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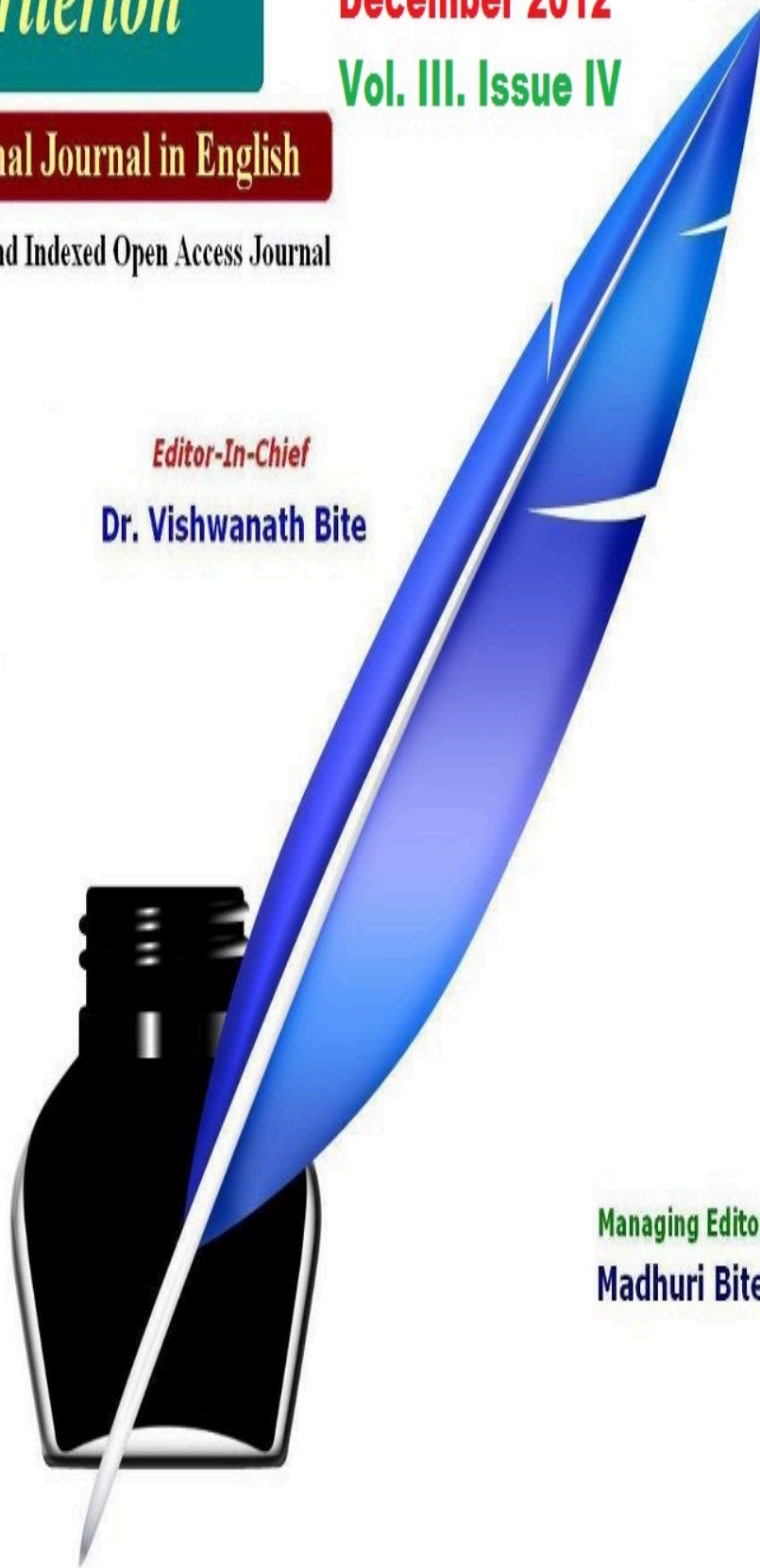
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[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Indian Aesthetics in Sri Aurobindo's Criticism

**Dr. K. Ujjwala**

Associate Prof of English  
K. L. University  
Green Fields, Vaddeswaram  
Guntur District  
Vijayawada.

The origin of Indian culture and philosophy marks the beginning of literary criticism in India. Indian poetic theory bears evidence to the impact of rich, cultural, philosophical and religious heritage on Sanskrit literature. The theory of beauty is not only confined to literary forms of Poetry, Literature and Drama but also applicable to other arts like music, dance, painting, sculpture etc. The Hindus first developed the science of music from the beginning of Vedic Hymns. The *Samaveda* was especially meant for music. And the scale with seven notes and three octaves was known in India centuries before Greeks had it. Probably Greeks learned it from Hindus. According to Swami Abhedananda, "It will be interesting to know that Wagner was indebted to the Hindu science of music, especially for his principal idea of the 'leading motive'; and this is perhaps the reason why it is so difficult for many people to understand Wagner's music."<sup>1</sup> Eminent Indologists and art critics like A. K. Coomaraswamy vouchsafe that the theory is capable of considerable extension even to the other Indian arts like painting. He points out, "It is true that this theory is mainly developed in connection with poetry, drama, dancing and music, but it is immediately applicable to art of all kinds, much its terminology employs the concept of colour and we have evidence that the theory also infact applied to painting."<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Indian critical texts had concentrated more on theory; and philosophy was not dissociated from literary criticism. The Vedas are the earliest pieces of recorded literature. As these were considered sacrosanct, the sudras were denied access to them and a fifth veda Panjama Veda – '*Natyaveda*' was created for their enjoyment with elements taken from *Rigveda*, songs from *Samaveda*, acting from *Yajurveda* and rasa from *Atharvaveda*.

Indian Poetics broadly developed into eight schools – Rasa, Alamkara, Riti, Guna/Dosa, Vakrokti, Svabhavokti, Aucitya and Dhvani – corresponding roughly to western theory of Pleasure, Rhetoric/Figures of speech, Theory of Form, Oblique poetry, Statement poetry, Propriety and Suggestion. The central tradition of Indian aesthetics originating in Bharata, the first and the oldest known exponent of the dramaturgic school of rasa, enriched by Anandavardhana, an exponent of dhvani theory, Bhamaha, an exponent of alamkara system, Kuntaka, the main proponent of Vakrokti, Vamana, the most notable exponent of aucitya codified by Mammata, Viswanatha and Jaganatha is a veritable treasure house of insights into problems related to creation, analysis and evaluation of works of literature.

The earliest distinct speculations on the nature of art and its purpose are clearly set forth by Bharata in the *Natyasastra* in connection with art and dance. Bharata, the oldest known exponent of the dramaturgic Rasa School accorded supreme importance to rasa in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. He synthesized the concept of poetry and the concept of drama by combining theology, philosophy and criticism. To many revivalistic Indian critics during the last two hundred years, Bharata had been the maker of the rasa theory. According to Mohit K. Ray, "The theory of rasa constitutes one of the most difficult theories in the entire arena of aesthetics,

and since rasa is regarded as the centre of gravity of poetic art, no one can avoid examining the merits and demerits of different theories trying to explain the process of aesthetic realization.”<sup>3</sup> It is at this point that we come to the essentially Indian approach to poetry and art. The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as rasa and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis, the soul’s pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. According to Sri Aurobindo, “More generally speaking aesthetics is the theory of rasa, of response of mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain taste in things or their essence. Passing through mind or sense rasa awakes a vital enjoyment of taste, bhoga in poet’s consciousness. The memory of the soul takes in broods over and transmutes the mind’s thought, feeling and experience in a larger part of process which comes by this aesthesis but it is not quite the whole thing; it is rather only common way by which we get at something that stand behind the spiritual being in us which has the secret of universal delight and eternal beauty of existence. The memory of poet’s soul takes in this enjoyment – the thought, the feeling and experience and turns it into ananda.”<sup>4</sup>

The new aesthetics that began with the impact of western thought culminates in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of art. Sri Aurobindo bases his philosophy on ancient Indian thought and experience revived, regenerated and reshaped in his own being. He is one of the most significant outstanding thinker who helped in recovering the lost tradition in aesthetics. The western concept of Art’s for Art’s sake is true only up to a certain point in Indian aesthetics. Aesthesis is not merely confined to reception of poetry and art but it extends to everything in the world. In Sri Aurobindo’s aesthetics all the dualities of ugliness, pain and pleasure are sphere of aesthesis. It encompasses heaven as well as earth, evil as well as good, spirit as well as matter. There can be an aesthetic response in truth also – a joy in the beauty, a love created by its charm, a rapture in the finding an aesthetic joy in its expression. According to Sri Aurobindo, “There is not only physical beauty in the world – there is moral, intellectual and spiritual beauty too. There are not only aesthetic values but life values, mind values and soul values that enter into art. Beyond the ideals and idea forces even there are other presences more inner and inmost realities, a soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be subject matter of an art still more rich and deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be.”<sup>5</sup>

The Indian approach stressed more on the principle of delight that the highest reaction of aesthesis is ecstasy than the western approach. Anandavardhana was a great exponent of dhvani and he uses the term ‘dhvani’ for his theory of poetic suggestion. Anandavardhana’s magnum opus *Dhvanyaloka* provides for the first time an insight into the secret of poetic beauty at once scholarly and illuminating and his aesthetics becomes the great dividing range between old criticism and new criticism. In Sri Aurobindo’s criticism the ancient idea is absolutely true that delight, ananda is the inmost expressive and creative nature of the spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, “This ananda is not pleasure of a mood or a sentiment or the fine aesthetic indulgence of the sense in the attraction of a form, superficial results and incidents which are often mistaken for that much deeper and greater thing by the minor poetic faculty, the lesser artistic mind but the enduring delight which, as the ancient idea justly perceived, in the essence of spirit and being.”<sup>6</sup>

The theory of dhvani owes its inspiration to the grammarians in general from Bhartrhari in particular and thus has a relation with the theory of sphota. The eternal sound is sphota that alone can convey ideas. Indian language and philosophy – starting from the word, sphota comes down to the articulated word which is comprehensive providing for the ascending and descending movements – from the preverbal state which is the source of inspiration of the

articulated word back to the inspiration and the source. Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics clearly reveal that if tone and intonation alone determine the meaning of our day-to-day utterance, is surely the rhythm that must decide the meaning of a poem. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Rhythm helps us not only to determine the meaning, realize the richness by drawing our attention to the overtones/undertones/association/suggestiveness of the diction but discriminate and fix the source of inspiration."<sup>7</sup>

It is at this point that we essentially come to the Indian approach to art and poetry. Indian art and poetry accepted intuition, inspiration, the unknown modes of being and all art could only be a product of detached contemplation of any experience that helped the poet to communicate the essence of an experience and the delight is associated with this essence. If poetry is the revelation of an inspired moment, the poet is only a medium of such revelation. A Swiss critic Breitinger affirms that, "The poet through the power of his inspiration creates entirely new things."<sup>8</sup>

Poetry is not a creation but a revelation of the supreme power. The inspiration plays an important role in the poetic composition. The poet is the medium connecting with the source of all creativity. The poet has a vision and he participates in this vision which may be said to be eternal and infinite one. According to Sri Aurobindo, "However it is the pseudo-classical or lower kind of classical art and literature which depends upon the faculty of intellect for achieving perfection for real classical art, works by a large vision and inspiration not by the process of intellect."<sup>9</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's poetry is the incarnation of great spiritual vision. The poet pins his faith in the rhythmic word which holds the highest intensities of rhythm, style and thought for the expression of soul-vision and world-vision. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Poetry is not merely beauty and power. It is merely sweet imagination, but creative vision – it is even the Rix, the mantra that impels the gods to manifest upon earth, that fashions divinity in man."<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has done a wonderful work in believing and exploring the power of inspiration not merely as a theory but a fact of both personal and general creative experience in the field of Indian aesthetics. He believed that inspiration is to be inwardly felt and realized rather than merely understood and grasped by pointing different levels of consciousness namely the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, and the Over Mind each producing poetry of its own particular intensity. The overhead planes and their characteristic powers are more or less spiritual in their origin and impulsion engage themselves partly or wholly, in the certain and communication of beauty in verse form the overhead poetry is born. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a Super Mind which sees things in their innermost, and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgency and rapture and its native language is revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and lustre. It is the possession of the mind by the Supramental touch and communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration."<sup>11</sup>

One might almost say that ancient India was created by the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and poetry was a revelation to the race of life of the gods and man and the meaning of the world and the beauty and power of existence and through its vision and joy and the height and clarity of its purpose it became creative of the life of people. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Ananda, the joy of the spirit in itself carrying in it a revelation of the powers of its conscious

being, was to the ancient Indian idea the creative principle, and ancient poetry did thus creatively reveal to the people its soul and its possibilities by forms of beauty and suggestions of power.”<sup>12</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has been a spiritual force not only in India but also where ever the thirst for spiritual quest is felt. He was fully alive to the mantric value of words and used them as vehicles to bridge the gap between the unuttered and uttered, thereby directing into the path of realization of truth. Sri Aurobindo is an evolutionary seer whose synthetic vision has not only recovered the salient principles of ancient Indian aesthetics but their potentialities and thus the ultimate aim of Sri Aurobindo’s aesthetics is to lift the humanity to the level of Supermind.

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