

Vedic Arts and Aesthetics from Mystery to Manifestation

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Those who have gone through the Vedic literature with a view to locate the arts and aesthetics, their nature and development, should have unfailingly noticed a variety of terms such as *vāstu* (architecture), *pratimā* (image), *pratikṛti* (counter image), *pramāṇa* (fore-measure), *pratimāna* (counter-measure), *citra* (painting), *alaṅkāra* (ornamentation), *rūpa-pratirūpa* (forms-counter forms), *peśa* (adorned/created forms), *rikha-likha* (inscribing-writing), etc., which encapsulate various kinds of artistic and aesthetic ideas and activities. Some of these find expression under the broader category of *śilpa*, a generic term which designates not only the abstract kinds of arts but also their gross and abstract forms. *Śilpa* is, in fact, 'a pervasive term which includes within the ambit of its meaning anything creative, imitative, ideational, or skilful which in one sense or the other involves dexterity of hand or mind or both.'¹ Viewed independently, many of the terms listed above, appear to be transcending the subtle and ideational stage and conceive a kind of gross and manifested art-form which is distinctly the same that we witness at present under a designated term. As most of them emanate from the *Ṛgveda* (RV), the antiquity of our tradition of arts and aesthetics extends at least up to the *Ṛgvedic* times. In fact, the *Ṛgvedic* descriptions form the basic substratum on which the later concepts of arts and aesthetics were evolved.

Significantly, the *Ṛgveda* and other Vedic treatises refer to a number of manufactured arts and crafts and the technologies involved in their creation. Some of these are wood-craft, leather-craft, ceramics, stone-work, bamboo-work, textile, basketry, metal-works, chariot-making, bead-making, etc. A number of professionals involved in the creation of these crafts such as *takṣā* (carpenter), *rathakāra* (chariot maker), *samitṛ* (currier), *kulāla* (potter), *vāsovāya* (weaver), *vayyā* (female weaver), *peśakari* (female embroider), *rājayitri* (female dyer), *bidālakāra* (basket maker), *bidālakāri* (female basket maker), *rajjusarja* (rope maker), *maṅikāra* (amulet maker), *dhmātṛ* (smelter), etc. have often been alluded which affirm to the existence of the specialised group of artisans in the Vedic society.

We do not, however, intend here to sketch elaborately the Vedic arts and crafts, singularly or collectively, nor do we intend to examine or review the existing writings on them. Our basic intention is to pin-pointedly focus on the Vedic concepts of the origin of arts and aesthetics. While proceeding with this standpoint, one thing which is overwhelmingly evident is that any sort of creativity in the Vedas is tinged with a kind of mysterious origin. We have dealt with it elsewhere² that the external manifestation of a technological action or an art-form is essentially in the Vedic view an outflow of a mysterious power inherent in its creator. This has been referred to as *māyā*, *śacī*, *viṣṭi*, etc.³ It is because of it that a number of Vedic divinities such as Prajāpati, Agni, Aśvins, Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra, Viṣṇu, Tvaṣṭṛ, etc. are supposed to be engaging themselves in the acts of creation. For instance, endowed with the power of *śacī*, Prajāpati is said to be creating the heaven and earth (RV, IV.56.3). In another passage of the R̥gveda (X.89.4), heaven and earth are assumed to have been fixed on two ends with the power of *śacī* by Indra as the wheels of a chariot are fixed by the axle :

यो अक्षेणेव चक्रिया शचीभि विष्वक्तस्तम्भ पृथिवीमुतद्याम

In the R̥gveda (I.112.8), *śacī* has been mentioned in reference to the Aśvins who, it is said, enabled Parāvṛja to walk, the blind R̥jraśva to see and the cripple Śrona to go. In the R̥gveda (I.117.13), they are stated to have rendered the aged Cyavana young:

युवं च्यवानमश्विना जरन्तं पुनर्युवानं चक्रथुः शचिभिः ।

Accomplished with the same power, the R̥bhus, the famous artificer, made their parents young, fabricated the *camasa*, the drinking bowl of the gods, and shaped the two horses of Indra swifter than an arrow from a bow :

शच्याकर्त पितरा युवाना शच्याकर्त चमसं देवपानम ।
शच्या हरी धनुतरातष्टेन्द्र वाहावृभवो वाजरत्नाः ॥

In the R̥gveda (IV.33.7), they have been praised for making the field fertile, leading forth the rivers, causing the plants sprung upon the waste and rendering waters spread over the low places. In another passage (III.60.2), their feats have again been described along with the shaping of a cow from the leather of a dead one :

याभिः शचीभिश्चमसान् अपिंशत यया धिया गामरिणीत चर्मणः ।
येन हरी मनसा निरतक्षत तेन देवत्वमृभवः समानश ॥

Here, *śacī* stands equated with *dhiyā*, i.e. intelligence as being instrumental in the execution of this act. The creative potentials of the R̥bhus have been expressed differently in a number of other passages (RV, I.3.1; 20.6; 110.5; 162.2; 4; IV.33.5; 35.2; 3; 4; 5; 36.4). All these creative feats are the outcome of the inherent mysterious power of the R̥bhus, often referred to as *śacī* and *dhī*.

Another term which stands for innate creative energies and is equivalent in meaning to śacī is māyā. Sāyaṇa often grasps it as a synonym of śacī and interprets it as a mental power or intelligence – शची माया इति प्रज्ञा नामसु पाठत् । As a creative energy, it is found associated with a number of deities such as Agni, Aśvins, Varuṇa, Mitra, Tvaṣṭṛ and Indra.

The Ṛgveda (I.160.3) provides that Agni who purifies all the worlds, invests the heavens, the waters and the clouds over the unbounded firmament by the energy of māyā:

स वह्निः पुत्रः पित्रोः पवित्रवान्पुनाति धीरो भुवनानि मायया ।

A number of passages allude to māyā as a creative energy of Varuṇa. The Ṛgveda (V.85.5) depicts Varuṇa as abiding in mid heaven and meting the firmament by the sun as if by a measure. The running of water-shedding rivers towards oceans is also a wonderful act of Varuṇa (ṚV, V.85.6), obviously impelled by māyā. He is spoken of as encompassing the entire universe by such kinds of wondrous acts (ṚV, VIII.3). Varuṇa is sometimes mentioned in the company of the deity Mitra. Both of them are accredited with causing the variegated clouds in the sky (चित्रेभिरभ्रैरुपतिष्ठतो), sending down the rains and sustaining the sun (सूर्यमाधत्थो) by their combined energies. The Ṛgveda (X.53.9) refers to māyā, the mysterious creative energy, in connection with Tvaṣṭṛ, the divine artificer, who fashions the drinking vessel of the gods:

त्वष्टा माया वेदपसामपस्तमो बिभ्रत्पात्रा देवपानानि शतमा ।

However, when we analyse the entire Ṛgvedic data with reference to māyā, we find Indra unique in the sense that he stands as the principal repository of māyā. A number of passages in the text refer to this energy of Indra in generating innumerable forms and causing destruction to his enemies. He is said (ṚV, II.17.5) to have fixed the mountains, directed the course of waters downwards, upheld the earth, the nurse of all creatures and stayed from falling:

स प्राचीनान्पर्वतान्दृंहदोजसा धराचीनमकृणोदपामपः ।
अधारयत्पृथिवीं विश्वधायसमस्तभ्रान्मायया द्यामवम्रसः ॥

He has generated the sun, the dawn and the firmament (ṚV, I.32.4):

आत्सूर्यं जनयन्द्यामुषासम ।

He has spread abroad upon the earth by his māyā, the swollen Sindhu (ṚV, IV.30.12). Being capable of affecting the desired form, Indra can manifest himself in any form (ṚV, III.38.7):

नि मायिनो ममिरे रूपमस्मिन् ।

A short hymn of three stanzas occurring in the tenth book of the Ṛgveda (X.15.3) again provides that Viṣṇu is the prime creator of the world. It commences with an invocation to Viṣṇu to help the formation of female womb as a breeding place for children. “May Viṣṇu form and mould the womb”, so opens the hymn. Other gods, Tvaṣṭṛ, the artificer, Prajāpati, the creator, and Dhātar, the preserver are also invoked to play their specific roles in the entire process of successful human procreation. Significantly, the entire corpus of the Vedic literature is replete with the parallels of embryology in reference to the manifestation of creative and technical skills.

The analysis of the terms śacī, māyā and viṣṭi and its cognates in the Ṛgveda, as given above, makes it abundantly clear that the earliest concept of art or craft or any kind of work involving creativity or application of techniques was conceived as proceeding from a latent mysterious power inherent in its creator. However, these notions could not remain confined to the Ṛgvedic people alone; they left their indelible mark on the Indian thought of the later times. The doctrine of māyā as elaborated in the philosophical systems of Vedānta has basically been built up on the edifice of these rudimentary ideas. Māyā in the Vedānta philosophy is not a human construct. It is prior to our intellect and independent of it. It is verily the generator of things and intellects, the immense potentiality of the whole world.⁸ All these mysterious notions have an obvious bearing on creativity, on the concepts of arts and aesthetics, for which we owe a lot to the Vedic literature.

A categorical enunciation of the divine origin of all kinds of arts and aesthetics is found in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AB, VI.27) :

देवशिल्पान्येतेषां वै शिल्पानामनुकृतीह शिल्पमधिगम्यते - हस्ती कंसो वासो हिरण्यमश्वतरीरथः शिल्पम् ॥

'These are the works or arts of the gods, in imitation of these works of art here is a work of art accomplished, an elephant, a goblet, a garment, a gold object, a mule chariot are works of art' (Trans.A.B.Keith).

As conceived in the text, it is in imitation (anukṛti) of divine works of art that any work of art is accomplished (adhigamyate). Evidently, the text makes a distinction between an original art-form which is divine and the other which is its counter production or imitation, indirectly by human beings. It further provides that a work of art is accomplished in him who comprehends this (शिल्पं हास्मिन्नधिगम्यते य एवं वेद) and also that arts lead to perfection/refinement of self (यदेव शिल्पार्नी आत्मसंस्कृतिर्वाव) as it is by them that a sacrificer perfects himself (आत्मानं संस्कुरुते) in the mode of rhythm (chandomaya).

According to N.R. Ray, the passage under discussion contains two essential conditions for being an art form : (1) it should be possessed with highest degree of skills (karma kauśala) and (2) it should be chandomaya which means that a piece of art

should necessarily have rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony, etc.⁹ in the same way as we witness in 'divine art' splashed over in variegated forms throughout the Nature. The text employs the term 'anukṛti' for artistic creations by man which literally means imitation of the divine forms or giving effect to their close resemblances. As it is not practically possible to recreate a natural phenomenon artistically, it indirectly implies that the workmanship of an artist should be in accordance to the laws of Nature which are reflected in its numerous creations such as flowers, plants, trees, sun, moon, stars etc., that were constantly observed and felt by our forefathers from time immemorial to have been accomplished with a unique kind of rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony, etc.¹⁰ The art forms thus created in accordance with these laws are supposed to be reflecting the highest degree of skill or workmanship of their creator. It has been claimed that these śilpas lead to the refinement of self, indirectly to the improvement and growth of human culture (AB, VI.27; VS, IV.9).

We come across numerous other passages in the Vedic treatises which further attest to the divine origin of the śilpas. In the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (TB, II.7.15.2), a number of divinities are alluded to as steeped in śilpa :

येभिश्शिल्पैः पप्रथानामदृंहत् । येभिर्दामभ्यपिंशत् प्रजापतिः ।
येभिर्वाचं विश्वरूपां समव्ययत् येभिरादित्यस्तपति प्रकेतुभिः ।
येभिस्सूर्यो ददृशे चित्रभानुः । येभिर्वाचं पुष्कलेभिख्ययत् ।

'With these śilpas Prajāpati strengthened the heaven. With these he made the heaven shapely. With these he expanded the speech thoroughly. O Agni! You make the king imbued with those splendours by which the Āditya shines with enhanced brilliance; by which the sun is seen with numerous rays; by which the speech is made complete and capable of denoting all meanings' (Trans. R.V. Tripathi as given in Kalātattvakośa, Vol.I, 2001, 200).

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ŚB, III.2.1.5) avers that whatever is a counterform/fascimile (i.e. imitated from divine or nature) is śilpa – यद्ब्रह्म प्रतिरूपम् तच्छिल्पम्. The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (II.7.15) makes a specific reference to śilpa as descended from heaven to the earth – दिवः शिल्पम् अवतलम्. Corresponding to this are many passages of the Ṛgveda (VI.32.1; X.39.14; etc.) in which the artistry of the incantation (mantra) is compared to that of a weaver or carpenter. In some descriptions, the artist is thought of as visiting some heaven, and there seeing the form the angel or architecture to be produced on earth. Citing the Śaiva Āgamas of the later times A.K. Coomaraswamy grasps it in the sense of 'Kailāsabhāvanā' which conceives that the architecture of the Śaivite temples is a replica of forms prevailing in Kailāsa.¹¹

Divine origin of the Vedic arts and crafts may also be assumed on the ground that prior to their execution by human hands; these are closely associated with the creative energies of the divinities. Though most of them are found embellished,

somehow or other, with these energies, three of them, Tvaṣṭṛ, Ṛbhus and Viśvakarman assume greater significance as they use to perform all kinds of technological and artistic actions for the sake of other deities. Hence, they conform to a group of divine artificers.

Foremost and oldest in concept among them is Tvaṣṭṛ. We have tried to furnish some details about his origin and person elsewhere.¹² What is strikingly evident about this Vedic deity is his close association with the creation of 'rūpa' (form) which places him to an unrivalled position of a creator – god. In a number of Vedic hymns, all kinds of forms, animate and inanimate, are alluded to as originating from this deity. He is the deity who had adorned with forms the two generatresses, heaven and earth and, in fact, all existence (ṚV, X.110.9; AV, V.12.9):

य इमे द्यावापृथिवी जनित्री रूपैरपिंशद्भुवनानि विश्वा

He is the master of all the forms (त्वष्टा रूपाणि हि प्रभुः, RV, I.188.9), their ruler (त्वष्टा वै रूपाणामीशे, TB, I.4.7.1; SB, V.4.5.8) and creator (त्वष्टा रूपाणि विकरोति, TS, I.5.9.2; TB, I.8.1.2; त्वष्टा वै रूपाणां विकर्ता KS, V.4, XXVI.7). As all the forms are the products of his own creative skill, Tvaṣṭā is conceived as manifested in them. He is, therefore, called the viśvarūpa, the omniform (ṚV, I.130.10, III.55.19, X.10.5) or pururūpa, the multiform.

As a divine artificer, Tvaṣṭṛ is accredited with fashioning all the creatures. He shapes them in the womb. He is frequently mentioned as transforming the cast seed into form:

त्वष्टा रूपाणि विकरोति रेतस एव सिक्तस्य बहुशो रूपाणि विकरोति (TS, I.5.9.2)

रेत एवं हितं त्वष्टा रूपाणि विकरोति (TB, I.8.1.2)

He is, therefore, the lord of creatures (prajāpatiḥ, ṚV, IX.5.9). Being the giver of favourable progeny, he bears the epithet sujanimā (ṚV, X.2.5, 18.6; AV, XII.2.24), the giver of glorious births. He is also the generator of all kinds of animals (त्वष्टा रूपाणां जनिता पशूनाम्, AV, IX.4.6). Being invoked in the sacrifice, he provides the sacrificer with them (TB, II.5.7.4). One of the principal tasks of Tvaṣṭṛ as a shaper is to provide the forms with uniformity. He removes whatever is uneven, cut or defiled. He renders smooth what has been injured in our body and heals whatever is torn (तन्वो यद्विलिष्टमिति यद्विवृधं तत्संधत्ते, SB, I.9.3.6; IV.4.3.14).

Apart from being an acknowledged shaper of living beings, Tvaṣṭṛ is accredited with fabricating some specific objects. These include the vajra of Indra, camasa, the drinking bowl of the gods and a quick moving horse (आशुरश्वः). He is the renowned shaper of Indra's thunderbolt with which the latter accomplishes the killing of Vṛtra

and releases waters (RV, I.61.6, 85.9; AV, II.5.6, XX.35; etc.). Likewise, by his creative prowess of māyā, he fabricated camasa, the bowl, used by gods for drinking Soma (RV, X.53.9). Elsewhere, he is accredited with shaping a new camasa (उत्त त्वं चमसं नवं त्वष्टुर्देवस्य निष्कृतम्, RV, I.0.6) which was later divided into four by his worthy disciples, the Ṛbhus. Yet another feat enumerated under his credit is the fashioning of a quick moving horse, of the wind's speed (वातरन्हा भव वाजिनि, AV, VI.9.1). It is worth noting that, at times, the expressions of his technical skills are alluded to through the Sanskrit root takṣa, to fashion, which in several other contexts manifests the creative skills vividly.¹³ It is due to his dexterity in creating a variety of forms that he has been conceived as supāṇiḥ or as supāṇim devam, the epithets indubitably expressing his proficiency in fashioning the objects.

Divine character of creative energies in Indian art tradition is so pervasive that it covers both the divine and ordinary practitioners. As we have observed earlier, these are divine because these are thought to have descended from a divine source. Nevertheless, there is another dimension, contrarious in nature, in which even an ordinary practitioner of art or craft obtains the status of a divinity by dint of his creative abilities. A classic example of this up-gradation from mortal to divine in the Vedic fold is the case of the Ṛbhus – the trinity comprising Ṛbhu, Vibhu and Vāja, referred to as sons of Sudhanvana (saudhanvanāḥ, RV, I.110.4, 8, 161.2, 7, 8; III.60.3; IV.35.1, 8). There is not even a shred of doubt that the Ṛbhus were originally mortals who by dint of their workmanship rose to the status of divinity. The Ṛgveda (I.110.4) describes in unequivocal terms that the Ṛbhus being mortals attained immortality :

मर्तासः सन्तो अमृत्वमानशुः

Quite a number of passages in the text link this elevation of the Ṛbhus to their good deeds (sukṛtam/sukṛtyā). The Ṛgveda (IV.35.8) depicts the sons of Sudhanvan as becoming gods and soaring aloft in the sky like falcons by their good deeds :

ये देवासो अभवता सुकृत्या श्येना इवेदधि दिवि निषेद

The Ṛgveda (IV.34.9) asserts that the gods were so pleased with their good deeds that Vāja became the artificer of the gods, Ṛbhukṣan of Indra and Vibhvān of Varuṇa :

वाजो देवनामभवत्सुकर्मेन्द्रस्य ऋभुक्षा वरुणस्य विभवाः ।

In some passages, they are stated as reaching to the gods and acquiring the sacrifice or its part through their skilful work. From all these accounts, it is amply clear that through their assiduous performance of good works, the Ṛbhus obtained divinity, exercised superhuman powers and became entitled to receive praise and adoration and also a share of sacrifice.

Amongst the marvellous feats of their artistic and technical dexterity five have uniformly been alluded to in the Vedic literature. These incorporate fashioning of a chariot for Aśvins, creation of two steeds for Indra, restoring the old parents to their youthfulness, shaping the cow from the hide of a dead one and turning a single camasa into fourfold.¹⁴ In addition, they are spoken as fabricating hymn for Agni (अग्नये ब्रह्म ऋभवस्ततक्षुः, RV, X.80.7) and sacrifice for the sacrificer (अध्वरमतस्त, RV, III.54.12). In the R̥gveda (IV.33.7), they are accredited with making the fields fertile, leading forth the rivers, causing plants sprung upon the waste and rendering waters spread over the low places :

सुकेत्राकृण्वन्नयन्त सिन्धून धन्वातिष्ठन्नोषधीर्निम्नमापः ।

In several passages, they are spoken as fashioning riches (RV, IV.33.8,10,11):

अतक्षन्तवृभवो रयिं नः

From these descriptions of multifarious skills of the R̥bhush found in the Vedas, it is quite evident that they are pre-eminently the artificers of versatile ability. We may naturally surmise that it was on account of these and the expertise obtained in artistic and technical creations that they were elevated to the class of divinities. This further strengthens the Vedic notion that creative energies whether expressed by divinities or humans were essentially conceived to be divine.

Creative energies criss-crossing the divine and human domains and elevating its practitioners to the realm of divinities may also be exemplified by the case of Viśvakarman, a prominent divine artificer who occurs as a deity for the first time only in the tenth maṇḍala of the R̥gveda but completely surpasses Tvaṣṭṛ and R̥bhush, the earlier predecessors belonging to his class, during the post Vedic times. He becomes the sole repository of all kinds of artistic and technical skills during this period and people indulging into different creative pursuits are found owing allegiance to him and seeking his protection and refuge.

References to Viśvakarman as a Supreme Artificer occur in the two successive hymns of the tenth maṇḍala (81 and 82) of the R̥gveda wherein he is sketched as pervading the entire universe. A verse (RV, X.81.3) depicts him thus, 'Having eyes everywhere, and having a face everywhere, having arms everywhere, and having feet everywhere, he traverses (heaven) with his arms, (earth) with his swift-moving (feet) and exists a god without companion generating heaven and earth.'

विश्वतश्चक्षुरुत विश्वतोमुखो विश्वतोबाहुरुत विश्वतस्पाद् ।
सं बाहुभ्यां धमति सं पतत्रैर्घावाभूमी जनयन् देव एकः ॥

Originally an essential name of a Supreme Artificer, Viśvakarman becomes in

the post Vedic times the master architect of the angels and patron of human craftsmen.

He is very often found in the later art traditions as 'himself assuming the form of a human architect in order to produce a particular work.'¹⁵

Significantly, the Vedic data on arts and aesthetics are not constricted only to elucidation of their divine origin; these also deal with the processes as how the creative energies, essentially mysterious and divine in nature, come to fruition by way of manifestation. It is thought that these are at first visualised in the mind and then transformed into actual creations. This is what Coomarswamy has termed as 'the psychology of aesthetic intuition.'¹⁶ Under the Vedic concept, an art is no art unless it actualises what is in the divine mind, or in other words, the divine purpose is realised in and through mind. 'The whole process, up to the point of manufacture,' observes Coomarswamy, 'belongs to the established order of personal devotions, in which worship is paid to an image mentally conceived (dhyātvā yajet); in any case, the principle involved is that true knowledge of an object is not obtained by merely empirical observation or reflex registration (pratyakṣa), but only when the knower and known, seer and seen, meet in an act transcending distinction (anyor advaita). To worship any Angel in truth one must become the Angel.'¹⁷ Hence, whatever object may be the artist's chosen or appointed theme becomes for the time being the single object of his attention and devotion; and only when the theme has thus become for him an immediate experience can it be stated authoritatively from knowledge.

We come across several allusions in the Vedic literature subscribing to this aesthetic notion. In the Ṛgveda (III.60.2), the creation of two vigorous steeds for Indra by the Ṛbhus has been imagined through their mental exercise (येन हरी मनसा निरतक्षत्). In the Ṛgveda (IV.36.2), a well-constructed and undeviating chariot belonging to Aśvins is said to be devised by the Ṛbhus by mental power :

रथं ये चक्रुः सुवृतं सुचेतसोऽविहरन्तं मनस्परि ध्यया ।

Similar conceptions of the exercise of mental power are to be found in some other passages of the Ṛgveda (III.38.1, X.39.14, 51.9-10) where creation of hymns and praises has been likened to the fashioning of wood or chariots, purporting that the fabrication of the former required as much of imagination (the power of having mental images) as the latter. In certain other descriptions, wisdom (vāc) is spoken of as 'seen' or 'heard' (X.71.4) and ideas are said to be 'hewn out' (takṣ) in the heart (hṛd) (X.71.8). Thus, in the Vedic view, mind is the very locus where the mystery of the creative energies is revealed in the form of an idea before its actualisation.

Role of mind in envisioning the divine order and reproducing it in various art-

forms, as illustrated in the Ṛgvedic passages above, finds an ideological formulation in the Kausitaki Upaniṣad which refers to the views of one Citra Gārgyāyana, a contemporary and teacher of Uddālaka. The text (I.3) describes his idealistic conception of art as 'मानसी प्रतिरूपा चाक्षुसी,' 'the visible or actual is but a reflection of the mental.' According to Benimadhab Barua, in the Gārgyāyana's view, 'we obtain the first reference to an attempt at defining art in terms of mind which is a divine element, – a faculty which imposes its own form upon nature.'¹⁸ His view is different from and yet follows closely the Aitareya philosophy, cited above, which regards all human arts, including the art of generation, as an imitation in some way of the works of nature, the Divine arts (deva śilpa). Like that of the Aitareya, it also presumes the existence of a divine order actualising itself through the mysterious manifestation of nature.¹⁹

This 'psychology of aesthetic intuition', as elaborated in the Vedic texts, left its indelible impact on the later art traditions, especially on those which evolved under the tutelage of Buddhism. That art is purely a mental activity (citta saññā), has been depicted in a number of Buddhist texts. The Aṭṭhasālini refers to it as a mental concept arising in the mind of a painter, that such and such a shape (rūpa) must be made in such and such a way. It avers that 'all the various art (sippa) in the world are produced in the mind' (PTS, ed. p.64). 'The difference in so far as Gārgyāyana's view is concerned,' observes Barua, 'is that Buddha precluded all idea of Divine Being external to man.'²⁰ He came to regard art as a product of human imagination, a representation of ideas conceived in the mind of the artist. Thus, speaking of a famous picture of his time, Buddha pronounced that the caraṇa citra was really conceived by the mind :

चरणं चित्तं चित्तेन एव चिन्तितम्

(Saṃyutta, Khandha-Saṃyutta, 5.8, quoted in the Aṭṭhasālini, p.64)

Buddhaghosa, the commentator, has expounded Buddha's view thus, "In the world there is no finer artsmanship than that which is displayed in a piece of painting, and of paintings the one called caraṇa is admitted to be the very best. In drawing this class of pictures the thought arises in the mind of the painters : 'such and such kinds of figures are to be drawn in this picture.' By this thought the drawing of outline, colouring, polishing, and such other detail works of drawing follow, in consequence whereof a wonderful figure appears on the caraṇa citra. 'Let that go above this figure, let that go below that' – the finishing touch is given afterwards to the picture according to thought. Similarly whatever products of art there are in the world, all are wrought by the mind” :

चित्तेनेव चिन्तितन्ति चित्तकारेण चिन्तित्वा कतत्ता चित्तेन चिन्तितम् नाम

(Sāratthappakāsinī, Ceylonese Ed., p.469, as quoted by Barua)

The Buddha introduced this psychological view of art by way of analogy of his

explanation of the diversity of the forms of life and of their experiences. Hence, there can be no doubt that Buddha's was a later development on psychological lines of Gārgyāyana's ideal theory.²¹

That this aesthetic notion took a philosophical tinge in Buddhism is obvious enough from the tenets of Vijñānavāda, the Mahāyānic sect, which believes that there is nothing external except the reflections of the pictures of the mind :

दृश्यते न विद्यते बाह्यं चित्तं चित्रं हि दृश्यते ।

(Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, III.33, Ed. P.L. Vaidya, Darbhanga)

Here, vijñāna or consciousness stands at the substratum of entire existence (सर्वम् बुद्धिमयम् जगत). To it, matter is an idea and nothing more. Things are just the clusters of sensations. The objects of knowledge are either ideas actually imprinted on the sense, or those perceived by attending to passions and operations of the mind. External objects independent of consciousness are not intelligible.²²

There is no dearth of analogous concepts in the Vedic and Sanskrit literature. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (IV.1.7) refers to antar-hṛdaya-ākāśa, 'the immanent space in the heart'²³ where the types of art exist in formal operation. In the Chhāndogya Upaniṣad (VIII.14) ākāśa is called 'the revealer of name and form or idea and image (nāmarūpa),' and identified with Brahman, the Imperishable, the Self. Here the inwardly known reality (antar-jñeya) exists in the form of pure knowledge (jñāna-sattva-rūpa) and reveals itself against the ideal space like a reflection (pratvimbavat), or as if seen in a dream (svapnavat). With this point of view, actual objects (rūpaṇi) seen in space are really seen not as such, but only as coloured areas being altogether mental and conventional.²⁴ It would be appropriate here to cite the example of Vālmīki, the author of Rāmāyaṇa. It is said that prior to its composition, he visualised the entire epic, the characters presenting themselves to his vision living and moving as though in real life. These kind of aesthetic formulations, alluded to in the earlier texts, where heart is said to be the support of all things and wherein all the possibilities of being can be realised, seem to be closer to the aesthetic notion of saḥṛdaya, literally, 'having heart', elaborated in the later texts such as Sāhitya Darpaṇa, Dhvanvāloka, etc.

From the foregoing analysis of the Vedic arts and aesthetics, it is well-nigh evident that the basic concepts with regard to these which were evolved during the Vedic period permeated gradually into the ideological fabric of the later times to prepare a solid foundation on which the conceptual edifice of Indian arts and aesthetics was erected.

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