Chapter-VII
Puruṣārtha in Indian Aesthetics

The traditional Indian works of art and aesthetics have attached great importance to the close relationship between art and life. The aim (prayojana) of art is generally regarded as the fulfillment of the four Puruṣārthas. Art is always related with life. In the Indian tradition there is no such thing as art for art’s sake. In the words Mulk Raj Anand “The Hindu view of art is the Hindu view of life, life as interpreted by religion and philosophy”. For the Hindu the ultimate goal of the life of an individual is self-realisation, which is nothing but the realisation of the Supreme Reality, whom the Hindus call by various names, such as, Brahma, Paramātman, Śadāciva, Śakti, etc. In the Indian philosophy it is considered that one is transported to the realm of eternal bliss (Ānanda) when one attains self realisation. Similar state of bliss, although aesthetic experience in essence is the experience of a mundane kind, is realised in aesthetic experience, because of ananda or pure joy. That is why Viswanath Kaviraj in his Sahityadarpan has regarded Kavyānanda the joy of poetic creation and appreciation, as Brahmānanda sahodaraḥ, which literally means, “twin brother of the joy of Brahma-realisation”. In aesthetic experience one has to transcend above the ordinary level of empirical or practical experience, free from attachment and personal consideration and enjoy beauty. The Sastras say that Brahman is Sat-cit-ananda (Sachidānanda), Existence- consciousness – Bliss. True art, therefore, should aim at the realisation of the Highest Bliss, the Brahman. In the Hindu conception of art (kalā), attainment of Brahman is the ultimate goal of all fine arts, such as kavya (poetry), Sāngit (dance-music), sthāpatya (painting, architecture, etc). All kalas (art forms) are brought in much three aspects of Brahmatāda, poetry under Śabdabrahmavāda, music-dance-drama under Nādabrahmavāda, and architecture, sculpture, etc., under Vastubrahmavāda. It is believed that these three are the three aspects (Trimurti) of the Brahman whose three aspects are represents by the three Deities – Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara.
In the Indian Kāvyāšāstra (poetics) the poet is compared to the Supreme Creator, Brahmā. It is maintained even in the Sruti that the mind of the Creator (kavi) is omniscient omnipresent and omnipresent. The poet like the Great Creator creates the aesthetic objects by making free employment of the power of imagination (pratibhā or poeticgenius). Kavirmanisi paribhu swayambhuh. It has been maintained by the ancient writers on aesthetics that there is even one plus point in the poetic creation which is not found in the creation of Brahma Himself. That aspect is that whereas in the divine creation we find a combination of the beautiful and the ugly, pleasure pain, in the poetic creation everything is beautiful, and everything is pleasurable. Moreover, it is said that poetic imagination can cross the bounds of natural limits. “Where the sun cannot reach, poetic imagination can reach”. This is the reason why so much importance has been given to kala (art) in human life. The great Sanskrit grammarian and poet Bhatrihari remarked: “Sahitya sangeet kala vihina saksat paśu visānahina”. The meaning is that “the man who is not interested in literature, music, dance and arts (in general) is like a tail-less animal”.

In the Indian tradition, the term “kavi” (poet) is applied to one who has taken up the creative enterprise. Ācārya Ānandavardhana says, “In this infinite world the poet is the creator. He transforms the world as it pleases him” 2 Each artistic creation is creation (sristi) in miniature which finds its inspiration and source in the original creation of Lord Brahmā, the creator of the Universe, who is the Lord of artistic creations to. The philosophers, the risis of ancient India, who visualized and contemplated or the Ultimate Reality, were also regarded as Kaivs. The artist like the rise begins his work with the visualization of the reality that he wants to create. Thus, the artist passes through a state of initial spiritual activity for the visualization and the subsequent creation, which is creation in the special sense.

According to Indian aesthetics, artistic creation begins only when the artist is in a state of detached emotional calmness. The artist needs concentration and meditation like the yogi for the realisation of aesthetic experience, which is an experi-
ence of pure joy (ananda). Aesthetic experience in this sense is comparable to religious experience. As M.Hiriyana said: "art experience is regarded as identifiable with the ultimate goal of life as it is conceived by the idealists. When we take the ideal of life as it is conceived by others, art experience affords the same escape from worldly concerns as that ideal, when attained does; but it also does more, for while the latter does not represent a state of supreme joy, the former does. According to both, it is one of the only two such values recognized by Indians – Ātmananda (spiritual bliss) and Rasānubhava (aesthetic enjoyment). In the Indian aesthetics, art experience is mainly defined in the context of the theory of Rasa, which is generally accepted as the aesthetic foundation of the arts. Aesthetic experience is known as Rasasvādana, the tasting or enjoyment "Rasa is a term which does not find its equivalent word in English language. It is, however, known as aesthetic enjoyment. Bharata Muni in his Natyaśāstra introduced the theory of Rasa for the first time. He used the term "Rasa" in the technical sense as the quality of the beauty of art in general. It is also the requirement for the production and appreciation of the beauty of poetry, music, dance and drama. Bharata technically defined Rasa as "Vibhāvanubhāva vyabhicārisamyogādṛstā rasa nispatti" ("From the union of the stimulant the determinants and the consequents, the birth of rasa takes place") only when Rasa is present (Rasavant) a work of art is beautiful; if, on the other hand Rasa is absent (Nirasa) an artistic work is worthless; it cannot be considered as a beautiful work of art. Art experience, therefore, is Rasa experience.

Bharata's Natyaśāstra in the earliest available complete work on aesthetics. It is basically a treatise on dramaturgy, a work on the technicalities of drama (which includes poetry, music dance also). It is a voluminous collection of rules and instructions concerned with the production of drama and the education of the actors. This work also aims at helping the rasīka (aesthete), who is eager to enjoy and appreciate beauty. Moreover, it aims at imparting to the ordinary people, the laymen, who have no access to the knowledge of the Vedas and Śāstras. Its important aim is to impart knowledge of the Puruṣārtha (the ends of human life) to the masses of people,
who are busy with the activities of practical life of the householder. It aims at imparting guidance about Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, in the course of witnessing drama. The primary aim of dramatic presentation, according to Natyasastra, is the intellectual, moral and spiritual upliftment of the spectators, most of whom are ordinary people. According to Bharata, drama presents the relation between action and its result, thereby elevating the spectator morally. Hence, Bharata called Natyasastra "Itihasa". It is an account of the narrative of the historical facts of the past accompanied by the teachings on Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa. Bharata regarded the Natyasastra as PañcamaVeda, the Fifth Veda, considering the spiritual and worldly knowledge it imparts. The Mahabharata, which is an Itihasa, is also called PañcamaVeda. According to Bharata, Lord Brahma is the author of Natya Veda.4 Brahma produced it in order to bring about co-ordination among the Vedas and UpaniGandas.5 Natya Veda incorporates in it learning (knowledge) from RigVeda, Geet (music) from SamaVeda, Abhinaya (dance gestures) from Yayurveda and Rasa for Atharva-Veda.

The NatyaVeda is an instrument of instruction for the people belonging to the underprivileged class of society. Out of the four classes (castes) in the society, viz., Brahm, Kasetriya, Vaisya and Sudra, the Sudras (who are mainly the underprivileged working-class) are not allowed the learning of the Vedas. Hence, the need arises for imparting knowledge and guidance to these people for leading their life in the right way so that they may contribute to the welfare of the society and the country. The drama has been regarded as the best vehicle for opening up the vistas of true knowledge and for imparting moral lessons among all sections of people in the society, including the Sudras. This is the reason for the creation of NatyaVeda by Lord Brahma.

For the traditional Indian artist, artistic creation is the supreme means for realising the universal Being. Art is a discipline (sadhanaa Yoga and a sacrifice (yajna). Sadhana is a means of achieving a state of complete harmony (samarasya) and of the
total release from the trials and tribulations of this world. This Sadhana leads to a recognition of one’s true self. The artist as a Sadhaka aims at the realisation of the true self. The spiritual, mental and physical discipline required in the search for complete harmony is yoga. Yoga is adeptness or proficiency in any activity undertaken by an individual; this is the karmasu kausalam of the Bhagavad-Gītā. All activity inasmuch as dedicated to the Supreme Lord should be considered as sacrificial offering. The Satapatha Brāhmaṇa elaborated the concept of cosmic sacrifice mentioned by the Upanishadic literature. The artist is obliged to the offering of his best to his Iṣṭadevata. Based upon the Hindu spiritual and philosophical thought, the Indian artist is involved in a discipline for the attainment of the Infinite, the Universal Being, in his individual self. Through his own creation, the artist seeks to evoke a state of pure joy (ananda). The artist is like the worshipper who sees again and again the Godhead and who has attempted to recreate the ultimate state of his realisation through the specific techniques of his art. Artistic creation shall be deemed successful if it achieves the supreme artistic purpose of creating a state of bliss second only to the seeker’s ultimate goal of absolute bliss in the Brahman (Brahmānanda). The aesthetic experience, therefore, was termed Brahmānanda sahodarabh as mentioned already. 6

The writers on poetics (Kavyaśāstra) and dramatics (Natyaśāstra) deal with the topic of Kavya-prayojana (purposes of poetry) at some length. Among the various purposes of poetry, the two most noteworthy are priti (or ananda) and vyutpatti. Bharatmuni says that the Puruṣārthas-Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa- are the main topics presented in drama, and that Natya is the performance for amusement or entertainment. Natya is kridāniyaka, viśrantiyana and vinodakarana meant for play, peace of mind and amusement. In other words, vyutpatti (instruction in the knowledge of the four Puruṣārthas) and priti (aesthetic pleasure or delight) are the two main objectives of poetry. According to Acarya Ananda vardhana, the propound of the Dhvani (Suggestiveness) Theory of poetry, Bharata his given primary importance to Vyutpatti, and secondary important to pleasure or delight as the major goal of
drama. The spectators get Vyūtpatti and prīti by watching a drama. The drama is a source of knowledge regarding the four goals of life. The knowledge given by a drama is easier to accept as it is in a pleasing manner and is the result of delight. The main purpose of a drama is to create prīti, i.e., aesthetic pleasure which is nothing but tasting of one's own blissful consciousness. Though temporary it gives a glimpse into the bliss of Brahman (Brahmānanda). As mentioned above, for the Indian artist, artistic creation is the supreme means for realizing the Universal Being. Art is a sadhana, yoga and yajñā for the artist. Manu codemns certain forms of art like dance, song and instrumental music regarding them as human weakness born of kāma. But Yajñavalka takes a liberal view of the fine arts and recommends music in view of its utility for salvation. Thus the tradition of nātya and nṛtiya does not fall under kāma, but is looked upon as a means to the higher end.

The history of Indian classical dance shows that it did retain its position as a form of worship. According to tradition, dance was a pure creation with no practical aim. Siva’s famous cosmic dance is the spontaneous expression of His overflowing bliss (ānanda) where sheer creative beauty exists. It is believed that Siva’s dance frees the devotees from the clutches of illusion. Aesthetic delight has been considered as a great source of the experience of the divine Self.

Let us now deal more with the emphasis on the pursuit of the Puruṣārthas in the Indian writings on art and aesthetics with special reference to Bharata’s Natya śāstra. Abhinavagupta refers to the view of some critics that drama produces only joy or delight in the spectators and not such feelings as sorrow, etc. Dhananjaya in his Dasārtipaka maintains that the aim of drama is to arouse joy among the spectators. Abhinavagupta deals with the topic of drama and the Puruṣārthas in his commentary on Dhvanyaloka of Anandavardhana. On the importance of vyūtpatti in drama he argues like this – the princes, etc. must be given instruction (vyūtpatti); best way to instruct people in the four goals of human life is by entering (i.e. appealing) their hearts (hrdayānupraveśa), which is just another name for rasa. This rasa comes about
due to the presentation of the Vibhāvas, etc., which are essential to vyutpatti for the realisation of the four Purusartha. The vibhāvas, etc., must be appropriate to rasa, then only the engrossment in the aesthetic experience will become the cause of vyutpatti, which naturally follows; hence, priti is the cause of vyutpatti. Both priti and vyutpatti depend on Vibhāvādyayucita. They depend on each other.

Kāvya yields pleasure or delight by depicting rasas. In kāvya, rasa occupies the first and foremost position. There are nine permanent emotions (sthāyibhavas). They are - rati (love), hasa (comic), krodha (anger), Šoka (sorrow), jugupsa (disgust), bhaya (fear), utsāha (courage), vismaya (wonder) and sama or nirveda (tranquil). Corresponding to these permanent emotions, there are nine rasas, namely, Śringar, Ḥasya, Raudra, Karuṇa, Vibhatsa, Bhayānaka, Vīra, Adbhuta, and Śanta. Of the nine permanent emotions, some are conducive to the four Puruṣārthas. They are rati, krodha, utsāha and sama. In the performance of the different types of drama the corresponding rasas of these sthāyibhavas, viz, Śringāra, Raudra, Vīra and Śanta are present in the very life of the four Puruṣārthas.

But only a few writers on poetics and dramatics, deal with this interesting and important topic, viz., rasa-theory and Puruṣārtha. Pratihārendrāja, Abhinavagupta, Hemacandra and his two famous disciples, Ramacandra and Gūnacandra deserve particular mention in this connection. Pratihārendrāja for the first time draws our attention to the fact that the nine rasas, śringara and others, are the means of acquiring the four goals of human life (puruṣārthas). We however does not expand his statement by adding suitable examples connecting specific rasas to specific Puruṣārthas. It is Abhinavagupta who deals at length with this topic in the course of his commentary on the sixth chapter called Rasādhyaya and the 18th chapter called Daśāṇḍpakavidhana. The passages and the contexts connected with this topic may now be taken up for discussion:
Abhinavagupta while commenting on Natyasastra VI. 15 verse make a determined effort to explain the reasons behind the order of enumeration of the rasas followed by Bharata. While explaining the reasons he connects rasas with Puruṣārthas. He connects śringāra with the (third) Puruṣārtha kāma (pleasure and love), raudra with artha (material prosperity economics, politics, etc., and directed to the fulfillment of this end), vīra with drama (moral and religious duty, righteousness, duty) and śanta with mokṣa (the liberation or redemption of the soul from the flow of existence, emancipation from recurring births).

Among the permanent emotions, some are conductive to the goals of human life. These are the predominant ones. To specify, rati is conductive to kāma and dharma and artha connected with it. Krodha (anger), in persons in whom it predominates is conductive to artha but can also end in kāma and dharma. Utsāha ends in all three-dharma, artha and kāma. And Sama, which consists mostly in the disgust aroused by the knowledge of truth or reality, is the means of liberation. These four permanent emotions only are the predominant ones. ‘Even if they are not to be found in a predominant position all four together, and the emergence of one of them naturally postulates the subordination of the other three, nevertheless someone of them is always predominant in each drama, so that all of them are clearly recognized as being, in turn (that is, one in this drama and the other in another one), equally predominant. Moreover, if things are more closely examined, all four of them will be seen to be present in the same drama, in various passages (Acts or Parts), in a pre-eminent position.’

Bharata declares that there are four major or principal rasas, which give rise to the other four. The original four are I) śringāra, II) raudra III) vīra and IV) bibhatsa. Regarding these original four rasas Abhinavagupta remarks that they are pervaded with their respective Puruṣārthas 1. kāma 2. artha, 3. dharma and 4. mokṣa. It is true that Bharata speaks of the fourth original rasa as bibhatsa and not śanta. And it is possible to criticize Abhinavagupta for introducing his own view here disregarding
Bharata’s authority. R.P. Kangle goes a step further and asserts in his notes (Rasa- bhava-vicāra, P.224) that it is impossible to connect bibhatsa (rasa) with any of the four Puruṣārthas. Abhinavagupta himself, however, unambiguously declares later in his commentary (NS. XVIII. 110): santa and bibhatsa occur in connection with mokṣa’. Abhinavagupta defines ‘sam, the sthāyin of śānta as tattvajñana-janita nirveda- prayah’. This nirveda and jugupsa, the sthāyin of bibhatsa are akin to each other. So Abhinavagupta is justified in saying that śānta and bibhatsa occur in connection with mokṣa. Being pervaded by Puruṣārtha these four original rasas attain extraordinary beauty. The remaining four derivative rasas, hāsya, etc. are pleasure-giving (ranjaka) and therefore they may be used as connected with their major rasas.

In a very important passage (Natyasastra XVIII. 110) which opens with the words ‘idamiha mimāṁsyam and ends with tadangataya tatra bhavati’ (pp.450-451) Abhinavagupta deals with the place of particular rasas and particular types of drama and the interrelation between rasas and puruṣārthas. Here we must consider this. In the types of drama like Utsṛṣṭi-kāṇka etc., one rasa alone is portrayed. This is no doubt true of the types nāṭaka, etc. Still in them, although they are fit for portraying all rasas, in nāṭaka and prakarana, the dharma or dana- or yuddha-vira is, really speaking, predominant. For all the types of hero are characterized by heroism. In the type called samavakara though the presence of śringāra, etc., is indicated, either vira rasa or raudra-rasa alone is predominant. Thus vira, raudra, śringāra (are used there) respectively, occurring in these works by being engendered by (the aims of the character portrayed) dharma, artha and kāma, while śānta and bibhatsa occur in connection with mokṣa. But not every character can carry the main role in this (latter) case, only the occasional saint. Although in the nāṭaka, śānta or bibhatsa may be the principal rasa when mokṣa is the principal goal, this is not a common practice, so they, although engendered by the best of human aims (the character’s pursuit of mokṣa) are considered subordinate to the other rasas-vira, raudra and śringara. Thus the main rasa of a drama is really governed by the Puruṣārtha it portrays, but other rasas occur in support of it as a result of the variety of subject-matter included.
Abhinavagupta at the end of his commentary on Ch. XVIII (p.459) remarks: There are only these ten types of drama (laksanāni)... their use for the (instruction in) the (four) Puruṣārthas has already been shown in the course of our exposition of each one of them. Hence we do not repeat it here again.' With a view to verifying the truth of this claim we take up the two types of dharma called nāṭaka and prakarana.

In the course of the exposition of Bharata’s definition of nāṭaka Abhinavagupta explains the phrase nanavibhutibhir yutum’ as ‘endowed with the splendour of the four goals of human life: dharma, artha kāma an mokṣa as ‘fruit’ (phala’). Among these four goals, says he, artha and kāma should be mainly depicted as all people yearn for them. Keeping this in mind Bharata adds in the definition of nāṭaka ‘(yutum) ṛddhivilāsasadibhir’. By ‘ṛddhi’ Bharata indicates the goal of ‘artha’ and by ‘vilasa’ that of ‘kama’. A poet therefore must not show in his drama that a king (of course, the hero) making a gift of his kingdom to brahmanas and himself accepting vanaprasthanaśrama (the third stage one’s religious life of an anchorite or hermit). For a common man longs for immediate and concrete phala, objective, goal of human life. A fruit like heaven of the performance of a sacrifice is doubtful for him and is to be attained only after death!

In the case of prakarana, following Bharata (NS XVIII. 47), Abhinavagupta says that the same ‘fruit’ mentioned in regard to the nāṭaka is to be had by extension for prakarana as well. The only difference is: in nāṭaka the ‘fruit’ (one or two or three goals or human life-dharma, artha, kāma) accrues to the hero ‘rājarsī’ (a royal sage) whereas in prakarana to a middling character- a brahmana, a merchant, amātya, etc.

Abhinavagupta has linked the following six types of drama with the Puruṣ-arthas: 1.nāṭaka, 2.prakarana, 3. samavakara, 4.dima, 5 vyayoga and 6. ihamrga and the additional type natika. He asserts that the governing sentiment of natika is srinagara (and thus it is connected with the third Puruṣārtha. Viz., kama). Regarding the three types, utṣrstikanka, prahasana and bhana he observes that karuna, hasya and vismaya
(i.e. abbuta) are their predominant sentiments respectively and thus they mainly serve to entertain and give pleasure to spectators. Thus these types differ from the above mentioned types nātaka, prakarana, etc. which give instruction, indirectly though, in the four goals of human life. As regarded the remaining type vithi Bharata says that it is rich in characteristics of all rasas (sarva-rasa-laksanadya). Abhinavagupta, however, is silent regarding its link with puruṣārthas.

Incidentally, it may be noted that Hemacandra in his Kavyanusasana (Ch.VIII, Sutra 3, pp. 443-445) deals with this very topic of types of drama and their use for the four goals of human life. He is certainly influenced by Abhinavagupta but his treatment is refreshingly somewhat new. Ramacandra and Gunacandra, the two famous disciples of Hemacandra dwell on this topic in the course of their exposition of the types of dharma. They follow, it would seem, both Abhinavagupta and Hemacandra.

Regarding mahakavya Bhamaha says that although it portrays all the four Puruṣārthas, it shall predominantly inculcate artha (Kavyalakara, 1.20-1). Dandin too gives ‘caturvargaphalayattam’ as a feature of mahakavya, it promotes the four goals of human life, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa.

To conclude, rasas occupy the first and foremost position in dramatic poetry. The main rasa of a drama, however, is really governed by the Puruṣārtha it portrays, and other rasas occur in support of it as a result of the variety of subject matter included in it. There are a few critics who look upon priti or ananda (pleasure or delight) as the major goal of poetry; but a majority of them insist on instruction in the four goals of human life as very important and rasas as means to that end. Abhinavagupta does not regard priti and vyutpatti as two distinct or different things as their source ‘vibhavadyaucitya’ is one and the same. He deserves all praise for his deep and penetrating insight into the subtle relationship between rasas and puruṣārthas.


3. M. Hiriyana, “Art Experience” in V. Raghavan and Nagendra (eds) *An Introduction to*

4. According to Hindu mythology Brahma is the author of the four Vedas-Rg, Yajur, Sama & Atharva.

5. There are Upa-Vedas, viz, Ayur Veda, Dhanur Veda, Gandhava and Sthapatya.