PREFACE

Our eyes feast on beautiful objects. Our hearts thrill with joy at their sight. Our intellect instantaneously asks—What is the nature and source of this joy? What is the speciality of those objects whose perception engrosses us in such raptures? The branch of study which attempts to clarify such questions is called aesthetics. Etymologically the word ‘aesthetics’ means the study of sense perception. Baumgarten first used the term ‘aesthetic’. He meant by it, the science of beauty. Today, it is used in the sense of philosophy of beauty.

Truth, beauty and goodness are acknowledged to be the three different facets of the wholeness of reality. Obviously, philosophers who talk of the highest truth have occasions to revert to the questions of beauty. It is no wonder then that aesthetics has been acclaimed as one of the branches of philosophy. Discussions on beauty become fruitless without philosophical treatment.

India, being the ancient land of philosophy, produced a host of able thinkers who dealt with the question of beauty in its various forms, such as poetry, music, architecture, sculpture, painting etc. Though these thinkers did not always belong to any specific philosophical school of thinking, yet they exhibited their perceptive philosophical mind while dealing with the questions of beauty. One such great name in the field of Indian aesthetics is Ānandavardhana, the 9th century A.D. poet, philosopher and administrator, from the Indian province of Kashmir. His views on poetical beauty bear remarkable resemblance to the theory of taste as explained by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his Critique of Judgement. The element of pleasure in the perception of beauty, or what is called aesthetic joy, has been characterized by Kant as ‘disinterested delight’. This delight is due to one type of self-realization. Ānandavardhana, the formulator of the dhvani prasthāna in Indian aesthetics, said exactly the same thing much earlier. Thus I feel that the aesthetics of Ānandavardhana and Kant will make a very interesting comparative study. The two great men belonging to two different traditions and cultures are yet in agreement on certain fundamental positions of life. One of the primary objectives of my present study is to show the unity of mankind in at least a limited area of aesthetic estimation of taste.
There are however basic differences between the positions ofĀnandavardhana, and that of Kant. Kant is a system-builder in philosophy. Western philosophical systems are generally more comprehensive than the ones produced in India. In India, philosophy was generally regarded as parāvidyā as distinguished from aparāvidyā. Studies like aesthetics, ethics etc. were relegated to aparāvidyā or mundane studies. Naturally, discussions on aesthetics in the Indian context were not generally continuous with the highest type of metaphysical discussions. In consequence, in spite of having a very rich spiritual message, the social significance of our ancient philosophy was not very wholesome.

As we have said, in India, aesthetics has not been generally recognized as a regular part of philosophy. The study of aesthetics has been carried out by a distinct class of thinkers—ālankaṇārikas, who are not always professional philosophers. The reason might be that the Indian philosophers believed that the pursuit of beauty or art experience cannot directly and permanently minister to the attainment of the final goal of life, that is, mokṣa or kaivalya or emancipation. Even though aesthetics has not been recognized as a regular part of philosophy there is no dearth of studies on aesthetics in India. Indeed, India has a glorious and perhaps the richest heritage in aesthetic-speculation. Bharata, Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Udbhāta, Vāmana, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Jagannātha, Visvanātha, Dhanañjaya, and in modern times, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurovindo, Mukul Dey, Abanindranath Tagore, Tilak and others are the golden stars in the galaxy of aesthetic thinking.

What is more, Indian studies on aesthetics are not devoid of philosophical content. The concepts of ānanda and rasa are fundamental in Indian metaphysics as well as in Indian aesthetics. There are some distinctive features of art-experience. First, the contemplation of a work of art leads to an attitude of mind, which is quite impersonal. In this state of mind, man forgets himself altogether, i.e., he becomes virtually oblivious of his private self. This is the meaning of saying that art experience consists in the disinterested contemplation of beauty. Secondly, as a consequence of such self-forgetfulness, the contemplation of art yields a kind of spontaneous joy that is pure and untainted by mundanity. In both these respects, the aesthetic attitude stands higher than that of common or everyday life, which is
characterized by personal interests and involves tension. It is for this reason that Indian aesthetic thinkers compare aesthetic experience with the relish of Brahmaṇ, a state, which is metaphysically ideal. Thus Visvanātha, in explaining aesthetic experience, says, ‘vedāntaraspāṛṣaśunya brahmāsvādasahodara’. One may point out here that the two experiences though of the same order are not identical. The ideal state when attained becomes a permanent feature of life. But art experience is transient. It passes away sooner or later. Hence, art is a device for provisional attainment of the final ideal of life.

This criticism has some substantiality. But art is much more than a means to secure for man a temporary escape from the imperfection of common life; it induces the human mind a good deal to rise permanently above the imperfections of the common plane. “Art experience arouses our interest in the ideal state by giving us a foretest of it, and thus serves as a powerful incentive to the pursuit of that state” (M.Hiriyama, Art experience). Thus we see that there is an indwelling current of philosophical thoughts in aesthetic studies.

In the present study, I have tried to bring Indian aesthetics in union with the main currents of philosophical thinking, that is to say, to bring parāvidyā and aparāvidyā in one continuum. This, I think, will open up new vistas in the intellectual horizon. For sometimes philosophy, in its habit of taking flights in the high altitudes of super intellectual sphere, looses its connection with man’s practical and social life. This is especially true of our ancient Indian philosophical cultivation. In order to moderate this attitude of seclusiveness, we feel that our ethical and aesthetical studies should be amalgamated with our ancient philosophical systems. Both ethics and aesthetics are linked up with man’s practical and social life. So if aesthetics is brought within the purview of philosophical studies, it will vibrate with the warmth of life and will get fresh impetus to break the deadlock of stagnancy. Moreover, dynamism and progress being the very essence of life, philosophy will become dynamic and life-oriented. In turn, our aesthetic studies will also achieve its deserved comprehensibility, which it lacked due to philosophy’s indifferent attitudes towards it.

In all these regards, a comparative study ofĀnandavardhana’s aesthetics and Kant’s aesthetics will be of much help. Kant’s aesthetics belongs to his critical
system of philosophy, his *Critique of Judgement* being the third great *Critique* of the series of *Critiques*. Since aesthetics in Kant is a comprehensive and systematic study, our comparative study will examine how far Indian aesthetics, seen from this angle, is successful as a systematic approach and a comprehensive study. At this stage, however, one thing must be made clear to avoid a possible misunderstanding about the relevance or the possibility of this kind of comparative study. The first part of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, which is important for our purpose is a study of taste or aesthetic relish. It has two subdivisions, namely, the beautiful and the sublime. Indian ālāṅkārikas or the rhetoricians do not distinguish between the beautiful and the sublime in any important way. What is called taste is, for them, *rasa*, and both the beautiful and the sublime come under one kind or other of *tasa*. However, there is no denying that the first part of Kant’s third *Critique* is a study of taste in general, whereas Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka* is exclusively a study of the taste of poetic beauty or poetic charm. But this hardly affects our objective. There are various kinds of objects either natural or created by the artists, which have their aesthetic values, such as for example, landscape, poetry, music, painting, architecture, etc. We may study any of them or all of them from the point of view of taste. Kant’s is a general study and Ānandavardhana’s is a study in exemplar. As the Nyāya philosophers say, when we perceive an individual as belonging to a natural clan we perceive its individuality as well as its generality, and through that perception of the generality of the object (i.e. *sāmānyalakṣaṇa paratyaṅka*) we perceive all the objects belonging to the class in respect of their class-essence (*sāmānya* or *jāti*). Both Ānandavardhana and Kant get to the heart of the taste of beauty in their respective studies. In our present work we want to ascertain to what extent and in what particulars Ānandavardhana and Kant stand united in their judgements of the nature and significance of our aesthetic relish or taste.

The point of view and the objective of the work as just explained has been worked out in the following form:
Preface

PART—I

Chapter I  The theory of *dhvani*—its background
Chapter II The theory of *dhvani* as developed by Ānandavardhana and as further developed by Abhinavagupta

PART—II

Chapter III A brief history of the western aesthetic theories preceding Kant’s critical enquires
Chapter IV Kant’s aesthetic theory explained

PART—III

Chapter V Conclusion: Ānandavardhana and Kant compared

Selected bibliography

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