

## BOOK-REVIEWS

Dr. Ranjan K. Ghosh : *Concepts and Presuppositions in Aesthetics* :  
Ajanta Series on Aesthetics, VI, Ajanta  
Publications, Delhi, 1987 pages : 152.

The 20th century philosophy is marked by its method of analysis. In India too, scholars have pursued this method for discussing and investigative philosophical problems. However, where concrete experience is the basis of the philosophical investigations which proceed to abstract level, this method of philosophizing is likely to make the subject-matter estranged from its roots if the investigator has not the feel of the art under consideration. Nevertheless, philosophers take interest in the abstract topics and pursue their studies although such pursuits in the absence of sympathetic response end in some kind of futility and irrelevance. Of course such a situation needs to be changed. Dr. Ranjan Ghosh, the author of "*Concepts and Presuppositions in Aesthetics*" has made a serious attempt in this direction. He is not merely a philosopher of insight but is also a practising artist. He has several beautiful paintings to his credit. It is good that he uses his training and insight in the field of fine arts, to philosophize in the domain of taste and beauty. The present work is a testimony in this regard. It is an encouraging feature in the context of the development of modern Indian philosophy.

Dr. Ghosh exhibits the same spirit when he writes in the preface of his present book that "There is, perhaps, need for a dialogue between the philosopher and the artist on general issues which are of importance for both". (p vii) There is no doubt that the absence of insights in the field makes the discourse empty and verbose whereas the inner stream of the experience of the creative artist makes the discourse richer. Keeping in view this position Dr. Ghosh discusses the concepts and presuppositions of aesthetic. Indeed these topics are of cardinal importance.

Art is communication and one who communicates has a certain intention regarding the content he communicates. This is the domain where nobody can proceed without taking into consideration the intention of the artist. Dr. Ghosh begins his book by devoting the first chapter of the book to the discussion of the concept of intention. And he does it by using the method of analysis. First he enumerates the basic questions related to intention and classifies them into why-type and what-type. He argues that what-type questions can be raised only with regard to works of art (p. 4) From this he proceeds to bring before us the two different senses of intention, one in the context of why-type questions and the other in the context of what-type questions. The *second type question* involves the sense of 'privacy' about the artist's intention.

After distinguishing between the 'why-type' and the 'what-type' questions Ghosh refers to the basic categories which he uses throughout the book. This kind of distinction helps him to raise the question like the privacy of artist's intention (p.6). The strength of Dr. Ghosh's method is that it allows him to bring in the modern frame-work for discussing the age-long problems of aesthetics. In fact, Dr. Ghosh's work should be regarded as exemplary of philosophizing as applied to arts. When an artist is involved in the creative activity, his attention is focussed rather on the object he is presenting than on the process of creativity and the psychological elements and aspects involved in the process. But in order to understand the inner process of artist's mind, Dr. Ghosh applies his method and investigates the nature of intention. We think that the analysis of this inner processes can be possibly and ably done only by that mind which can have the inner approach to the inner process. Dr Ghosh exploits his artistic calibre and strength to have such an 'inner approach' in the philosophical analysis of the aesthetic problems. Thus we get a proper blend of the artists personality in this kind of deeper and successful analysis. In his deeper and extensive analysis he introduces another useful distinction viz. narrow sense and wider sense of privacy (p.8). With this kind of procedure he arrives at a very significant point. He says, "Seeing possibilities is seeing the object" (p.27) This really hints at the creative potential of the artist. In fact it is here that the artist scores over the critic and embarks on his creativity.

Dr. Ghosh continues this important thread in the next chapter,

'Presuppositions of Aesthetic Experience'. Art is actualization of something. But it is not an actualization of something which is actual. It is actualisation of something which is beyond the actual. It is imanaged, contemplated and reached by the artist. He goes beyond the actual world and contemplates over the possibilities. He discovers (or invents) his world in these possibilities and actualizes some of the possibilities. Before creation, i.e. before actualization, the artist experiences the possibilities and then wants others to share with him his experience. Hence he actualizes, i.e., objectifies, expresses, the experienced possibility which can be now experienced by others. Dr. Ghosh writes, "To experience a work is always to experience it against this spiralic background. New possibilities are realized; even the artist may 'discover' them in his own work when he experiences it dispassionately" (p.53). Both the worthiness and the greatness of a work of art is to be identified by following the same clue. A truly great work of art will never stop throwing up new 'possibilities'. Realization of such complex possibilities will bring richness and intensity to our experience." (p.53). There is a continuity involved in it. It seems to have a dialectic form in its essence. He further says, "Once I have an aesthetic experience of a rich and intense kind it will arouse expectations with regard to my experience of other work of art. It is an ongoing phenomena here too" (p.53). In order to strengthen this point Dr. Ghosh aptly takes the help of Bharata. He writes "... the Indian Rasa Theorists and commentators on Bharata's Rasa Sutra recognize that rather than experiencing passively the Rasika (Sahrdaya) (the experiencer) participates in such experience. What I am saying accords well with this view point." (p.54). There is, so to say, a kind of dialectic between the artist and the appreciator and both proceed by enriching each other in this process. Nevertheless, the 'experience' of each is unique for the experiencer, tries to express or communicate it. "Every work of art has a public context but the experience that results from it is private. 'Public context' implies everthing that is sayable about the work of art and its relation to other works of art. The 'privacy' I speak of is with regard to the realization of the possibilities within the context of aesthetic experience" (p.54). The dichotomy of privacy and publicness involved in aesthetic experience may look as if it was enigmatic or paradoxical. But Dr. Ghosh makes it more and more sensible and intelligible. There is no point in reducing the dichotomy by discarding

either of the alternatives, since that will affect adversely the core of the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience needs to be understood in its rich and varied form. "Aesthetic experience is not any one single kind of experience as there are varieties of experiences possible within the ever-widening contours of such description. Yet experiencing art is a teachable concept in quite the same sense as art-making activity is such in some important respects" (p.55).

A major concern of the study of aesthetics is with the various aesthetic judgements passed. This important area is taken up for discussions by Dr. Ghosh in the third chapter, 'The Problem of Aesthetic Judgement'. He begins the discussions by clarifying his approach to the problem. He writes, "My concern now is with the problem of aesthetic judgement. Is there one single common way of judging all works of art? Are all aesthetic judgements of the same type? My answer to both questions is in the negative. I see a variety, here, too" (p.56). Dr. Ghosh in his approach as well as in his conviction appears to be quite open and this is a true spirit of an artist. Restricting oneself to the subject is reducing one's own freedom to philosophize; and this goes against the concept of creativity. When one holds the view that 'seeing possibilities is seeing the object' (p.27) also allows a sufficient scope to one's creativity. This helps one not to become dogmatic. One has to be always aware of the other side, the other way and the other possibilities Dr. Ghosh keeps this philosophic paradigm before himself, without of, course, marring the rigour of his presentation. He does not allow his mind to rattle in any disorderly way. He classifies the various aesthetic judgements in a systematic manner. He writes, "I will want to say that there are atleast two different kinds of judgements, and I will call them (i) w-type judgements and (ii) e-type judgements." (p.56) He works out his scheme in an orderly manner and in the context of what he discussed in the previous chapter, viz. the public context and the privacy of the experience.

Passing or making a judgement presupposes a certain frame of reference. Although in aesthetics, a judgement is passed on an 'aesthetic' object, the object of this judgement is not taken in isolation. Such understanding or appreciation of an object is never possible. Any object has a context in the form of a history and the evaluation is related to its roots in history. Dr. Ghosh makes this

clear when he says, "Art objects can never be viewed otherwise than in a continuum howsoever distinctive or original a particular work may be. Picasso could not be Picasso just in virtue of one single work; he had to father a whole tradition" (p.71). Any work of art is only like a point in this continuum, a continuum of the contributions of the artist as also of the continuum of the tradition of artists to which the particular artist belongs. "Around every work of art there is a tradition. If a new and entirely original work stakes its claim to the title, 'work of art' then there must be a new and original tradition. Past works of art form a tradition in the background of which any work may be judged" (p.71). To belong to the continuum is significant for the work of art. Nevertheless, the originality consists in breaking away from the continuum. Here, however, the artist might have to pass through noticable stress and strain. To understand the break from the tradition the appreciator has to have, first, a total grasp of the tradition as a continuum. Then alone he can relate to it the 'original' work of art which makes a departure from the tradition. Dr. Ghosh is aware of this point when he says, "To create new and original works one must break the tradition and create a new one. Many a time a new work (very original) or a new trend-setter does not receive immediate recognition because the connected tradition has still not come to full bloom" (p.72).

Dr. Ghosh continues his investigations in the fourth chapter, "Critical understanding : Process and Response", in which he takes up the point of art as an expression. He raises two questions, "(i) What does the artist express? and (ii) What decides whether he expresses truly or not?" (p.77) And he himself further says, "Question (i) is a pseudo question, I maintain Question (ii) is a typically aesthetical question." (p.77). Because, according to him, the first question is concerned with life-situations while the second does not. And in the explanation of this he tells us that, "A true expression of the artist is his own expression, it no longer is imitative though the signs he works with must have a common context" (p.80).

This helps understanding the nature of arts in general. For a philosopher this is the question of defining art, viz. "Do all works of art have some common feature of property?" (p.91). In fact, this is a very challenging task set for any philosopher. Since the area



of aesthetics is quite different from that of logic, we do not expect the precision in aesthetics the same way we have it in logic." "But to be ambiguous is not the same as to be meaningless. 'Art' is so much an ambiguous word that it is quite meaningful to ask what is Art' (p.93). Nevertheless art does involve a kind of theorization and precision of its own kind. *Art can never go unattended with some theory or definition.* After a particular art form has become well established it is difficult to say which follows the other, the theory or the art-activity. (p.96). And the reason given by Dr. Ghosh is very significant. He writes, "Theory is important because it makes clearer the ongoing process of creativity" (p.98). This is how he gives a different direction to the point in defining art.

As it is difficult to get a precise definition of art, though it is sought for the philosophical purpose, it is equally difficult to pin point the meaning and criteria for a work of art. This is the topic for discussion in the sixth chapter. Here Dr. Ghosh makes use of the previously introduced distinction between the w-type and e-type judgements, and arrives at a point that there are no paradigm cases of art in the strong sense of the term.

This leads Dr. Ghosh to the problem of commitment. Dr. Ghosh discusses it in the seventh chapter. The considerations of this problem are based on the understanding of the relation between art and society. He analyses this from different angles and considers in this context several other normative concepts like response, responsibility, freedom etc. In fact, responsibility is determined by freedom. Hence, one has to first decide whether an artist is free and if so, in what sense he is free. Dr. Ghosh reminds us of the typical question "Does the artist have freedom to create any type of art he chooses" (p.133). In a fairly long discussion on the point of freedom he makes a reference to cinema which is not usually brought under such discussions. But this helps to relate the discussions, re: the role of art in relation to society. For this he introduces a "distinction between the phrases 'art-is and art-doing' (p.139). Here again, the modern tools of analysis are used ably to drive the point towards its conclusion.

In this entire book, thus, Dr. Ghosh discusses such related topics of aesthetics which are of cardinal importance to the subject.

Although the topics are varied, he has put them together maintaining consistency and continuity. Here lies the methodological strength of the presentation. In brief, in Dr. Ghosh's book we find a very lucid and novel presentation of the problem and is likely to be a trend-setter for the students of aesthetics. The book in short, is challenging in regard to methodology and novel for the perspectives, the author explores from the blending of art and philosophy. The work should provoke as well as encourage the researchers to think in depth about the aesthetic problems which arts in general pose to philosophers.

Dept. of Philosophy  
Poona University,  
Pune 7.

**S. E. BHELKE,**  
**S. S. BARLINGAY,**

## II

Rudolf A. Makkreel, *IMAGINATION AND INTERPRETATION IN KANT : THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPORT OF JUDGEMENT*. Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press. 1990. pp. x + 187.

With the possible exception of the philosophy of David Hume, the three *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant during the past 200 years have received more attention than the writings of any other philosopher in the Western world. Several commentators on Kant have not gone much beyond the first *Critique*. But in the present work under review Makkreel has extended his commentary to develop an expanded theory of the imagination as a function of reflective rather than simply of determinate judgement in the employment of ideas of reason in providing a more complete interpretation of the contents of our experience.

It has been said that with Kant the faculty of the imagination came into its own, as it were, gaining much more respect than it had hitherto enjoyed. In the third *Critique* imagination is no longer constrained to serve the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories) in causal judgement alone, but along with reflective judgement is enlarged to recognise an indeterminate sense of wholeness in some selective capacity patterned after an aesthetic sense of the beautiful. Ideas of reason are given legitimate scope to encompass the human as well as the natural sciences.

In Chapter 1 of Makkreel's carefully documented work, the building of images for Kant is found to take various forms, one of which (*Gegenbildung*) allows images to fill the role of linguistic signifiers or symbolic analogues to the thing that is represented, making them indispensable to conceptual understanding. Image formation may take place almost at a subliminal level in the implementation of the knowledge process. Images may furnish both an upper and a lower limit to absorb the shock in the apprehension of discretely sensed intuitions, compensating for a lack of harmony in a reality that is all but primitive.

In Chapter 3 imagination is portrayed in the traditional manner



as a synthesizing faculty having its origins, as Kant has told us, deep within the human soul. It is a faculty of a *a priori* intuition resulting in a synthesis that underlies even the concept of an object in general. Imagination brings to bear its own formative powers by applying the universality of categories to the universal condition of all sensibility (which is identified as time) in the construction of objects that come to be meaningful in experience.

In Chapters 4 and 5 the centrality of creative imagination in the *Critique of Judgment* is elaborated. But in this later work Kant's theory of the imagination is considerably altered and even reverses itself to accommodate an aesthetic component and wholeness which never appeared earlier in the categorical deduction of all (human) experience. Aesthetic imagination is now a mode of reflective judgment which negates the conditions of time itself, for Kant speaks of an imaginative cosmological regress instantaneous to the point of the annihilation of time so that imagination no longer presents images in a linear sequence. Moreover, an aesthetic representation in myself, it is claimed, imparts an immediate awareness of well-being, unity and harmony, a sense of purposiveness without the presence of any further design or of any further object. The purest form of reflective judgment is one in which we are able to discern a sense of beauty in the awareness of aesthetic ideas enabling us to move freely from the particular to the universal in advance of the causality of determinate judgment which allegedly has accounted for ordinary and meaningful objective experience.

Aesthetic imagination is subjective, and in Kant's words involves only a "making distinct of objects". For in knowledge arising from the aesthetic we are concerned only with the apprehension of the form of objects. Aesthetic imagination attains an epistemological function only in some proprietary sense, self-activating and satisfying to the subject, acting more freely than the imagination which supposedly was bound by the understanding within the confines of causally determinate laws.

The conclusion seems inescapable that the aesthetic imagination is not limited to the determinate knowledge of the categories as deduced in Kant's earlier *Critique*, but even apart and independent of nature plays its role in the organization of the content of all nature in general including human nature. Kant has now raised the possibility

of an aesthetic mode of interpretation in the comprehension of our world in its entirety, relating not only to pure concepts of the understanding, but to the ideas of reason as well. The concept of (the) imagination has become greatly enlarged and is to be seen in a more or less independent capacity as a function of judgment in the service of the understanding.

Reflective judgment articulates the function, not only of nature objectively, but aesthetically and subjectively in supplying an elective conditionality to nature in accordance with our own human needs and desires. Every recognised object may be taken "analogous to spirit" as a self-determining principle of life itself. The tortured causal epistemology we were offered with great assurance no longer holds. Entities that possess life must be shown to be freely self-organizing and purposive. The doctrine of the categories turns out to be anything but definitive for all experience; it makes no complete and satisfying contribution to epistemology and none at all to metaphysics.

Makkreel wants us to believe that intellectual ideas which were thought to be illusory are now utilised to furnish a well-rounded meaning to all life and living. Categorical laws of the understanding deductively proven in the first *Critique* have left certain aspects of experience quite unfinished. Imagination springs to life as a mediating link to provide what is termed a "completely formative" content to rational ideas heretofore supposed to be completely empty of content. In the first *Critique* rational ideas were dismissed as having only a regulative function in the understanding of phenomena, but in the third *Critique*, along with ideas available from the imagination, ideas of reason seem to be readily invoked to play a key role in the interpretation of our knowledge of experience as a whole and in capturing the felt fulfillment of life.

It is further noted by Makkreel that the teleological interpretation of life for Kant derives not only from our aesthetic sense, but from the various goals to which we might aspire. Purpose as an incentive is recognised in accordance with human needs. Only under the condition of the ideals and values that we appropriate to ourselves selectively and apart from terrestrial nature are we able to declare for the purposiveness of nature. Nature only points to those higher ends that are to be found in mankind alone, ends higher than nature herself is able to either fulfill or afford. This doctrine is to be found in Section

83 of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Kant is saying that only by prescribing a principle of purposiveness to ourselves in separation from nature are we able to articulate the *telos* that might be found sporadically with nature in some desultory fashion. Man is himself the ultimate purpose, a final end independent of and free from nature in order to be in a position to proclaim for himself moral autonomy. Purpose for us operates by a system, not of instruction from nature, but in accord with the recognition of our own needs and aspirations.

Chapter 7 is taken up with teleological ideas and the interpretation of history. Purpose in the natural world may be exercised in assessing the usefulness of one species to another, but can scarcely become meaningful without the assumption of (some) final purpose, or in other words the presupposition of purposiveness as an idea in general in order to attest to the significance of life itself. Teleology is examined from various angles, as for example, a natural chain of purposes observable in nature, a final or moral purpose to be found in humankind and a speculative teleology in accordance with reflective judgment and the ideas of reason. The ideal goal for both the individual and for society in Kant's view is one of moral fulfillment and moral wholeness which can only belong to mankind as sovereign over and above nature.

Makkreel has made a significant contribution in showing that the *Critique of Judgment* declares for an indeterminate universality of communication through feeling, an approach that is yet of prime importance without appealing first to concepts. This is accomplished largely by a non-discursive appreciation of aesthetic ideas in relation to imagination in its role of symbolic form. The imagination is seen as almost a substitute for reason, and in playing a stronger and more flexible part than formerly depicted seems to surpass reason in its ability to supply content to ideas in order to enrich experience largely on its own terms. In a kind of networking of recognition rather than only of instruction, the imagination not only accommodates ideas, but even produces ideas in working toward a more complete rounding out of all possible human experience.

59 Victor Street,  
London, Ontario, Canada  
N6c 1 B9.

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