

## INDIAN AESTHETICS

- A long and varied tradition.
- More sophisticated at an earlier stage than Western aesthetics. In the West, although individual philosophers had written on various issues concerning beauty and art (Plato talks about the form of beauty, about the danger of poetry, and the effect that various musical modes may have; Aristotle about the effect of tragic drama) we don't get any sense of aesthetics as a unified discipline until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- The word "aesthetics" is coined by Baumgarten in 1735. Only at this stage do Westerners recognize the system of 'fine arts' (music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, etc.). Only at this stage do Westerners recognize that painting, poetry, and music, have anything at all in common and can be the subject of unified philosophical study.
- Indian aesthetics dates from at least 300BCE. The most famous foundational thinker is Bharata (100BCE) who wrote the *Natya Sastra*.
- Bharata distinguishes 8 or 9 (some scholarly argument) *rasas*. **Love, Humor, Pathos, Anger, Heroism, Terror, Disgust, Wonder, Serenity.** These are moods/modes/sentiments/qualities which a work of art may have. Bharata regards artworks as *expressing* one or more of these *rasas*.
- Note firstly that this provides Indian aesthetics with the concept of an artwork (an artifact which created to express a *rasa*) 1800 years before we in the West get a corresponding concept.
- Note secondly that Bharata's 9-fold classification of *rasas* generates a potentially richer aesthetics than we have in the West. We tend to be preoccupied with the notion of Beauty. There is some talk of Terror. And Kant notes the existence of Wonder but doesn't say much about it. In contrast Indian aesthetics is well equipped to provide a much more detailed exploration of our aesthetic experience.
- Note thirdly that we Bharata basically presents an *expressive* theory of Art. The purpose of artworks is to express certain feelings/emotions/etc. Not to represent reality. Until 1800 the dominant view in the West was that Art was/should be *mimetic*. It should represent reality and the better it did this the better art it was. Only with Romanticism do we get the view that art is/should be expressive rather than imitative.
- Note fourthly that Bharata does not offer a crude-expressivist account of art on which the feelings/moods expressed by an artwork are those we feel when we experience it. He distinguishes between the *rasa* or an artwork and the emotions we feel upon experiencing it. An artwork might express one emotion but we might feel something completely different when we experience the artwork. It took Westerners a little while to make this distinction and even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we have Tolstoy (apparently) advocating crude-expressivism.