PREFACE

Indian aesthetics, though rich in content, is a much neglected and misunderstood field of study. This has perhaps been largely due to the unsystematic manner in which the whole subject has been treated in the traditional texts. Whereas, the metaphysical statements of the Vedas and the Upanishads skirmish around the concept of beauty, without elaborating on it in the manner of an aesthetic treatise, the classical works on art such as the silpaśāstras and alamkāraśāstras are full of practical injunctions and didactic statements. Moreover, the erudite language of these texts and the mythical manner in which the authors often develop their themes, tend to cloak the essence of the thought and do not permit of its logical analysis and development. For these reasons it is generally believed that while Indian thought is rich in mysticism, religion and metaphysical thought, it has never really developed a true aesthetic.

The present study aims at dispelling this view. While every work has its limitations and one cannot perhaps do all that one sets out initially to do, the explicit purpose of this work is to clarify the terms and concepts used in the traditional Indian texts and to submit them as far as possible to an objective
analysis. This analysis was undertaken in the context of modern aesthetic theories which often provide not only a startling contrast but an amazing parallel to the Indian theories.

In the process of analysis we have at times taken liberties with the traditional texts, not in order to read meanings into them that were never intended, but because these seemed to be logically suggested by them. By dealing with the problems of Indian aesthetics in a systematic way we do not wish to suggest that this is how they appeared to the ancient and mediaeval Indian thinkers. The plan of this study was drawn up for the sake of clarity and convenience alone.

What is the value of such a study? It can lie in various fields. It can, for one, add to the knowledge of the history of ideas and culture of a particular age and time. It can also help the modern mind understand Indian art within its own cultural and intellectual setting, and it can enhance our understanding of art and aesthetics in general. Needless to say, the need for a systematic approach in a field such as Indian aesthetics, wherein the subject has never been fully organised, cannot be over emphasized.

Among the vast prevailing literature on Indian
art and aesthetics, apart from a few essays, there has been no study of the kind undertaken. The contribution of Indologists in the field of Indian art has been considerable. Most of it however has been done by historians and archaeologists, museum curators and art-historians, mainly with a view to organize the vast material of Indian art and aesthetics, fix this material in chronology, identify the themes and relate them to their cultural setting. Special studies have also been undertaken for the purpose of explaining the various systems, styles, modes of technique, methods of composition, the iconology and symbols of the separate arts.

Nonetheless, these works which are not perhaps complete aesthetic theories in the sense in which the subject is understood today, provide a valuable background for any student of Indian aesthetic thought. I have depended on them to draw my facts and references from. It is not necessary to mention them all here since I have done so in foot-notes and in the bibliography appended at the end. Mention must, however, be made of a few which have been especially useful in my context, namely, A.K. Coomaraswamy's admirable treatise, The Transformation of Nature in Art, Stella Kramrisch's Indian Sculpture, Raniero Gnolisi's fragmentary but admirable, The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta, M. Hiriyanna's Art Experience, K.C.
Pandey's *Indian Aesthetics*, S.K. De's *Indian Poetics as a Study of Aesthetics* and P.J. Chaudhary's *Studies in Aesthetics*. Thomas Munro's excellent work *Oriental Aesthetics* came to hand too late for use, I regret very much to say.

My greatest debt of gratitude however is to Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray, former Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla, and Emeritus Professor of Calcutta University, not only for making me aware of the challenge involved in the undertaking this particular field of study but for the clarity of the ideas he put across to me and for his over-all guidance and supervision. Despite his many responsibilities, he has gone through this study with the care and patience, he thought, it deserved, and discussed the problems with me on several occasions. It has been not a little due to his dynamic and enlightened guidance and to his generosity in freely making available to me his knowledge, experience and time, that the completion of this work has been possible.

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