

The Concept of Art

Etymology: The word 'art' in the thirteenth century Middle English meant "skill as a result of learning or practice." Nowadays the word 'art' is a commonly, often loosely used term for anything which one considers of great aesthetic merit. < write different definitions from the dictionary>.

Art and Aesthetics have a hand in glove relationship: where the theory is aesthetics and the object is art.

Aesthetics

The Reader's Digest Dictionary of the English Language defines 'aesthetic' as 'concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty; pleasing appearance; a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement' (Readers Digest 14). For the term aesthetics, the dictionary explains- 'a set of principles concerned with the nature of beauty, especially in art; the branch of philosophy concerned with questions of beauty and artistic taste' (Readers Digest 14). The term is derived from the Greek *aistetikos* which is from the root word *aisthesthai* which means 'perceive'.

The theory of aestheticism believes that art is autotelic and autonomous, hence the criticism must not be based on moral, social, political religious and other such parameters which are not aesthetic standards. The Aesthetic Movement began with the German aesthete Alexander Baumgarten, who expounded the term as the 'science of sensitive cognition'. The other critics who ascribed to the theory were Immanuel Kant, Schelling, Goethe, Schiller among others and they connected it to the concept of beauty and considered it superior to nature.

The Western aestheticians- philosophers are preoccupied with the question of beauty, but in Indian aesthetics, Kavyalamkarshastra, as aesthetics and poetics is referred to in the Sanskrit tradition, the question of beauty is discussed as a part of professional literary criticism by *Alamkarikas*, the literary critics, who are not philosophers. This segregated approach to beauty, has led to the postulation of Vyangartha or the connotations, which stands in antagonism to philosophy. The aim of artistic endeavors is not to unveil the reality but to channel the way to receive the highest experience.

Poetics

The term 'poetics' refers to the study of linguistic techniques in poetry and literature. It is derived from the title of Aristotle's work on verbal making, *Peri poietikē*, the fragmentary lecture notes delivered by Aristotle to his students which were later compiled together. They have become the model for all the following commentaries on poetics.

Western Poetics

There are many interpretations of the term 'poetics' in literary discussions in West. The practice to apply the term to every human activity has reduced it to being a mere theory. If the term is used in context to a particular author, it refers to the relation of the extrinsic theory with the intrinsic principles, inherent in the work of the author. However, the usage of the term in relation to the "theory of literary discourses" is more appropriate as it then specifically remains well within the orbit of literary theory, thereby retaining a clear distinction between the literary and the non-literary. Following the validity of the distinction thus made poetics then comes to denote 'the theory of poetry'. This definition proposes that there be recognized and validated the existence of a fundamental distinction between the modes of verse and prose. The history of criticism recognizes two viewpoints on whether the mode of verbal discourse is essential to the category of distinctions within the literary or to the literary itself. Aristotle contends that mimesis- a skilfully contrived imitation of actions, and not the metrical form, makes poetry. According to him, poetry exists in the purpose and not the mode, a view corroborated later by Phillip Sidney, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Wallace Stevens.

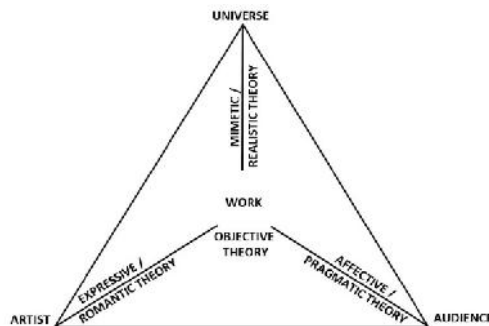
The contending view is that the verse form matters and constitutes the distinguishing factor between poetry and prose. Gorgias, a fifth century Sophist opines that poetry is a language used among many for convincing or deluding, where the differentia is the use of different verse form. He is backed in his view by successive critics like Scaliger, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Roman Jakobson, the Russian as well as the American formalists.

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, defines Poetics as,

Poetics, then is in the most specific sense a systematic theory of poetry. It to define the nature of poetry, its kinds and forms, its resources of device and structure, the principles that govern it, the functions that distinguish

it from other arts, the conditions under which it can exist, and its effects on readers or auditors. (Priminger 930)

The study of Western poetics can be studied from two prototypes. M. H. Abrams in his *Theories of Poetry* proposes a model which offers four kinds of orientations for poetic theory. The first orientation is the objective or the formalist theory which places the work centrally, the second is directed at the reception of the work by the audience and is called the pragmatic or the affective theory; the third theory called the mimetic or the realist theory gives utmost importance to the world while the fourth is oriented towards the poet as the creator and is called the expressive or the romantic theory. The various literary theories confirm to these orientations and what makes them different is the degree of their respective valuations as is represented in the figure below:



The second model as outlined by Jakobson, does not differ essentially in its premise from Abrams but offers six components instead of four. “The transactional continuum of course runs from speaker (poet), through message (text), to audience (auditor, reader), but the text itself must also comprise the context, contact type, and code (language)” (Priminger 930)

The Western poetics has undergone three major waves- in the first wave the Aristotelian tradition which was objective and formalist, continued till the 18th century. The second wave, dominated by the Romanticism was expressive, conscious and emotive. In the 20th century, the third wave started which was metacritical or theoretical.

The first half of the century the theory- poetics was dominated by objectivism and formalism, with the Russian Formalism, American New Critical School and Structuralism bringing about a revolution. In the latter half of the century, the literary theory has been mired in questions of what would make an appropriate poetics, the

queries it must discuss, and what would be the consequences of the conclusions thus formed.

The grapple between subjectivity and objectivity has been as closely associated with the Western poetics as the fight between good and evil has been conceived as a twin with the conception of the world. Since ancient times the efforts have been unceasingly made to undertake the study of poetics from an objective distance, and they continue till date.

Aristotle, is the first literary critic in West who is known to have undertaken a systematic study of literature and tried to undertake the taxonomic method for the same. In *Poetics*, Aristotle is concerned with the art of poetry, or the craftsmanship that will move the audience. The Poetics maps out the rudimentary schema of genres to begin with, although constrained in many arenas except that of verse drama. While *poesis* is a making, a course of action, poetics is the skilled execution of the action. It is inevitably based on some or the other theory of language, as poetry is nothing but the singular placement of words in the verse form. Western poetics is founded on the philosophy of language propounded by Greeks and used by Aristotle in *Peri hermeneias*. The hierarchal structure of the school consists of four rungs- beginning from noumena (things-in-themselves) it progresses to become a phenomena (mental impressions) which is transmuted into speech which thence gets transcribed into writing.

Homer is presumably the first critic in the West to consider poetry as a form of delight and instruction, although it is shaped around the principles of Plato and Aristotle. Plato based his poetic theories on his metaphysical philosophy. Aristotle, although his disciple, strikingly differs from his master. He not only embellishes arts of imitation with the highest aesthetic accolades, but also gives an organized taxonomic paradigm to poetry. He is concerned with the 'art of poetry' instead of 'nature of poetry'. Literature, as it is perceived in the contemporary times was defined only in the eighteenth century. During the Roman era literature took a backseat while the analytical rhetoric was the mode of civic discourse. In the Middle Ages, poetics was a part of the curriculum of grammar. The nineteenth century with the aid of Romantic Movement saw the rise of poetics as an individual branch of study which finally paved the way for modernism and successively postmodernism to take the centre stage.

Indian Poetics

In the Indian context, the theory of aesthetics is not delimited to the reception of art but it seeks to experience the ordinary in an unordinary way, wherein acuity, emotion and comprehension ascend to absolute and heightened realms of sensuous experience.

The ancient perception of the character of poetry can be estimated from the discussions of the Vedas and the contemplations expressed in the Upanishads. The Vedas hailed the poet, Kavi, as a 'god' and thus Ganpati was invoked as the poet's poet. The poet considered to be the 'Seer of Truth' was conceived to be an intellectual with delicate, intense and insightful consciousness. He is an artist because he is a creator and his aim is to explore the realms of 'Delight'. He perceives beauty in everything which replenishes him with bliss thereby bestowing upon him an exalted vision which makes the earth appear Heaven to him, where joy is all pervasive. The Vedic perception of the poet is all encompassing as it takes into consideration every facet of poetry, namely-the creation, the execution and its influence on the reader. The poet consciously regulates the word, the Vak. Having familiarized himself with the four stages of Vak, the latter is revealed to him.

The conscious control of the Word and the conscious act of creation raises the Kavi to the status quo of the Yogi. The four stages that must have been known to and experienced by the Yogi are- jagrat, swapna, susupti and turiya. The jagrat is the state where he performs the day to day activities, which form the impressions on the mind. In the Swapna or the dream sleep, the jagrat impacts the state of mind, and these interactions fill the consciousness of this life as well as those that will appear in imagery and provide a meaning to the dream sleep. In this state the mind supersedes the body in activity. The dreamless sleep is called Susupti and in this state the human consciousness undergoes intense self-oblivion and no recollection can be had of anything. The fourth and final stage is Turiya or the superconsciousness, which is the condition of consciousness in which there is no regard for the materiality of the world as the poet has then reached a higher consciousness.

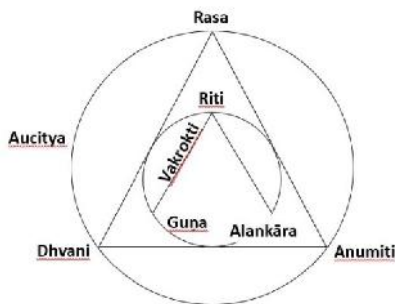
The Kavi exercises his will to withdraw, collect, contain his consciousness and emerge to present his 'vision and experience'. He possesses the knowledge of the Word, and hence is the perfect receptacle for the inspiration as he receives it passively and

presents it without amending its essence. The objective criticism of his own creation is the hallmark of a Kavi.

The three conclusions that can be derived are- firstly, authentic and grand poetry is not constructed but emanates from the Rasa, invoked in the heart of the Kavi. The second conclusion is that the artist is great only if the critic in him is great and objective as well. Thirdly, it may be safely concluded that the structure of poetry has three foundation stones-the diction, the versification and the *laya* give it its meaning.

Many instances of Poetic theorizing have been recorded in the Vedas and its ancillary literature. In the *Mimamsa* school of thought provides the first leitmotif of Indian Cultural history, where the Vedas were recognized to have a self-defining reality. It attempts for the first time to map a blueprint of Indian poetics and formulates a vocabulary specific to its needs. A distinction between the literal and the figurative is made, as well as the motivation driving the use of specific figurations and not others are also analyzed. The earliest hymns in Vedas seem to have been the renderings of the professional poets, but later a drift towards the academic casting of the composition to be enjoyed by the cognoscenti or the *sahradaya*.

A diagrammatic representation of the theories of Indian Poetics, is as represented below. The diagram has been taken from the V. S. Seturaman's work on Indian poetics, titled *Indian Aesthetics-An Introduction*.



The earliest text that shapes as a formal treatise on Indian poetics is the *Natyasastra*, often recognized as the fifth Veda, is a compendium on the theory and practice of theatre, by the sage Bharata in and around sixth century. In his treatise he explains the mechanizations of the aesthetic relish for the audience, which he terms as 'rasa', which is a feature of the way the audience respond to the drama performance. This 'rasa' is evoked among the audience due to the inherent chemistry between the

thought, the diction, the actions and the spectacle, which if appropriate lead to the evoking of certain emotions among the audience, thereby causing the rasa to be realized by the *sahridaya* or the connoisseur. He goes on to dictate eight rasa's namely- Sringara, Hasya, Karuna, Raudra, Vira, Bhayanaka, Bibhastsa, Adbhuta.

Bharata focuses mainly on the kind of diction that is appropriate in the play, for the sole purpose of the aesthetic pleasure it must evoke. According to Abhinavagupta the term rasa sums up the whole of critical literature. It is accomplished by the fruitful combination *Vibhava*, *Anubhava* and *Vyabhicara*. The extensive and exhaustive discussion on the theory of rasa was initiated by Abhinavagupta. He also added the ninth Rasa Shanta to the eight rasas delineated by Bharata. Bhatta Tauta, Abhinavagupta's teacher in his work *Kavya-kautuka*, opines that the performance of drama is divorced from the physical aspect, as the audience ignore the actual individual character of the actors and engage only with the character being portrayed on the stage. As Dr. S.N. Gupta mentions in his essay "The Theory of Rasa":

In witnessing a play we forget the actual perceptual experience of the individuals on the stage playing their different parts or manifesting their individuality as associated with their local names and habitations.... [the audience] stands somewhere midway between the pure actuality and pure ideality.... This is *Camatkara*, *Carvana* which literally means the experience of a transcendent exhilaration from the enjoyment of a rouse the emotions inherent in our own personality. (Seturaman 195)

Vamana is acclaimed to have been the first theoretician to give the Indian a formal structure and approach it with a scientific and logical perspective as he tries to explore the essence of poetry. He arrives at the conclusion: *RitiratmaKavyasya* or 'Riti is the soul of poetry'. Riti refers to the exquisite positioning of the words, based on their Gunas. He goes on to talk about *Alamkaras*, the embellishments which provides *Saundarya* to poetry.

Kuntaka, the propounder of the *Vakrokti* School of poetics carried the Riti school to another level and appended it with the theory of *Vakrokti*, or *vaichitriya*- the element of defamiliarization, which makes the poetry different from everyday speech and hence lends it the artistic expression which gives aesthetic pleasure to the connoisseur.

Anandvardhana's theory of *Dhvani* is put up as a contender against Vamanas's theory of Riti for the pedestal of the 'Soul of Poetry'. In his treatise, *Dhvanyalok*, Anandavardhana uses the term Dhvani to refer to the concept of suggestiveness in his poetry. The poetry, in which the literal meanings of the words take a backseat while the metaphorical meaning of the words implies a much more aesthetically charming emotion, is dhvani, which is the best type of poetry.

The counterpart of Horace's concept of propriety is Ksemendra's concept of Aucitya in the Sanskrit system of poetics. The first mention of the term is found in a verse in the prologue to his drama *Ramabhyudaya*, composed in the eighth century by King Yasovarman of Kanauj. He refers to a vast number of characteristics that a drama should have. According to Ksemendra, it is only in comparison to other objects that things can be graded as good or bad. Their merits or demerits rest more on the situations in which they are placed at a particular point of time. The appropriate placement of things in such a way as will go well with the Rasa being evoked and also the removal of things that do not blend in with the essence of the artistic expression is called propriety or Aucitya. It is harmony and the proportion between the parts and the whole, the principal and the secondary. Bhamaha and Dandin explain this concept in respect to *Gunas*, the qualities of style.

The Sanskrit poetics, however, as is necessary had been preceded by some theatrical performances, although sufficient evidence is yet unable so as to be able to ascertain their time or place of origin. Nevertheless, it is certain that in the Vedic times some performances had been staged as part of the religious festivities- in the combination of dance and mime. The setting of the stage is believed to be quite similar to that of the Greek theatre. This receives an added validation with the fact that the curtain separating the back of the stage was called yavanika, which was an abbreviated form of the name by which Greeks were generally referred in India.

The Sanskrit plays vary in their structure from some being as condensed as one-act plays to some extending to have ten acts. The performers of these plays were travelling professional troupes which included actors of both the sexes. The dramatic performances were not held on any regular basis but one of the caves of Ramgarh is considered to be particularly suitable for the performances. The amateur artists

performed these plays amongst themselves, for private or semi-private viewings in palaces and the homes of wealthy.

The stage was divided into the ranga (main stage) and nepathya(backstage) by a curtain called yavanika. The actors entered from the backstage directly to perform as there was no curtain between the stage and the audience. The scenery and the props were not used. However this lack of spectacle was compensated through the performance itself, because the performance included elaborate gestures known as the 'mudras'. These mudras employed all the parts of the body- hands, limbs, features which conveyed the act taking place on stage quietly effortlessly to the sahridyas. A special emphasis on the costumes of the actors was laid; as they help the audience differentiate between heroes, heroines, gods, demons, villains etc.

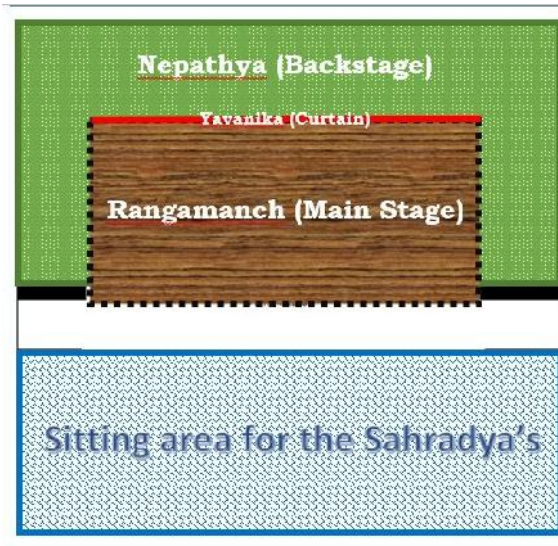


Fig: The Stage of Sanskrit Drama

The play began with the invocation to one or more gods, followed by a prologue in which through a conversation between a 'sutradhar' and his wife, the chief actor and actress, some information regarding the occasion and nature of the play was conveyed to the audience. The language was prosaic which was often interspersed with verses, meant to be intoned but never sung. The time span of the play took epic proportions and was not restricted by any time frames. The scenes of violence were not preferred for performance although this rule was sometimes ignored. The act followed a prelude or the pravesaka in which the characters kept the audience updated on what had transpired hence and thus set the scene.

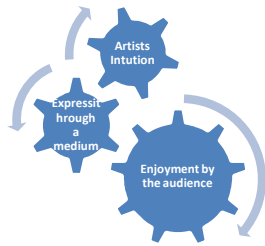
Tragedy, unlike West was not a favored form of ending, but tragic events and pathetic scenes were certainly included for the complexities of the plot. The source material of the plays was generally derived from the legends and mythical tales of gods and ancient warriors. Some plays however were also based on secular themes. Some of the dramatic corpus also deals with allegorical themes and the use the allegorical convention of characters personifying virtues and vices. The theorists classified the plays on the basis of the style and length into around a dozen categories.

The hero or the nayaka and the heroine, the nayika are troubled by pratinayaka, the villain. The counterpart of the fool in Sanskrit drama is the vidusaka, who may be an ugly, disfigured Brahman and a loyal friend of the hero. But he provides the comic relief in the play. The counterpart of the parasite character of the Greek comedies in Sanskrit drama is the vita- who is a cultured but shallow man of the world, befriending the hero.

The Mahābhāṣya by Patañjali sows the earliest seeds of Sanskrit Drama. Kālidāsa (1st century BCE), hailed to be ancient India's greatest Sanskrit dramatist presents the richness of the Sanskrit theatre through his three famous romantic plays - Mālavikāgnimitram (Mālavikā and Agnimitra), Vikramuurvashiiya (Pertaining to Vikrama and Urvashi), and Abhijñānaśākuntala (The Recognition of Shakuntala). He is followed by Bhavabhuti who wrote in the 7th century AD and wrote three plays: Malati-Madhava, Mahaviracharita and Uttar Ramacharita. This tradition was not exclusively limited to a certain class of people, and this is evidenced by the powerful Indian emperor Harsha who wrote three plays, namely *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarsika*, and the Buddhist drama *Nagananda*. The Sanskrit drama prospered until the 12th century in India when due to the Mohammedan invasions the Sanskrit stage suffered and was pushed into the realms of oblivion. But till the fifteenth century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage in areas which now make the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Utter Pradesh and Gujarat.

The differences between the two aesthetic systems have percolated into their art of filmmaking too. The very distinct aesthetic experience a Hollywood and a Bollywood movie renders to the audience personifies these differences.

The three stages of any Artistic activity may be understood as:



The first and the second stage are interlinked as the artist's intuition expresses itself simultaneously with its expression through the artistic medium. The artist gets an idea which continues to grow, edit, change and manifest while it is executed in the artistic medium. For example, a painter has a vision which he wishes to concretize through a painting. As the painting progresses he may make changes to the painting which may or may not resemble the initial vision he had. Nonetheless, the final product of this synthesis will become a piece of art only if the audience enjoy it. In film making the script of the film is written by the scriptwriter, but it is visualized and executed by the director of the movie, who decides the entire mise-en-scene of the movie. It is ultimately his vision which makes the whole difference to the movie, and thus the director is considered to be the author of the film (Auteur Theory). The ultimate goal of any artistic endeavour is to provide aesthetic pleasure to the audience. This holds true for the art of filmmaking too, and more so than other arts, as the process of filmmaking requires a lot of financial capital, which would incur great losses if it is not able to lease the audience.

Although the history of film goes much beyond, the concept of film as art emerged with the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1908 France, a movement known as the Film d'art began and the first product was the film *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*. Louis Feuillade, first propounded the idea that since the film trances its ancestry to the established arts of theatre and painting, and like them provides aesthetic sensual pleasures of aural and sight, it too qualifies the criteria for being considered an art form in its own right. He considered film to be an amalgamation of popular, economic and artistic art. Popular, as it is derived from and caters to the popular taste of the audience, economic art as it employs artistic finesse and technology for its execution and an artistic economy because the process of film making is economic intensive. Ricciotto Canudo, after an year published his manifesto- "The Birth of the Sixth Art" and with it

initiated the debate about the element of realism in cinema as one aspect and the “pure, non- representational cinema based on form and rhythm” (key-concepts 386) on the other hand.

Difference in Art and Craft

| | Art | Craft |
|-------------|---|--|
| Definition: | The output of an endeavor which expresses the feelings, emotions and the vision of its maker. | An act involving a skill which produces an object. |
| Basis | Creativity | The artistic skills acquired through learning and practice. |
| Purpose | To provide Aesthetic pleasure | Utility, Ornamental, Economic enhancement |
| Focus | The emotions and the inspiration expressed | The optimum use of raw material and skills |
| Quantity | Single- One of its own kind- it may have copies, but there cannot be another original artifact its kind | Produced/ manufactured in large numbers- each a replica of the other |
| Origin | The artistic intuition of the artist | The craftsmen or the machinery used |
| Source | Vision of the artist | The skills of the craftsmen |
| Example | Leonardo da Vinci’s painting- “Mona Lisa” | The jewelry of Rajasthan, Gujarat |

The Film and Reality: