

Fine Arts in Rigveda

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Were our Vedic Sages insular, being preoccupied with their meditations? The writer explains with copious illustrations that they were far from being other-worldly to the exclusion of secular affairs.

Indeed, they showed by precept as well as by example that life had to be lived in all its warmth and splendour. They were the greatest artists of life, literally as well as figuratively.

It is a common observation of the occidental scholars that there is little of aesthetic value in the *Rig Veda*. Whatever the motive, this view seems to be untrue. In *Rig Veda* we come across mention of the various Fine Arts, beside a theory of Fine Art.

To begin with, we read of a series of musical instruments. Chief among these are *vana, vani, bakura,*

bhritni, vansa, kshoni, nali, karkuri, aghati and so on! There is the *dhamani* along with a predicate derived from this word, *dham*, constantly employed with these instruments (2.11.8). Most of them are applied to the Maruts, who are said to be the best songsters. There are orchestral bands of musicians made up of these Maruts too. Maruts formed themselves into

various groups or *ganas* presided over by Brihaspati, the Ganpati.

It is by having song as the accompaniment that Brihaspati cleft the rock or cave and killed Vala, only to let loose the waters and light. The significance of this activity is that, music opens the doors to light and freedom.

Music is one of the Fine Arts and like all other arts, it is the revelation of the Spirit in a sensuous garb. This is the meaning of the exploits of Brihaspati, who is also the lord of prayer. The same music is also cultivated by human beings. They sing their songs in a sweet voice. The melody of Samagana is proverbial. If music was not an integral part of *Rig Veda*, then there is no meaning in the compilation of Sama Veda which is nothing but *Rig Veda* set to music! Further, the refrains of *Rig Veda* are mostly lyrical. They were mainly meant to be sung. For instance, in the dialogue-hymn of Vrisakapi there is a refrain, "*Visvasmad indra uttarah*" (10.86). Now Indra too is one of the characters in this dialogue. Then how can he too glorify himself? It is evident that something like the chorus or the orchestra is necessary to sing it. Moreover,



coming in a dialogue, it demands music together with dance.

In the field of dancing we have better information. Dancing was popularised by the courtesans who were till recent times the best dancers in India. Ushas was the prototype of these dancers. Dance brings forth rhythm. We are informed that the universe sprang out of dance, the dance of the gods: "When the gods lived in the pool, when the world was yet water, then a pungent particle went forth as if they were dancing". (X. 72. 6).

The Soma dances so that Indra might come pleased by the offerings (X. 94. 4). The Soma-pressing stones too dance like the black deer in the stall. (X. 94. 5).

Men danced holding their bamboo sticks aloft in the air (I. 10. 1).

Even the battle provoked Indra to dance because of excitement and the consequent emotion (I. 120. 7). That is, emotion is the root cause of dance. Decent women appeared on public occasions in white garments and coverings only to dance (8.17.7). A funeral too was celebrated with dance (10. 18. 3). That is, dance enlivens the spirit of man and consoles him. This is the purgation of the Aristotelean theory of art. Ushas appears like a dancer; she decorates herself like a dancer and lays bare her breast as the cow does its udder to the calf. This reveals the existence of professional dancers in vedic times.

There were assemblies or gatherings that promoted these arts. These were termed 'Samana'. In a celebrated hymn to Ushas we

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read (10.12.4):

“She decks her beauty shining
forth with sunbeams

Like women trooping to the
festive gathering.”

The people incline to Agni as the
women at a gathering fair. (4.58.8).
This custom of going to the assembly
or gathering is very old (10.86.10).
We are told that the two ends of the
bow meet like a woman and her lover
in the gathering place. (6.75.4).

The waters hurry to the wind as
dames to an assembly (10.118.2).
These gatherings were visited by all
kinds of people. Bowmen went
there to exhibit their skill in archery
(6.75.3,5). Horses were taken for
races (9.96.9). Women flocked
there to enjoy themselves and seek
lovers (1.124.8; 4.58.8; 7.2.5). Old
ladies, aged spinsters (7.2.5.) and
courtesans (4.58.8) were a party in
these festive gatherings.

Pischel argues that the dancers
of the vedic times were courtesans.
He compares *yoshah kalyanyah
smayamanasah of Rig veda* (4.58.8)
with *kanyah, kalyanyak* of
Mahabharata. He also brings in
other passages to prove his
contention. They are:

“*Yabhiih somo modate harsate ca
kalyanibhih yuvatibhir na maryah.*”
(10.35.5)

“*Samanam na yosanah.*”
(10.168.2)

“*Samaneva yosa*” (6.75.4).

It is these dancers and the courtesans that took to dance and became in due course professional dancers. The vedic society was full of this dancing art.

From the foregoing it is evident that the vedic poet considered that dance has its origins in emotion or excitement. It must be harmonious and rhythmic. It is a great enlivening force of life. It consoles us, ennobles and purifies us. It is to be accompanied by music. Ornamentation and decoration too figure therein. The immediate effect of this art is delight.

Painting was recognised early as a Fine Art. The great painters of the vedic poets were *Dyavaprithivi*. They paint the universe with colours (9.5.6; 10.70.6). Tvastar was the great architect of the gods who fashioned the thunderbolt for

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Indra and carved out a cup for the gods to drink Soma. This cup was divided into four by the equally great artist Ribhus. Amongst the best painters was Varuna who paints the sky with stars. The Asvins too had something to do with painting.

On the whole, we have ample references to dancing and poetry alone. But it does not mean that the vedic poet did not know of the other arts. We have only a fragment of *Rig veda*.

As regards poetry they present a very modern theory. They considered the form and matter of the poem as inseparably united. The work of art is a creation. It is a revelation. It is the inspiring force that sings for the poets. It has been said:

“*Indro brahmendra rishih.*”

Inspiration was an essential feature of their poetic faith. The poem must be a new one. It must be simple, sweet and transporting, for a Yaska said, the vedic seers were “*Sakshat Krita dharmana rishayah*”. It is as poets that they had the mystic insight into the reality of the unseen.

“*Kaviih Kavyenasi visvavit*”;

“*Kaviih kavitva divi rupam asajat.*” ●