

CHAPTER IV

AESTHETIC EFFECTS OF LITERARY LANGUAGE

C H A P T E R - I V

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The great critics of the past have attempted to explain the value of arts. It is a fact that good art means useful art to the society. A good theory of value should show the place and function of arts in the general context of life and society. Richards takes into account the effects of the literary work on the reader. For him the real value of fine arts lies in the reactions and attitude they create, and whether or not they are conducive to greater emotional balance, equilibrium, peace and rest in the mind of the readers. According to him, the value of a work of art lies in its power to harmonize and organise complex and warring human impulses into patterns that are lasting and pleasurable.¹

A) Aesthetics :

Aesthetics may be broadly defined as the philosophical study of beauty and taste. It is concerned with understanding beauty, particularly, as it is manifested in arts, and with its evaluation. In A Dictionary of Literary Terms Martin Gray defines aesthetics as -

"Aesthetics is the name given to the philosophical study of the nature of beauty. It concerns the appreciation, definition and criticism of the beautiful, and the theory of taste."²

The above definition makes clear that aesthetics is the branch of philosophy to study the nature of beauty and taste. The New Encyclopaedia of Britanica regards aesthetics as the theoretical study of beauty and taste comprising a branch of philosophy.³ In The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, Hornby considers aesthetics as the branch of Philosophy which tries to make clear the laws and principles of beauty.⁴ The laws and principles of beauty are the subjects of study of aesthetics. In other words, aesthetics is studying the nature of beauty and taste. The term aesthetics is contrasted with morality and utility. The above definitions clarifies that the taste and beauty concepts are the basic concern of the aesthetics.

Aesthetics deals not only with the nature and value of the arts but also with the responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly. The term beautiful has no sense except as the expression of an attitude. The beautiful belongs to a class of terms from which it has been chosen as much for convenience sake as for any sense that it captures what is distinctive of the class. In Principles of Literary Criticism Richards says regarding beautiful as -

"We are accustomed to say that a picture is beautiful, instead of saying that it causes an experience in us which is valuable in certain ways"⁵

The above opinion makes clear that our response to the work of art is very significant as it helps to understand the beauty of an object. "The term aesthetic covers two different sets of characters - 1) putting something in a frame or writing it in a verse gives it an aesthetic character, 2) from a sense in which value is implied.⁶ The more serious defect in aesthetics is the avoidance of considerations as to value. All modern aesthetics rests upon an assumption which has been strangely little discussed, the assumption that there is a distinct kind of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experience.

The nature and scope of aesthetics is clarified with the approaches to aesthetics such as -

1. The study of the aesthetic concepts, or more specifically, the analysis of the language of criticism in which particular judgements are singled out and their logic and justification displayed.
2. A philosophical study of certain states of mind-responses, attitudes, emotions - that are held to be involved in aesthetic experience.
3. The philosophical study of the aesthetic object.

The above discussion suggests that the study of aesthetics considers the particular judgement regarding language, aesthetic experience and the aesthetic object.

The arts are the supreme form of the communicative activity. Richards asserts that the arts supply the best data available for deciding what experiences are more valuable than others. While discussing regarding the arts he tells that "the arts are our storehouse of recorded values. Without the assistance of the arts we could compare very few of our experiences, and without such comparison we could hardly hope to agree as to which are to be preferred."⁷

B) Synaesthesia:

Richards chooses "Synaesthesia" as the one affective theory that serves as a foundation of an aesthetics. The review of various affective theories, though not exhaustive, will suggest some of the reasons for Richards' choice of synaesthesia as the one affective theory that seemed to him fit to serve as the foundation of an aesthetic. Even projective theories like empathy - means feeling something, namely, oneself, into the aesthetic object, apply to so much non-artistic experience that they fail to isolate the specific values of art.⁸ According to Richards synaesthesia means - the element constant to all experiences that have the characteristic of beauty - a harmony and equilibrium of our impulses.

Richards says regarding experience as - 'experiences are happenings in the nervous system - or rather, consisted of the interactions of the energy elements of that system, the impulses.'⁹

Any experience must involve the arousal and interplay of various impulses, but in the experience of beauty. He tells how we experience beauty -

"Not all impulses ... are naturally harmonious, for conflict is possible and common. A complete systematization must take the form of such an adjustment as will preserve free play to every impulse, which entire avoidance of frustration. In any equilibrium of this kind, however momentary, we are experiencing beauty."¹⁰

Richards asserts that synaesthesia is not an oscillation between two sets of opposed impulses but a harmonization means the competing impulses sustain not two states of mind but one. They do not split the ego in two, but complete and enrich it. In the experience of synaesthesia, our interest is not canalised in one direction.¹¹

The term synaesthesia has a psychological orientation, not a metaphysical, but synaesthesia is certainly disinterested, and this aspect comes out most plainly when Richards tries to distinguish it from the false equilibrium of irresolution or from that of full emotional commitment.¹² He says that synaesthesia is the ground plan of all aesthetic experience. According to him 'attitudes' are incipient or imaginal actions. In synaesthesia these

incipient actions are so ordered and so balanced that the maximum number of them is involved and the minimum number is blocked. He discusses about the nature of synaesthesia as -

"When works of art produce such action, or condition which lead to action, they have either not completely fulfilled their function or would in the view of equilibrium here being considered be called not 'beautiful' but 'stimulative'."¹³

synaesthesia is defined as our readiness 'to take any direction we choose,' but in synaesthesia evidently we do not choose. Presumably if we did choose and acted upon that choice, that very fact would indicate that the supposed state of synaesthesia was illusory, not real.

Richards theory of synaesthesia is based on psychology. The artist uses those elements which are most uniform in their effects upon impulses which may satisfy the artist and the reader as well.¹⁴ According to David Daiches -

"The poet, said Sidney, does not tell the literal truth about the real world, but presents a picture of an ideal world which stimulates us to endeavour to copy it in our own behaviour : the poet, says Richards, does not tell us the literal truth about the world, but suggests attitudes which represent

a proper balance of the nervous system and which are absorbed by the properly qualified reader.¹⁵

The above discussion clarifies that the literary work affects the reader and asks him to behave according to the ideas presented in it. The proper balance of nervous system is made possible by the literary work.

C) Aesthetic Effects of Literary Work :

The artist is concerned with communication, in other words his desire is to affect his readers. Richards suggests that 'communications involving attitudes are deeper than those in which references alone are concerned.'¹⁶ He considers the value of the literary work as -

"The artist makes pseudo-statements. A pseudo-statement is a form of words which justified entirely by its effects in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes."¹⁷

Richards did not only defend poetry but he proved it to be the salvation of civilization. The significance of the art is stated by Richards as -

"Poetry acts in a diviner manner which awakens and enlarges the mind itself. Whatever strengthens and purifies the affections enlarges the imagination and adds spirit to sense, is useful."¹⁸

The art helps to strengthen and purify the affections. The moralizing force of art lies, not in its capacity to present a timid imitation of our experiences, but in its power to go beyond our experience, satisfying and harmonizing the unfulfilled activities of our nature. The systematisation of impulses is necessary to get a real satisfaction. The artist will actually prefer to satisfy a greater number of equal appetancies rather than a less. Richards divides impulses in two categories - appetancies (likes) and aversions (dislikes). He says that anything that satisfies appetancies possesses value. No person can like without coordination of impulses. A change to a better organized state is achieved through the influence of literature and arts. Richards tells about value as -

"satisfaction of impulses lends value to an object. Values can be for individuals as well as for communities. Systematization of impulses for better satisfaction leads to happiness."¹⁹

The above discussion asserts that the value of an object depends upon the satisfaction of impulses. The systematization of impulses takes to happiness which is based on better satisfaction. In other words, those arts/^{are}valuable which give satisfaction through the proper balance of impulses. In The Adventures of Criticism, K.R.Shrinivasa Iyenger points out Richards views regarding aesthetic value of the literary work as -

"Richards has been sometimes referred as the Aristotle of our times. If Aristotle saw in Katharsis the clue to the salutary effect that Tragedy produces upon the spectator, Richards thinks that it is the function of art to temper and discipline the individual's impulses and attitudes in such a way that he becomes a new man with a competence and sanity that he could not achieve otherwise."²⁰

Here Richards regards art as the means of changing man - the reader completely. The newness is brought by avoiding his originality which is distinct from his past. Richards regards the arts on the most formative of experiences, because in them the development and systematization of our impulses goes to the further lengths.'²¹

Harmony is produced by the work of art in that it stimulates usually opposed aspects. All the complex thoughts, feelings and desires which are stimulated are simultaneously put into an ordered pattern leading to mental peace and pleasure. Richards suggests the theory of value as -

"If the mind is a system of interest, and if an experience is their play, the worth of any experience is matter of the degree to which the mind, through this experience attains a complete equilibrium."²²

The most valuable experience is that which brings a complete equilibrium of impulses. Richards also considers poetry as a remedy for the world's ills. The most valuable attitudes arise in the reading of literature and here we find the most sensible balancing of impulses. He says that 'there is a close natural correspondence between the poet's impulses and possible impulses in his readers.'²³ The main value of literature was to be found in its after-effects upon the mind, sometimes, art is bad because communication is defective, the vehicle inoperative, sometimes because the experience communicated is worthless. Richards states aesthetic effects of the art as -

"At present bad literature, bad art, the cinema, etc. are an influence of the first importance in fixing immature and actually inapplicable attitudes to most things."²⁴

The above statement clarifies that man is always being influenced by the work of art. If the art is bad it creates bad or useless attitudes. Here he asserts the moral point of the work of art. He also says that the enlargement of the mind, the widening of the sphere, of human sensibility, is brought about through poetry. So the vital function of poetry is to induce states of balanced impulses in the reader. The work of art introduces peace in a troubled situation.

Bad art obscures the issues and vitiates critical attitudes. Art may be bad when - communication is defective, vehicles is inoperative and experience is worthless. So the writer must be aware of above views if he wants to create good work. The value of the art depends upon the adequate organization of impulses. The sense of suggestiveness plays its own role in the organization of attitudes. Attitudes leads to reflection which, if prolonged tremoves us from experience and takes us to stages in the development of attitudes. Bad literature and bad art are the result of fixing immature and inapplicable attitudes to most things. Artificial fixations of attitude are wasteful and make men worse adjusted. He lives in fiction projected by his own impulses and not in realities. Richards has discussed badness in poetry, on the ground of impulses, experiences and ultimate value.

There is a general belief that a work that appeals to all types of tastes is a superior. Since men are different, the social value of an experience is bound to differ from man to man. Arts exert an indirect influence. The art develops attitudes and readers are influenced by works of art. some people wrongly emphasize the message or the educational aspect of arts as -

"in Macbeth, "Honesty is the best policy" or in Othello, "Look before you leap."²⁵

This moral finding method is damaging to arts. The above statement

clarifies that the work of art plays a moral activity. Yet we must admit that arts have educational influence. According to the 19th century novelist, majority of the young people derive their morals from the novels they read. The novelist is closer to the young men than their parents or teacher. He is their friend, philosopher and guide. The cinema affects in the same manner. People do not openly imitate films or best sellers. But they adopt stock attitudes and stereotyped ideas through those media. The cinema has a few advantages in this but the ideas a movie-fan imbibes tend to be coarse, clumsy and inapplicable to life. Films supply a sort of cross, second hand experience which is a threat to cultural life. According to Plato, experiences in a play are incomplete, are substitutes and are meagre copies of the real ones. The force of art does not lie in timid representations; it lies in satisfying and harmonizing our experiences. Art is not only for the youth and if art becomes obsolete it will be a calamity for mankind. Arts are the chief means by which the standard of responses can be raised or lowered.

Thus a poem, a play or arts appeal to our impulses at a higher level and reconcile the relationships that would otherwise be irreconcilable. Life filtered the lenses of literature and imagination orders and systemizes our impulses and leaves a lasting impression on us. The balance of opposed impulses leads to aesthetic responses and vigilance of personality. In all aesthetic

experiences there is a balance of opposites, achieved through imagination. The balance and composure in great poetry give a unique state of mind.

Richards' endeavours to distinguish between the emotional effect produced in the reader and the means by which it is produced give rise in his criticism to a whole series of related separations between value and communication.

Human mind is a system of impulses which are activated by some stimulus. Each new experience disturbs the impulses and the mind can rest only when it has readjusted the impulses. To get a poise or balance after such disturbances, some impulses have to yield place to others. The mind aims at maximum satisfaction of the maximum impulses. When impulses respond to an experience in an organised way, we get poetry. A poetic experience has its own value. In its efforts to satisfy the impulses the mind finds their utility also. Richards also says that poetry has a vital role to play. The salvation of mankind can be found only in the mind programmed in the poetic way.²⁶

Richards' views on art and morality explain the place and values of arts in human life. He redefines what he means by morals and wants to prove that in the context of the new meaning of morals, all arts must be moral - if they are to possess any value. What is good or valuable is the exercise of impulses and satisfaction of appetencies. A good thing (art) satisfies our

impulses without interfering with other impulses. Value will disappear if there is no system in the valuation of impulses.

There is a general belief that a work of art that appeals to all types of tastes is superior. The one who appeals equally to all builds up its attitudes with the simplest impulses, so that people of all levels of development can weave their impulses into a satisfying fabric. A poet of wide appeal deals with general impulses and avoids a certain dangerous finality, because impulses go on adjusting themselves at so many levels indefinitely. To sum up : according to Richards aesthetic experience has a distinct kind of mental activity which was supposed to be concerned with pleasure and judgement only.

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