

The Concepts of *Anukarana*, *Anukirtana* and *Anudarshana* in Abhinavagupta's Theory of Aesthetics

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Introduction

This article aims at presenting the significance of three important concepts of *anukarana*, *anukirtana* and *anudarshana* in the context of Abhinavagupta's theory of aesthetics as developed in his interpretation of *natya*, as described by Bharata in the *Natyashastra*. These three concepts, along with their related ideas, constitute a key to the understanding of Bharata's conception of art as understood and developed by Abhinavagupta.

Though, quite apparently, Bharata's main concern is *natya* and not art as understood from the point of view of some Western philosophers, his conception of *natya* is so comprehensive and broad-based that it would be nothing short of a crime to reduce its connotation to drama or dramatic art as it is understood today. Thus, it becomes necessary to deal with the concept of *natya* in expounding which Abhinavagupta presses into service the other three concepts. However, a study of the text reveals that these concepts are essentially related to two other concepts that are equally important in this context, namely *anuvyavasaya* and *anubhavana*. Thus, it is proposed in this paper to deal with all these concepts in the general perspective of *natya*. Incidentally, comparative references to analagous concepts in Western aesthetics may be made in order to make the exposition of the subject more intelligible, since it seems that Abhinavagupta comprehends aesthetics in the form of *natya*.

Bharata's Statement

(a) Definition of *natya*

In keeping with the general ancient Indian tradition of scholarship, what Bharata gives us by way of definition of *natya* is not actually a definition, for this is hardly attempted by him, but the *lakshana*-s, the characteristic features of *natya*. He describes the nature, the function and the aim or the objectives of *natya* at great length in about 18 verses (l. 106-124). In a way this description is of great value since it sheds light on the various fundamental issues embracing his total concept. These are the more important aspects of the science of aesthetics as it is understood in our times and it is interesting to find how Bharata conceives *natya* in these terms, and how they are interpreted by Abhinavagupta who reflects upon the nature of aesthetic experience analytically and arrives at a definition that strikes one as a synthesis of the concepts of modern aesthetics.

As a basic concept, Bharata defines *natya* as *Trailikasya bhavanukirtanam* (l-107).¹ This may be freely translated as, "the expression of existence as conditioned by different times and climes". What should be noted, at the very outset, about this notion is that *natya* is the name that signifies expression of existence, as a whole, and thereby implies the intuition or the non-reflective perception of the whole in a particular form, as conditioned by time and space. Thus, fundamentally, even according to Bharata, aesthetic experience is basically intuitive in nature, and may clearly be distinguished from the order of direct and indirect perception i.e. from sensation, on the one hand, and intellectual

knowledge, on the other. Another significant implication of this notion is that aesthetic experience, by its very nature, seeks expression, and cannot, therefore, be isolated from aesthetic, or what may, for the purposes of clarity, be called artistic activity (*natya-karma*). Thus, expression signifies "the spontaneous response of aesthetic experience", while aesthetic experience may be distinguished, on the one hand, from the mystic experience, in so far as it signifies the intuition of the universal in a particular form, and from the sensual in so far as it transcends the limitations of the particular (in terms of time and space). However, the prefix *anu* in the term *anubhavanam* does imply a sequence of the two events viz. *bhavanam* (experiencing) and *anubhavanam* (expression), the former being essentially involved in the latter. Obviously, *natya*, as propounded by Bharata, is directly concerned with expression rather than with mere experience; and that is why he defines *natya* explicitly as expression. Thus, according to Bharata, *natya* signifies "the spontaneous response of the intuitive perception to the universal in a particular form". In other words, it is this response or expression that essentially characterises aesthetic experience. Hence the sequence of the two events referred to earlier is only apparent or functional and not real or final.

(b) The purpose and the function of *natya*

Describing the origin of *Natya-veda* or *Natyashastra* (the science of aesthetics), Bharata projects *natya* as *kridaniyakam*, an aural and visual plaything that amuses as well as instructs all alike without any distinction of caste or creed (I.11-12).² Then, while resolving to construct *Natya-veda*, he declares that this science, with its theory and practice, would satisfy moral, economic, intellectual and aesthetic values and function as a guide to every sort of human activity (I.14-15).³ When this is read in conjunction with N.S. I.106, where Bharata declares that he has produced the *Natya-veda* as a critique of action as motivated by will (*karmabhavanvayapekshi*),⁴ he leaves us in no doubt that *natya*, being the expression of the universal in a particular form, reflects impartially (*shubhashubhavikalpaka*)⁵ the good and evil results flowing out of such action. It does not seek to teach or to preach what is good or evil and why it is so, a concept that is analogous to Dandin's doctrine of poetics which declares that poetry is a mirror of existence.

This is the theory, in its rudiments, which was inherited by Abhinavagupta from Bharata. It will be quite interesting to find out how he expounds and develops it into a complete theory of aesthetics and in what terms he interprets the viewpoint of Bharata.

Abhinavagupta's Contribution

Abhinavagupta's contribution lies in his interpretation of the basic concept of *natya*. He asserts, and not without adequate justification, that *anukirtana* does not mean *anukarana* (i.e. imitation), even though Bharata has used this word as well. So he proceeds to expound the concept of *anukirtana*, and, in the process, reveals the entire psychological phenomenon in the enjoyment of a dramatic performance and concludes that *anukirtana* is, in fact, a psychological process of a very specific character *anu-vyavasaya visheshah*. Thus, he establishes that aesthetic experience is essentially a psychological activity which is categorically different from intellectual or physical activity.

(a) The nature and the object of *natya*

Bharata, as already stated, basically conceives *natya* as *anu-bhavanam*, which he further clarifies as *bhavanu-kirtana*; and it has already been rendered as “the expression of the existential mode of being”. Abhinavagupta explains that *anu-kirtana* is a specific psychological process, not a mere reproduction or imitation (*anukarana*).⁶ It is worth noting that Bharata uses the term *anukarana* almost in the sense of imitation in one or two places viz. *lokavrttanukaranam natyam* (I.112)⁷ i.e. “*natya* is the reproduction of people’s behaviour”. However Abhinavagupta is quick to refer to this usage, which he explains on a linguistic basis. So it is obvious that his main stress is on *anukirtanam*, a concept which he elucidates in detail and at great length. To begin with he makes an epistemological investigation into the nature of aesthetic cognition, and posits the view that in the execution of the artistic motif in the *natya-karma*, the actors do not in any way reproduce the behaviour of the characters they are supposed to imitate. This is due to the following considerations:⁸

- (i) *Essentially, they do not have the same mind;*
- (ii) *They are not even similar in appearance like twins;*
- (iii) *If an actor is portraying the character of Rama, for example, he does not appear as Rama due to an erroneous perception (the way silver is perceived in an oyster-shell due to an illusion arising out of memory);*
- (iv) *Nor is it a case of false identification (as is the case when a snake is seen in a rope) which may be invalidated subsequently;*
- (v) *It is not a metaphorical or analogical perception (which is what happens when the face of the beloved appears to be a lotus or the moon to the lover);*
- (vi) *It is also not a copy (as is the case in a portrait or photograph);*
- (vii) *It is not even a case of imitation (the way a disciple learns, by reproducing the same tune produced by the teacher);*
- (viii) *Magic is certainly not involved here (like something being instantly created out of nothing);*
- (ix) *It is definitely not a case of hypnotism or mesmerism (cf. Abhinavagupta on N.S. I.107).*

It is thus quite clear that the aesthetic perception of Rama as represented by an actor, who is historically known to be different from Rama, is not obtained through any of these possible modes. Therefore, Abhinavagupta concludes that since none of these modes of cognition possibly secure the interest and aesthetic participation of the spectator, aesthetic cognition is categorically different from and independent of all these ordinary means and modes of knowledge. Having arrived at this conclusion, he proceeds to trace the extraordinary process through which aesthetic cognition is obtained:

In the example of Rama, the spectators, as well as the actors on the stage, are aware of the historical Rama, and, therefore, they are conditioned by the particular, that is the historical character. And yet, as Abhinavagupta explains, owing to the artistic ability of the actors to enact, in all probability, the deeds of Rama etc. (*sambhavayamana-rtha-kriyasamarthya*), the particularity of Rama is dissolved in the universal obtained through similarity of characteristic behaviour (*salakshanya*). The universal indicated here pertains not to particular persons, namely, the historical Rama and the actor appearing as Rama, but to the end-

results which follow from the events associated with the former and demonstrated by the latter. Thus, *anubhavanam* properly implies the expressive demonstration of *bhava-s* (states of being in relation to conditions of existence). In simple words, according to Abhinavagupta, aesthetic perception does not take place through the normal means of valid knowledge; it takes place through a psychological process of universalisation in which the presented particulars lose their local or personal colour and, through the artistic ability of the actors, the end-result, that is the inherent moral, is realised by dint of similarity of characteristic behaviour.

Abhinavagupta further points out that even though this process of universalisation is obtained in poetry as well, here in *natya* it is realised directly, through sense perception, and is, therefore, immediately and deeply effective. Also, the spectator, expecting to undergo an extraordinary experience (which is categorically different from the usual sort of pleasure and pain of everyday experience) attends to the performance (that is accompanied by song and dance) with an unoccupied and a free mind. In other words, he is in a receptive mood, ready to participate in the aesthetic experience, which is completed in a triangle involving the poet, the actor and spectator.

Abhinavagupta concludes, after a few similar statements of psychological analysis, that *anukirtana* is a specific cognitive or psychological process and is another name for *natya*,⁹ the one already mentioned being *anubhavanam*. When a description of the events associated with Rama is transformed into a dramatic performance, it becomes *anukirtana*: it not only implies the active and sympathetic participation of the spectators, but also presupposes the creative contemplation of the poet. That is why he insists that *anukirtana* is not *anukarana* (imitation).

Imitation, he says, means similar activity. The question is: similar to whom or to what? It cannot be similar to Rama because Rama himself is not the object of imitation. Perhaps Rama's mental make-up, his attitudes and temperament may be the object of imitation. No, not even that, since the actor is incapable of ever harbouring the very same feelings and attitudes. It is obvious that nothing, in fact, is imitated. The actors represent Rama, etc. not through actions similar to those of Rama but through actions of the same class: the feelings of happiness, sorrow, jealousy, courage are represented by the responses (*anu-bhava-s*) or reactions that are common to the majority of human beings. So the 'universal inherent in the particular' links the actors to the audience and provides the bridge for communication. Thus, it is noteworthy that Abhinavagupta completely rejects imitation as a possible explanation for artistic activity.

As a matter of fact, Abhinavagupta's fundamental concept of *natya* influences his entire interpretation or, rather, his interpretation leads to the following definition of *natya*. तेनानुभवायान् विशेषविषयीकरणं नाट्यम् । i.e. *natya* is the object of aesthetic experience; in other words, *natya* is that which is worthy of being expressed or that which finds expression through the triangular psychological process of aesthetic expression, artistic activity and aesthetic enjoyment. This elucidates the nature of *natya*.

(b) The purpose of *natya*

No human activity is aimless. Therefore it is natural to enquire into the

aim, the purpose and the function of art as well. Here Abhinavagupta elaborates Bharata's view explained under the concept of *anudarshana*. He explains that *natya* points to the importance and role of the four fundamental values (*purushartha*-s) of human life through the direct perception of the results stemming from the aesthetic presentation of illustrious characters or their notable deeds as contrasted with the ignoble deeds of the ignorant and the wicked. However, the instruction thus imparted by *natya* is different from the regular modes of *vidhi* and *nishedha* i.e. injunction and prohibition in so far as it directly appeals to the heart and leaves the individual free to draw his own lessons from this experience.

When Bharata's concept of *natya* is viewed in the light of Abhinavagupta's interpretation, *natya* seems to have three dimensions symbolised by three different concepts: *anukarana* (imitation), *anukirtana* (creative contemplation) and *anudarshana* (perceptive aesthetic enjoyment). These are respectively represented by the actors who play the different roles and execute the plot conceived by the poet; by the poet or the writer who creates, in his artistic contemplation, the plot of the drama; and the spectators who consciously participate in the performance and reach out to the joy of the poet's creation through the interpretation of the dramatic action.

Critical Appraisal

It would be obvious from the above discussion that Abhinavagupta has spared no pains to prove that *anukirtana* does not mean *anukarana* (imitation). It can, therefore, be safely assumed that such a view must have prevailed widely during and before his time and he found it necessary to refute this attitude with all the power at his command. The theory of art as imitation was also propounded (in its various shades) by many Western thinkers. Plato, for example, held that art is three steps removed from Truth and primarily so because he recognised art merely as imitation: he could not accord the same respect to art as to philosophy. Obviously, Abhinavagupta's comprehension of *natya* as the "expressible", the perception of the universal as expressed through the particular steers clear of these difficulties. His concept of *anukirtana*, leading to the conclusion that *natya* is a psychological process, is akin to Croce's theory of aesthetics where he emphatically asserts that aesthetic experience or expression is primarily theoretical. However, whereas Croce distinguishes aesthetic value as categorically different, independent and *separate* from intellectual, moral and sensual or economic values, Abhinavagupta, while considering *natya* as different and independent of the intellectual (i.e. logical or scientific), moral and economic disciplines, does not consider it as *separate* or alien to these pursuits. He considers them all as complementary. This 'synthesis' enables Abhinavagupta to overcome many of the minor problems confronted by Western aestheticians, such as the connotation and the relation of the form and content of art, the number and classification of the fine arts and the aim or the object of art. In fact, a comparative study of these problems deserves a more comprehensive enquiry.

The concept of *anudarshana* is also unique. Though it seeks to combine amusement with instruction, it can hardly be said to be pedagogic: in this concept, instruction is not the aim or the objective of art; it is rather incidental to *natya* i.e. expression. Here art is not employed as a means to an exterior end; but what is sought to be realised through art is the unity of aesthetic, intellectual, moral and economic values.

Conclusion

This discussion of Abhinavagupta's views, as based on Bharata's doctrine, leads to the conclusion that, 'aesthetic experience as conceived in terms of *natya*, being essentially a psychological process, involves not only the creator but also the executor and the enjoyer of the art, namely the artist, the performers and the audience. Furthermore, aesthetic enjoyment is categorically different from and independent of intellectual, moral, and sensual values, and yet it is capable of affording a glimpse of transcendental joy, technically called *Brahmananda-sahodara*.'

It may, however, be observed that Abhinavagupta inherited the basic ideas of his theory from Bharata, which he developed into a total system.

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References :

1. त्रैलोक्यस्यास्य सर्वस्य नाट्यं भावानुकीर्तनम् । N. S., I.107.
2. क्रीडनीयकमिच्छामो दृश्यं श्रव्यं च यद्भवेत् । N. S., I.11
3. धर्म्यमर्थ्यं यशस्यं च सोपदेशं ससंग्रहम् ।
भविष्यतश्च लोकस्य सर्वकर्मानुदर्शकम् ।
सर्वशास्त्रार्थसम्पन्नं सर्वशिल्पप्रदर्शकम् ।
नाट्याख्यं पञ्चमं वेदं सेतिहासं करोम्यहम् । N. S., I.14-15.
4. कर्मभावान्वयापेक्षो नाट्यवेदो मया कृतः ! N. S., I.106.
5. शुभाशुभविकल्पकः ।
6. तस्मादनुव्यवसायात्मकं कीर्तनं रूपितविकल्पसंवेदनं नाट्यम् । तद्वेदनवेद्यत्वात् ।
न त्वनुकरणरूपम् । Abhinavagupta on N. S., I.106.
7. लोकवृत्तानुकरणं नाट्यमेतन्मया कृतम् । N. S., I.113.
8. Cf. Abhinavagupta on N. S., I.106-107.
9. See Footnote 6.