

# Kant's Aesthetic Theory: In the Light of Indian Poetics

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## Abstract

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The paper deals with Kant's notion of Aesthetics as reflected in his *Critique of Judgment* and its elucidation. An effort has been made to show some affinities between Kant and Indian aestheticians with special reference to literary form of art. Beauty is pleasurable since pleasure is defined as a feeling that arises on the achievement of purpose. Kant describes purposiveness as perceived both in the object itself and in the activity of imagination and understanding of their engagement with the object. Aesthetic judgments are disinterested. There are two types of interest- by way of *sensation* in the agreeable and by way of concepts in the *good*. Aesthetic judgments are free or pure only of any such interests. Aesthetic pleasure is not limited by the specific individual and hence it is considered as universal. Aesthetic judgment behaves universally, i.e., involves an expectation or claim on agreement of others. According to Kant, beauty may also remain in 'sublime'. It is said by Kant that when an object gives us pleasure is called beautiful. Viśvanātha is of the opinion that something which is source of pleasure is called beautiful. Such pain or other sentiments are impersonal one, but not personal. Had it been personal, the experience of pain and other feelings would have arisen in himself. Personal pain makes a man crippled while impersonal pain empowers him with creativity. According to Kant, aesthetic pleasure is disinterested and universal, which is completely admitted by the Indian Aesthetician. Actually, it is observed by us that when a drama or film is enacted or shown in the auditorium, there are persons of diverse taste, status and mood, but it is astonishing to note that all are enjoying the drama or film equally. A spectator can share the feelings of the characters and lose himself.

**Keywords:** disinterestedness, universal, sublime, *lokottara*, *sādhāraṇakṛti*

## I

The paper deals with Kant's notion of Aesthetics as reflected in his *Critique of Judgment* and its elucidation. An effort has been made to show some affinities between Kant and Indian aestheticians with special reference to literary form of art. Though Kant and Indian thinkers belong to different tradition and culture yet there are certain striking points of similarity between them if a serious comparative study is made, which I propose to undertake in this paper.

## II

The world which is seen can be grasped with the help of intellect. The world which is super sensuous cannot be known through the intellect. The visible world is governed by causal rules while the super sensuous world is ruled by individuality. Two worlds are there- one governed by intellect and another by intuition. The former goes as per natural intellectual law while other is dominated by natural law available from morality. Though apparently two worlds are different from each other, we cannot remain silent without differentiating the two worlds when we recommend the moral laws for governing the visible world. At that time, we feel a *harmony* between the visible and transcendental world. Generally, we receive a rule from our inner soul to govern these worldly activities through moral law. It would be taken for granted that there is a dominance of the transcendental world on this phenomenal one. Under this circumstance we are bound to accept the *harmony* of these two worlds without admitting their separate existence. Such harmonized situation is more prominent in Kant's aesthetic theory.

Though the scientific cognition comes from intellect and moral cognition from the intuition, Kant has accepted third power apart from intellect and intuition which is called the power of judgment. With the help of this third power, i.e., the power of judgment Kant has established harmony between intellect and intuition. This power can be taken as a bridge between natural world and moral or phenomenal world by establishing harmony and identity between them.

According to Kant, self has got three fundamental properties - Thinking, Feeling and Willing. Accordingly, three types of power have been presupposed by Kant like intellect, judgment and intuition. Through intellect we attain cognition, and through intuition willing power as to moral phenomenon is controlled. But what is the relation between happiness and judgment? To Kant we can understand with our power of judgment whether an object comes under any rule or not. We get rule from our intellect, but it cannot tell us what object is included in what rule. For this we have to depend on our power of judgment. On the event of absence of the power of judgment one cannot understand what object is befitting with what rule. Due to the lack of the power of judgment even the great intelligent persons cannot act properly. It is the function of the power of judgment to bring the specific object under general rules. Such rules may be known by us earlier or they may be searched through our power of judgment. If rule is known by us earlier, we can understand through power of judgment that it is befitting with law. This power of judgment is called determinant judgment.

It is known to us that the causal rule is applicable to all cases. But such rule may be different in different cases, which cannot be known by general rule. For this reason, we need a special research and consideration. Though all the rules are originated from the intellect yet intellect cannot reveal them. If intellectual rules are considered to be necessary, they are to be taken as contingent. For, in this special rule there is no inevitability and hence it may be of other type. After

observing and examining the specific case we have to invent rules befitting to them. Such judgment is called by Kant as Reflective Judgment.<sup>1</sup>

According to Kant, there is certain idea behind our imagination and such idea is taken as having purposiveness. In this case, the term 'purpose' is to be understood as something for which we do something, which is otherwise called end-in-view, but the term cannot be taken as a sense of meaning just as in Indian Philosophy the term *artha* may mean both end-in-view and meaning. If it is said that an individual inclines to take food (*bhojanārtha*), we take the term *artha* in the sense of purpose. Kant has used this term 'purpose' in this sense. To Kant we are able to invent various scientific rules through research due to having some purpose in nature. We can see the relation of one object with another in nature on account of this. We can claim to understand nature, if we are able to bring all natural incidents under the domain of certain rules. If the objects in nature remain in a haphazard or non-systematic or non-organised manner, they cannot come under our intellectual awareness. In other words, we cannot claim that they are understood properly. To be organised and intelligible are the same. Any rational enquiry presupposes the idea that an intelligent creator has constructed the world in order to make it intelligible for us.

The idea that the world has a particular purpose of its own leads us to do research work for inventing the rules corresponding to our ideas. Under this situation a pure bliss or pleasure arises in our mind. We think that the nature and the power of knowledge have got some harmony as if nature has adapted the power of knowledge. Such an idea gives pleasure in our mind. Kant claims that the beautiful has to be understood as purposive, but without any definite purpose. Kant again argues that beauty is equivalent neither to utility nor perfection with respect to our faculty of judgment, but its beauty will have an ascertainable purpose. That is why, beauty is pleasurable since pleasure is defined as a feeling that arises on the achievement of purpose. Kant describes purposiveness as perceived both in the object itself and in the activity of imagination and understanding in their engagement with the object.<sup>2</sup>

Such pleasure, Kant observes, is purely mental having no connection with the object. Though it is true yet it is to be understood that there is no guarantee that a mental object has no connection with the object. It can be substantiated with the case of sensation which, though mental, has got a relationship with the object. The whiteness, redness, softness etc. of an object comes to our awareness through sensation. When we have happiness or misery after perceiving an object, we do not have any cognition of the object. When an object seems to be beautiful or is understood as beautiful, pleasure invariably comes to our awareness.

When a specific type of pleasure arises from the perception of a specific type of object, it is called beautiful according to Kant. The feeling of pleasure comes from the awareness of beauty. When an object is known in perception or imagination, our various power of knowledge has got a harmonious activity. From the harmonious activity of the power of knowledge a specific type of pleasure is

originated. When the object is seen in imagination by mental eye then this object always seems to be in favour of our understanding. At this moment the specific type of pleasure comes into being. This object embedded in imagination is considered as beautiful. The power which compels us to think an object beautiful is called taste. However, there is a clear difference between the judgment of knowledge and the judgment of taste. In case of the former we have an awareness of the nature of the object while in the latter case we simply express our 'feeling' about the object. In other words, in case of judgment of taste we are not concerned about the merit and demerit of the object, but we express only the happiness or misery through its imagination or perception.

It is already pointed out earlier that the object after perceiving which we have pleasure is called beautiful. We may feel attracted to the sweets, but sweets cannot be taken as beautiful. If there is any pleasure in such cases, it is not of disinterested type. Aesthetic pleasure does not come from the fulfilment of bodily excitement. The object which is agreeable to us physically can give us pleasure where interest is involved. The pleasure involved with the desire of enjoyment is not an aesthetic one. The pleasant object in such cases cannot be taken as beautiful. If something is good and pleasant for having the fulfilment of some desire, it is not disinterested in the true sense of the term.

The satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. If a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends on the existence of the thing. Satisfaction is in the pleasant bound up with interest.

Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful. According to Kant - "The satisfaction which combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Such faculty always has reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or as necessarily connected with its determining ground. Now, when the question is if a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends or can depend on the existence of the thing either for myself or for anyone else, but how we judge it by mere observation (intuition or reflection) ... Taste is the faculty of judging an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is beautiful."<sup>3</sup>

Aesthetic judgments are *disinterested*. There are two types of interest- by way of sensation in the agreeable and by way of concepts in the *good*. Aesthetic judgments are free or pure only of any such interests. Interest is defined as a link to *real* desire and activity and thus also to a determining connection to the *real existence* of the object. In aesthetic judgment the real existence of the beautiful object is quite irrelevant. Kant accordingly claims that the aesthetic judgment must concern itself only with form (shape, arrangement etc.) but not sensible content (colour, tone etc.), since the latter has a deep connection with agreeable and thus to interest.

Whatever is good or pleasant in the light of morality is not disinterested.<sup>4</sup> The object from which we get the aesthetic pleasure gives us satisfaction in its imagination or perception. If there is another desire regarding the object, we shall have desire to fulfil this desire. It proves that such attainment of pleasure is not an aesthetic one. The aesthetic pleasure culminates in itself and hence it does not have a desire for other type of pleasure. If there is another desire, it would not be considered as an aesthetic pleasure.

According to Kant, whatever is beautiful, it is not beautiful to me at all but it is beautiful to all. Aesthetic pleasure is not limited by the specific individual and hence it is considered as universal. Aesthetic judgment behaves universally, i.e., involves an expectation or claim on agreement of others. The universality is distinguished first from the mere subjectivity of judgment such as 'I like honey' (because it is not at all universal, nor do we expect to be) and second forms the strict objectivity of judgment such as 'honey contains sugar and is sweet', because aesthetic judgment must be universal apart from a concept. Judgments of beauty are universally valid. In making a judgment of beauty about an object, one takes it that everyone else who perceives the object ought also to judge it to be beautiful. Judgment of beauty are not to be understood as predicating the concept of *beauty* of the object.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of taste is a faculty for judging an object in reference to the Imagination free to *conformity to the law*. If the Imagination is left free, it would project in accordance with the conformity to the law of the Understanding in general. The imaginative power should be free and yet of itself conformed to law, i.e., bringing autonomy with it. Free play of imagination and understanding which is the harmony of the faculties is probably most central notion of his aesthetic theory. 'Free Play' means freely harmonising without imagination's being constrained by understanding as it is in cognition.

According to Kant, beauty may also remain in 'sublime'. Let us see where we impose sublimity. We ascribe sublimity in large mountain, great ocean, water associated with big waves or forceful waterfall etc. Where we get an introduction of unlimited power and unlimited magnitude, we impose sublimity there. Considering the magnitude or power sublimity may divided in forms-mathematical and dynamic. The experience of sublime consists in a feeling of the superiority of our own power of reason, as a super sensible faculty over nature.

"Just because there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world i.e., imagination awakens the feeling of a super sensible faculty in us."<sup>6</sup>

The mathematical sublimity is found in large mountain range, vast ocean and large sky while the dynamical sublimity remains in forceful large mountain, water with large waves etc. it is told that sublimity is imposed in an object having infinite and largest power. But in any normal existing object such infinity and largeness cannot

remain and hence there cannot remain the sublimity. The idea of sublimity does not come from normal object, but it is originated in our mind. That which is sublime is beautiful.<sup>7</sup>

### III

Kant's Aesthetic Theory has got some affinities with literary form of art as found in Indian Aesthetics. It is said by Kant that when an object gives us pleasure is called beautiful. Viśvanātha is of the opinion that something which is source of pleasure is called beautiful. According to Indian Aesthetics, not only the positive entities become the cause our pleasure but negative object also becomes the source of our unalloyed pleasure. Even the pathos presented in literature can be the source of pleasure and hence pathos (*karuṇa*) will be the cause of pleasure, which is also beautiful. Viśvanātha told- "*karuṇādaḥ rase jāyate yat paramaṁ sukham/ sa cetasāmanubhavaḥ pramāṇam tatra kevalam*".<sup>8</sup> That is, in the feeling of pathos etc. we receive great pleasure which is evidenced through our experience. How is joy realized from the painful situations? In this situation our mind is absorbed in the performances and this absorption depends on the equilibrium of mind. When our mind is disturbed due to the non-equilibrium of three attributes like *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, the pain follows. If our mind remains in the state of aesthetic experience, there is something which forcibly snatches our mind and keeps it in a state of complete rest (*viśrānti*) ("*...rajastamovaicitryānuviddha-sattvamaya-nijacit-svabhāva-nivṛtirviśrānti-lakṣaṇaḥ*...").<sup>9</sup> At this stage an individual's mind attains real rest, which is characterized by the taste of its own blissful consciousness dominated by the *sattva* quality along with the association of *rajas* and *tamas*. In other words, one can enjoy the taste of his own blissful consciousness or self due to the prominence of *sattva*-quality. When there is prominence of *sattva*, it may provide a real mental repose (*viśrānti*). The prominence of *sattva* quality along with the association of others in a non-prominence stage gives rise to the taste of own self as blissful generating aesthetic pleasure. It is the aesthetic pleasure which only can do this thing. This joy is endowed with such power by which audience can enjoy this bliss even out of painful situation, but in our practical life human nature is found averse to experience of pain ("*Evam hi sati taddukhena so 'pi dukkhita iti kṛtvā rasasyātmateṇa niravakāśam bhavet*...").<sup>10</sup>

Such pain or other sentiments are impersonal one, but not personal. An object seems to be disinterested if it becomes impersonal. A personal feeling is always related to our interest. Had it been personal, the experience of pain and other feelings would have arisen in himself. Personal pain makes a man crippled while impersonal pain empowers him with creativity (*nirmāṇa-kṣamatva*). Here we get an *additional point* in Indian aesthetics which is called creativity, which is not found in Kant. This empowerment through impersonal pain leads Vālmīki to create a poetry in the form: "*Mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvamagamah śāśvatīḥ samāh/ Yat krauñcamithunādekamavadhīḥ kāmamohitam*!" (That is, O Fowler, you will never receive establishment in your life, as you have killed one of the pains of crane who were engaged in sexual pleasure).<sup>11</sup> Hence, Viśvanātha, the celebrated rhetorician,

has said that an art object is a peculiarly unworldly phenomenon, an extraordinary creation of supernatural supernormal genius and hence it cannot be governed by the rules of ordinary human intellect. In ordinary life sorrow arises from sorrow, fear follows fear, but in the world of art we find pleasure deriving from the painful, horrible and terrible situations. (*hetutvaṃ śokaharṣādergatebhyo lokasamśrayāt śokaharṣādayo loke jāyantām nāma laukikāḥ. Alaukikavibhāvatvaṃ prāptebhyah kāvya-samśrayāt sukhaṃ sañjāyate tebhyah sarvebhyo 'pīti' kā kṣatiḥ*).<sup>12</sup> Herein lies the role of Imagination which is not contradicted with the power of knowledge as observed by Kant.

According to Kant, aesthetic pleasure is *disinterested* and *universal* character, which is completely admitted by the Indian Aesthetician. When an individual becomes happy after seeing some object, this pleasure does not belong to him (i.e. arising from his personal life) and hence it is impersonal (*nairvyaktika*). For this reason, he remained untouched with his personal enjoyment, which has got some sort of pathological basis. This pleasure, not arising from the fulfilment of his self-interest, is disinterested and hence non-pathological. In the realm of experience, he will find any reason in his personal life so that he can have a feeling of enjoyment. Such type of feeling does not occur in the case of only one individual. It happens so in the case of all individuals. That is why, it is universal. It has been stated earlier that due to complete absorption in the aesthetic pleasure a man forgets his individual love, fear etc. At that time there remains a universal love which is aesthetic pleasure. When a terrific scene is represented, there is enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure called *bhayānaka*. In this case also we generally forget that this fear realized by us belongs to us and enjoy the universal character of fear which is free from other barriers like individualistic elements. The generalization or universalization called '*sādhāraṇīkṛti*' in Indian term is the process of idealization through which an individual may go from his personal emotion to the serenity of contemplation of a poetic sentiment. Actually, it is observed by us that when a drama or film is enacted or shown in the auditorium, there are persons of diverse taste, status and mood, but it is astonishing to note that all are enjoying the drama or film equally. A spectator can share the feelings of the characters and lose himself in the feeling of characters represented, but not personal (*Pramātā tadabhedena svātmānam pratipādyate*).<sup>13</sup> The poet and audience must have capacity of idealization. For this reason, a poet can present personal emotion as an impersonal aesthetic pleasure which is equally enjoyed by others. As this pleasure transcends the limitations of personal interest, it is disinterested (*lokottara*) universal pleasure. Among all individuals there is an agreeability of the situation which is technically called *sahridayatva* having the common heart among all the connoisseurs. In case of literary form of art there is an agreeable situation among the trio- poet, characters of the story and all the connoisseurs. That is why, aesthetic pleasure is shared by all leading to its universality and disinterestedness. A pleasure which transcends this-worldly interest is surely transcendental. As this-worldly pleasure arising out of this-worldly affair like the birth of a son, attainment of property etc. is not impersonal, disinterested and universal, it cannot be described as an aesthetic

pleasure as endorsed by Kant also. Aesthetic pleasure is the emotional mood revealed in a blissful knowledge free from all barriers. Though the principles of Aesthetic pleasure have been discussed in connection with the literary form of art by the Indian theoreticians, all such principles can be applied in other forms of art like dance, music etc.

According to Kant, beauty may also remain in 'sublime'. Let us see where we impose sublimity. We ascribe sublimity in large mountain, great ocean, water associated with big waves or forceful waterfall etc. Where we get an introduction of unlimited power and unlimited magnitude, we impose sublimity there. Imagination awakens the feeling of a super sensible faculty in us. Indian thinkers also subscribe such view. Such sense of sublimity is realized in the following description. Kālidāsa has taken the great mountain range Himālaya as sublime in the introductory verse of *Kumārasambhava*, which runs as follows: "*astyurasyām diśi devatātmā Himālaya nagādhirājah/pūrvāparau toyanidhī vigāhya stithaḥ prthivyā iva mānadaṇḍaḥ*"//.<sup>14</sup> That is, on the Northern frontier of this country that forms the heartland of gods, intercalating himself into eastern and western oceans like an evaluating rod of earth, there stands the sovereign as Mount Himalaya. The fact of being an evaluating rod of the whole world and its remaining in the eastern and western oceans are the feeling of the super sensible faculty in us. Therefore, due to having sublimity there it is beautiful no doubt.

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