nature of Beauty :

Beauty is a quality of an object, and its main nature is to please. Beauty provides us with pleasure and joy. Beauty, by both Greeks as well as Indians, has been considered as an aspect of divinity like Truth and Goodness. Just like Truth & Goodness, no one can experience Beauty without being beautiful.

Beauty by nature is eternal. The forms are transitory. They can be caught in thought but Beauty itself is unthinkable. It is to be felt or experienced. In the words of Plotinus " In itself perfectly pure." In the words of Upanishadas, " In itself perfectly complete (*purna*) all is beautiful because all have come from the Pure and Pure is beautiful".

Beauty has a typical nature - a unique characteristics, it eludes him who seek to hold and possess. Disinterestedness as Kant says or interestlessness as Kainz says is the first condition to experience beauty.

According to Indians, Beauty is a value and absolute Beauty is an absolute value. Beauty (even worldly) once enjoyed, there is a strong desire to repeat the enjoyment. J. Krishnamurti says. "Beauty is not in the museum, in the painting, in statues or listening to concerts; beauty is not in a poem or in the lovely sky of an evening; or in the light of the water; or in the face of a beautiful person, or in a building. There is beauty only when the mind and the heart are completely in harmony and that beauty cannot be got by shallow mind that is caught in the disorder of this world."

True beauty is never dependent. Beauty is a state of freedom. Ancient Indian have considered True Beauty as "an awakening to the Universal nature of things".... the perception of Beauty is a yoga or union of self with the super self.

On Vedant philosophy :

Vedant philosophy is the Philosophy or the doctrines set forth in the end portion of the Vedas, which are the upanishads. They

constitute "The final aim of the Veda"⁵ or the essence of Vedas. The Vedanta philosophy has exerted the greatest influence out of all the six Brahmanical systems of the Indian philosophy. It always demands a closer attention because of its philosophical value, its close association with the religion of India, and because "it determines the world view of the Hindu thinkers of the present time."⁶ According to Vedant Philosophy, Jeevan Mukti or the Liberation from Avidya or root ignorance is the ultimate goal or value of human life. It denies the reality of many objects perceived and their unity in one reality is asserted over and again: all is one god one soul. All is god and god is the Reality (*satya*). Here God appears as qualified (*saguna*) by many qualities - He is omnipotent, omniscient, the sustainer and destroyer. These qualities are seen from the stand point of god as a creator. God is possessed of all supremely good qualities. The upanishads, conceive Brahman or God as the pure ground and ultimate source of reality, consciousness and joy. Realization of the self is regarded as the highest goal. Its method lies in controlling the lower self, deep rooted impulses, and through a vigorous practice of the ways taught by religion. It is a difficult path and all men are not capable of realising this mystic state. Prof. M. Hiriyanna remarks, "the foretaste of Brahmananda can be had when a man enters the world of art." The aesthetic pleasure, when makes man free from the clutches of Kama and Karma, leads an individual to spiritual pleasure.

Beauty in Vedant:

Vedant equate Ananda with Brahman. Brahman is termed Ananda because the restful bliss or Ananda is realised through the inner universal harmony. This harmony is beauty and Ananda is the product of the harmony. It is to be experienced and not to be apprehended intellectually. According to Vedant true beauty is the "inner harmony underlying all diversities of experiences." and this is not outside. Thus according to Vedant philosophy true beauty, like Truth and Goodness, "is the ultimate reality which appears in the form of Ananda."⁸

The aesthetic pleasure according to Sankhya school is different than that of Vedantins. "Sankhya relates their aesthetic experience to the purification of human attitudes, human qualities and characteristics." "But the esoteric philosophy of Upanishads invested the word *rasa* (*rasa*) with rich and profound significance. The Absolute is equated with *roso* and all delight is traced unto it. Upanishads describe the human personality composed of five sheaths or *Kosa* and the highest is pleasure (*Anandamaya*)"¹⁰ In fact, 'aesthetics is the philosophy of taste.' Tradition makes god almighty himself as the first and foremost of creative artist; And Taittiriya Upanishad describes him as *Rasa (Rasu vai saha.)*"

The word used for joy saw many charges: pleasure, *rasa* (empathy), *sundar* (beautiful) etc. The term *Rasa* and *Ananda* become indispensable to the artistic excellence. Madan Gandhi observes, "Indian Philosophy and aesthetics not only recognize *Ananda* as essence of Beauty, but enables us to differentiate between spurious and authentic beauty."¹² Beauty thus becomes important and its experience a significant one because to realize the absolute one needs to realise *Ananda* and *Ananda* can be understood in one's experience of the underlying harmony (beauty) in the universe. According to Vedant Philosophy, True beauty and *Ananda* can be "experienced when man realises his own totality and tries to establish intimate relationship among his different level of consciousness."¹³ This view is very similar to what western scholars talk about 'disinterestedness' (Kant) or Interestlessness' (Kainz) or 'Integrity' (Thomas Aquinas), while discussing the transcendental values of beauty.

Prof Kainz says, "Every human activity, if it is to be meaningful, must strive for a goal. But the characteristic of the aesthetic attitude is that it is free of interest interpreted as meaning the relation to a practical goal. Nothing else is desired but the state itself and the object making up its content in its pure appearance as a mere intuitive image. The moment an aim from the outside is dragged into the aesthetic state, that state ends, or at least its purity is stained"¹⁴ The same has been differently but distinctly

expressed by Paul Haberlin, "We are able to experience beauty only to the degree in which we are capable of standing back from the purposeful requirements of the object. The category of beauty is not one of those which determine purpose; it is outside and beyond the concept of purpose; outside everything of interest. Beauty is a fact of our feeling"¹⁵ that leads to Ananda.

Indian thought in general, and Vedanta in particular categorizes Ananda into three categories: *Priya* (Simple experience) *Moda* (Conscious experience) and *Pramoda* (active participation). Since Ananda is experienced by soul, it has to pass through these three phases of Ananda.

Prof. Hariyanna says, "The aim of art is not to discover the nature of reality but to secure the highest experience of life. It does not pronounce any final option of the tenability or otherwise of the view of reality it thus uses. In other words, aesthetics unlike ethics for instance is alogical. While it is closely connected with psychology it regards logic, or more precisely epistemology, as irrelevant to its purpose. Art is a short cut to the ultimate value of life, by passing logic."¹⁶

While talking about Beauty we should remember that "the conception of Ananda is the hallmark of Indian Philosophy; and *rasa* is its kin. *Rasa* conveys the sense of enjoyment roused through a sympathetic, dis-interested contemplation on God, humanity, and nature. *Rasa*, like *Ananda* is an expression of the cosmic emanation or Universal like... Ananda or *Rasa* can be experienced only through the object of Beauty."¹⁷

Sri Aurobindo says, "according to our own Philosophy (of Vedanta) the whole world comes out of *Ananda* and returns into *Ananda*, and the triple term in which Ananda may be stated is Joy-Love-Beauty. To see divine beauty in the whole world, man, life, nature; to love that which we have seen and to have pure unalloyed bliss in that love and that beauty is the appointed road by which mankind as a race must climb to God. That is the reaching to *Vidya* through *Avidya*"¹⁸

The Vedant as well as the Indian aesthetics and Philosophy made a unique contribution to the world in the form of the Trinity: *Satyam* (Truth), *Shivam* (Goodness) and *Sundaram* (Beauty). "The absolute idea as conceived by the intellect is the highest truth, as realised in practice is the greatest good, and as manifested in man and nature is the supreme beauty."¹⁹ All truth is all good and is also all beautiful. The fundamental oneness of truth and beauty is the final message of Indian Aesthetics. Beauty is no beauty, according to Vedant, if it fails to bear within in it truth. We remember here Whitehead, in Western Philosophy, who remarked that in the absence of truth beauty is on a lower level in the absence of beauty, truth sinks to triviality. Truth matters in our life due to beauty."²⁰

The approach of a true Vedantine towards Beauty and his striving after beauty would only be with one purpose alone, and that will be "to establish emotional unity with God. Beauty removes all barriers and differences. At this state, one finds god nothing but only joy. Thus we find beauty not as a means but as an end in itself. One can take note of what the Bhagavadgita says that whatever beauty we find in the universe, it is ultimately an aspect of godhead (X-41). Bhagavadgita ends with beauty of God. According to Vedanta perfect Beauty is God himself."²¹

At the end, to note a very important and striking difference between Indian and Western thought regarding the approach towards Beauty and Art, let us see what Anand Coomarswami rightly observes, "In India the concern of art was not the pursuit of beauty as an aesthetic observation but the revelation of beauty as a divine condition not as a personal sentiment, but a religious adherence, a traditional hieratic canon."²²

Conclusion :

The concept of Beauty in Vedanta Philosophy, as we have seen, leads to its role in everyday life. Beauty according to Indians, is value to be lived. It has a power to harmonies life, to balance it and making it attractive and joyful. To strive for Beauty is to strive for Truth and Goodness also. Beauty which is lost in the cheap,

obscene advertisement on TV. screen, beauty which is exhibited in the market for selfish purpose of profit making , beauty which is lost or transformed into whiteness or fairness—all these certainly is inferior, low and so called beauty. It is not real and pure but vulgarised and valueless. I started with and again I repeat to end this paper, "Let us worry about beauty (real and pure) first, the truth will take care of itself." By being worried, we simply mean being concerned about Beauty, in Vedantic term, an effort to go from ugliness (of thought, of feelings and of will; of head, heart and soul) to beauty, from beauty to Divine Beauty.

Epilogue :

"Let us worry about Beauty first and Truth will take care of itself. "These are the words of a physicist who introduces himself as the intellectual descendant of Albert Einstein. Beauty, today, has become the driving force in all the fields of interest, in every walk and talk of life's living and dealing. It is for this reason, as well as many other, that Beauty is something we should know more about.

In this small paper, I deal with Beauty from philosophical point of view. Having taken a brief note about the meaning and concept of Beauty in general, both as a property of beautiful and also as an essential element in art and aesthetic experience, I focus Beauty in Advait Philosophy. I have consciously tried to see that the detailed discussion about the evolution of the concept of Beauty in west and in India, and issues related to aesthetics is not touched. All these are not relevant to the title and, besides, I have taken for granted that the august audience/ the reader knows it. An effort is made to present a very small and precise issue to highlight only two aspects: Beauty (its philosophy) and the Experience of Beauty (Aesthetic Experience) in Advait philosophy. It is very necessary, for due justice to the paper, that there is a clear understanding of Advait school in Indian Philosophy and the approach towards Art and Beauty in general. It is typical of Indian ethos that every mundane activity is viewed against religious background. There is

a common principle underlying different branches of art like dance, drama, music and so on. This common aesthetic principle is "Rasa". The corresponding term in Western aesthetics could be "empathy". *Rasa* is the soul of Indian Aesthetics, which is generally believed to be an aesthetic delight, and depends upon *Bhava* or Emotional Complex. The *Rasa* theory has opened up new avenues of discussion in the field of Indian Aesthetics. According to Indian poetics, the experience of beauty is a state of transcendental joy or a state of self - fulfillment. This experience can also be explained, though pleasant in essence but complex in nature. Thus *Rasa* in Indian aesthetics, is the source of beauty and essence of aesthetic experience. *Rasa* in Advait philosophy aims at liberation from nescience. We get spiritual pleasure through aesthetic pleasure, *Ananda*. The Vedantins equate *Ananda* with Brahman.

Apart from what Vedas and Vedantins say about Beauty, I have taken note of Upanishads, as the esoteric philosophy of Upanishads has invested the word "*rasa*" with rich and profound significance. The concept of *Anand* is the Summum Bonum of Indian philosophy, *Rasa* leads to *Anand*. It is of three kind; *Priya*, *Moda* and *Pramod*, according to *Taittiriya Upanishad*. The trinity or *Satyam* (Truth), *Shivam*(Goodness), and *Suindraum*(Beauty) is significant contribution of Indian philosophy. I have taken note of different etymological derivations of the word *Sunder* (Beautiful) as well as different opinion about Beauty in ancient India. Beauty is not just what we find in this physical world. It is the light of the soul. Every beautiful object in the world is the external manifestation of that internal beauty. "Beauty in Advait Philosophy" - the external details, is the manifestation of "Beauty of Advait" - the inner beauty of Advait. Is n't it ?

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"It was on 11th September, 1906, a Movement was started in South Africa, by Gandhi, which ultimately came to be known as "*Satyagraha*". Initially the name given to this movement was "Passive resistance". This was resorted by the people, who had either no right to vote or were otherwise, weak. They were not averse to use of arms, if possible, for the attainment of their aims. On the other hand, *Satyagraha* is soul force, pure and simple. *Satyagrahis* never used physical force, and that too although there were occasions, and when they were in a position to use it effectively. In a sense this was non-violent assistance in the right direction.

We may call it coincidence or destiny, it was on 11th September, that the World Trade Center was demolished. After this demolition US President, George Bush, remembered Gandhi. After the said tragedy a new youth organisation has been founded in the United States, named as "We want Peace, not War". There is another organisation known as "Seeds of Peace"

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