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## UNIT 3    THEORY OF AESTHETICS - MODERN

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### 3.0    OBJECTIVES

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The main objective of this Unit— is to trace the development in the field of Philosophy of Art from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We shall briefly analyse the concept of *beauty* and the sense of *taste* from these original works of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of the development of concept of *beauty* in the work of Shaftesbury
- to differentiate it from the contribution of Addison
- to relate it with the ideas developed by Hutcheson
- to understand the approach of Hume
- to know the importance of sense of *taste* as thought by Burke

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### 3.1    INTRODUCTION

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The aesthetic current was found dominant during this period especially in the writings of the British thinkers. The concept of beauty received special attention as a response to the earlier theories along with the changes the society faced. A new turn, as it were, could be found during this period that we mark as the modern period (part 1), where we shall bring out the essentials in aesthetic from the writings of some of the British thinkers. This unit comprises of an analysis of the compilation of letters of Earl of Shaftesbury that are put together under the title *Characteristics* followed by the idea carried forward by his disciples Addison in his series of influential essays *The Pleasures of Imagination*, in *The Spectator* and Hutcheson in his work *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Treatise 1 – Of Beauty, Order, Harmony, Desing). While Addison tries to bring out the significance of the sense of sight (eyes) as the key factor for imagination based on which the pleasure of imagination is derived, Hutcheson concentrates on analysing the sense of absolute beauty in contrast to the relative

one and in determining the wisdom of cause from which evolved this beautiful effect. In the *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume turns the attention to the sense of *beauty* to that of pride and *deformity* to that of humility through his experimental method of reasoning. In the realm of art experience, the concept of taste was further analysed by Edmund Burke in his work *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* where he points out a stark distinction between the *sublime* and the *beautiful*.

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### 3.2 EARL OF SHAFTESBURY (1671-1713)

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The concept of art and beauty are found strewn in the religious and ethical treatises of Shaftesbury. He traces the development of art forms and the position of artists from the Greek civilization. In the Miscellaneous writings II chapter 1, Shaftesbury states that the arts and sciences were formed in Greece itself. The art forms like music, poetry were shaped and classified into several orders and degrees. He observes that the Greeks had set a standard for perfection with a high degree of correctness. The high standard was accomplished in poetry that aimed at a comprehensive language. This standard, Shaftesbury remarks is found in all the other art forms which included admiration of the performer and the masters and by and large there were art critics who were also honoured. Shaftesbury identifies the admiration the Greece had for music, poetry, rhetoric, and what is classified as plastic arts namely sculpture, painting, architecture etc. He shows that Greece as a nation had an original art of its own. This he calls it as self-formed arts. Thus, in this natural growth of arts very peculiar to Greece, Shaftesbury states the *taste* preferred would be the *sublime* and the *astonishing*. The rhetoric was found prevalent even in the common gatherings presented in highly poetic and figurative manner. The tragedy was greatly extolled and the *taste* has commonly known to be in a high degree of perfection. Gradually, notes Shaftesbury, a change in the *taste* of the Greece, they sought for simplicity and Nature. This *taste* continued for ages until the fall of the empire.

Shaftesbury compares this ancient growth of *taste* with that of the modern period of his own times by citing the example of the speeches delivered in the parliament. He wonders whether the modern period has fallen very low in *taste* or is it an improvement of being natural and simple. By the study of the growth of science and art in ancient Greece, Shaftesbury arrives at an important cause that led to such a development which he calls it as the love for one's own country. He necessitates an enquiry thus, "to discover how we may to best advantage form within ourselves what in the polite world is called a relish or good taste".

To philosophise, says Shaftesbury, is to carry the thought a step higher. The sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in Nature and the order of the world. Accordingly, he states, that the respective conduct and distinct manners are regulated by one's rank and quality at the individual level and the other according to the dignity externally, in Nature. He concludes here stating, "The taste of beauty and the relish of what is decent, just, and amiable perfects the character of the gentleman and the philosopher. And the study of such a taste or relish ill, as we suppose, be ever the great employment and concern of him who covets as well to be wise and good as agreeable and polite."

Thus, in his treatise, he recommends morals in the sense of manners which is the foundation to advance philosophy. He considers that without the pre-establishment

or supposition of a certain *taste*, the charm of the external world that is adopted as pleasure or entertainment cannot be accounted for. He shows that *taste* or *judgement* cannot be created by an individual into the world. That is to say, it is not innate but proceeds from practice and culture. He states that a legitimate and just *taste* can not be conceived but from a considerable hard work and pains of criticism. He considers that the performers and others are able to discover the true *beauty* worth of every object because of the examination undertaken following criticisms. Shaftesbury being an extreme moralist claims that more than the symmetries and proportions seen as the feature for beauty, it is the right and generous affection that is more beautiful. Thus, he opines that along with principles the *taste* governs the moral attitude. He does not accept the *taste* formed by exterior manners and behaviours but sees moral as its foundation. He struggles to establish that *beauty* is of inward sentiments and principles.

Shaftesbury addresses the Greek thought of *beauty* in proportions and symmetries. He shows that the *taste* cannot be just determined by the outward symmetry and order without acknowledging that the proportionate and regular state is truly prosperous and natural in every subject. He exhibits that the same external features (proportionate and symmetrical) is the cause for deformity and creates inconvenience and disease. By his study of the sculptures, he derives that the beauty of statues is measured from the perfection of Nature. Therefore, he considers *beauty* and truth are committed to the notion of utility and convenience, even in the apprehension of every ingenious artist, the architect, or the painter. A physician too, he states, comprehends that the natural health is the just proportion. This, Shaftesbury, admires as the inward beauty of the body. When the harmony is disturbed there is deformity internally and calamity externally. By raising a sequence of questions, he provides his proposition as *what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable, what is harmonious and proportionable is true and what is at once both beautiful and true if of consequence agreeable and good*. Shaftesbury often connects the outward and inward beauty and truth and observes that on learning and knowledge, the manners and life depend that takes to the creation and formation of *taste* and hence it is not innate but wholly depends on manners, opinions, characteristics, times. Thus, the ultimate foundation of *beauty* as of morality is found in the principles of harmony and proportion, whether of the parts in relation to each other, or of the whole in relation to other wholes.

In the Moralists, Shaftesbury sets forth the three orders of beauty.

- 1) The dead forms, which bear a fashion, and are formed, either by human or by nature, which have no forming power, no action or intelligence.
- 2) The Forms which form; that is, which have intelligence, action and operation. Here is the double beauty, there is both Form and the mind.
- 3) Whatever beauty appears in the second order of forms, or whatever is produced from that, all this is principally and originally in this last order of Supreme and Sovereign Beauty.

He opines to a kind of ascending order of *beauty* from the material objects to the Supreme Form, thus resonating the Platonic thought.

Shaftesbury expresses his view on the Fine Arts, in his two small pieces namely *Notion of the historical draught or tabulature of the Judgement of Hercules* and *Letter concerning Design*.

In the first piece contains some remarks on the requisites of historical painting in general. He lays down the rules for painting with the principles like unity of design, unity of time and action or the rule of consistency, thus maintaining verisimilitude and congruity. These principles he applies for the historical and mythological pieces and not for devotional art pieces. He concludes with a note on the concept of colors.

In the second piece *Letter concerning Design*, he predicts a rise of national school of art in England. He observes here that the art does not flourish by patronage and private persons but on the *taste* and *genius* of the people at large. He considers that the spirit of the people in a free state brings about improvement in *taste*. He believes that the factors that cause a fall in the progress of the arts could be climate, geography, wealth, leisure, temperament of the people, the characteristics of religious beliefs etc. According to him a flourishing state of art and literature usually accompanies a wide-spread deep interest in philosophy and politics.

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### 3.3 JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719)

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Addison, a disciple of Shaftesbury, sets to ponder on the concept of *beautiful* that are recorded in a series of essays titled *Pleasures of Imagination* (letters numbered 411 to 421) compiled in the work named *The Spectator*. He begins his analysis from the source from which the pleasures of imagination or *fancy* arise. He arrives at the sense of sight as the primary source that give rise to imagination from which pleasure is derived and thereafter he classifies the pleasure into two kinds as primary pleasure and secondary pleasure. The primary pleasure of imagination is originally from the sense of sight that proceeds from the objects that are directly perceived. The secondary pleasures of the imagination flow from the ideas of visible objects that are not actually before the eye, but are 'seen' through memories or from the absent and fictitious objects that are agreeable to visions. Addison then demonstrates the objects given to sight. In the survey of external objects he classifies the sources of pleasures of imagination into three, as what is *great*, *uncommon* and *beautiful*. In describing that which is *great*, he says, it means not only a bulk or large single object but the largeness of a whole view. The response to such a *great* object, he describes as, "...flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them."

The *uncommon* he considers as that which is presented as *new*. He shows that mind delights at something unusual, is a kind of diversion that makes even the imperfections of nature pleasing. The *beautiful*, Addison sees as the culmination of both the *great* and *uncommon*. He says, "...there is nothing that makes its way more directly to the soul than beauty, which immediately diffuses a secret satisfaction and complacency through the imagination, and gives a finishing to anything that is great or uncommon."

Addison identifies *beauty* at two levels, one as a general *beauty* in the species. He shows that every sensible being has its own notion of *beauty* that is affected by the beauties of its own kind. In the second kind of *beauty*, he states, is found in the works of art and nature that arouses a secret delight and a kind of fondness for the places or objects in which the *beauty* is discovered. Addison remarks that among the several kinds of *beauty*, the eye takes delight in the colours.

In the next essay, Addison tries to assign a necessary cause of that which effects the imagination with pleasure. He states it is hard to determine the necessary or the final cause because neither the nature of an idea nor the substance of a human soul is known. But, Addison engages in a scheme of speculations to arrive at the agreeable part of the soul and categorising as that which pleases and displeases the mind without tracing the necessary or the efficient cause from where the pleasure or displeasure arise. In his speculative process, Addison shows that which is agreeable to the soul and pleasing to the mind is based on the *great*, *uncommon* and *beautiful*. In the *beautiful* too, he shows the pleasantness in the *beauty* in our own species followed by the *beauty* in nature that is consumed by the sense of sight in the form of colours.

In the following essay, Addison sets a standard of gradation in the *beautiful* in nature and art. Here he considers that even though in art, there is *uncommon* and *beautiful*, it is difficult to validate that there is *great* in art, whereas, in nature there is all the three, viz., *great*, *uncommon* and *beautiful*. He justifies this by stating that the poet loves nature that appears in the 'greatest' perfection and the poetic composition aims at bringing out the *great* that delights the imagination. By setting apart the work of nature from that of art, Addison does not completely isolate them, he shows that the works of nature is more pleasant when they resemble those of art. He discovers a double principle in pleasure, one that is from the agreeableness of the objects to the eye and the other from their similitude to other objects. Addison applies this double principle in the work of art also. The nature carries more value when it resemble those of art, likewise, the art is also at a greater advantage by resembling the nature because he states here, the similitude is not only pleasant but the pattern more perfect. Addison in this essay describes one such experience, "The prettiest landscape I ever saw, was one drawn on the walls of a dark room, which stood opposite on one side to a navigable river, and on the other to a park. The experiment is very common in optics. Here you might discover the waves and fluctuations of the water in strong and proper colours, with the picture of a ship entering at one end and sailing by degrees through the whole piece. On another there appeared the green shadows of trees, waving to and fro with the wind, and herds of deer among them in miniature, leaping about upon the wall. I must confess, the novelty of such a sight may be one occasion of its pleasantness to the imagination, but certainly the chief reason is its near resemblance to nature, as it does not only, like other pictures, give the colour and figure, but the motion of the things it represents."

In essay (No.415), Addison reverts to the main idea on the primary pleasures of the imagination by analysing the work of art, specifically architecture. He cites various examples of architecture in London, France and China and concludes that what pleases this imagination through architecture is that it is *great*, *uncommon* and *beautiful*. He then describes the secondary pleasures of imagination as that which proceeds from that action of mind which compares the ideas arising from the original objects along with the ideas received from statues, pictures etc. Addison demonstrates his failure in determining the necessary reason why this operation of mind is attended with so much pleasure. Here he talks about a single principle that derives pleasure from arts like sculpture, painting, description etc. In this analysis, Addison confines himself to those pleasures of imagination that proceed from ideas raised by *words*. The description through *words* brings about varied *taste* that itself proceeds from either *perfection of imagination* or *different ideas* with which one is acquainted with. He concludes



here by stating that to accomplish a perfect imagination one is to be born with such qualities. In the following essay, he states that even a poet or a writer is to be born with this faculty in its full strength and vigour. Addison brings out such faculties in poets like Homer, Virgil and Ovid and later he analyses the poem of Milton.

In the following essay (419), Addison analyses the problem of art that has been prevalent for centuries haunted with the question as how does the mind delight in various scenes of horror and terror either described in words or in visual art forms. In this process, as his predecessors, Addison distinguishes the tragedy faced in life as that from depicted in art forms. He wonders at the delight created by the poets and writers on horror by real, fictitious and fairy tale characters. He conveys the many ways of poet's imagination, "Thus we see how many ways poetry addresses itself to the imagination, as it has not only the whole circle of nature for its province, but makes new worlds of its own, shows us persons who are not to be found in being, and represents even the faculties of the soul, with her several virtues and vices, in a sensible shape and character."

Addison then contrasts two kinds of writers, one as described above who borrow their material from outward objects and combine them with their own pleasure, to other kinds of writers who follow nature more closely and take the scenes out of it like the historians, natural philosophers, travellers, geographers and so on. In the concluding essays, he shows in general the art of imagining and draws that imagination is capable of delivering a high degree of pain and pleasure both that are a delight in the artistic sense.

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### 3.4 HUTCHESON (1694-1747)

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Hutcheson, also a disciple of Shaftesbury presents his thoughts on the sense of *beauty* in his work titled *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Treatise I: *Of Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*). In eight sections of the first treatise, he begins by differentiating *perception* and *sensation*. He then takes up the concept of *beauty* as original and absolute followed by an analysis of the *beauty* of theorems. Then he analyses the relative or comparative *beauty*, reasons in relation to design, wisdom of the cause from which effects the *beautiful*, universality of *beauty* and concludes with an analysis of the internal sense in life and its final cause.

To begin with, Hutcheson tries to arrive at the conventional definition of the word *sensation*. He says, it is those ideas which are raised in the mind by way of interaction with external objects that is responded by the body. He makes a note of different senses like colour, sound etc. The different senses are combined and received by the mind where the simple ideas are conjoined as composition of a substance. He mentions that a substance can never be defined if the simple ideas are not gathered by the senses. Thus, any desire or aversion to an object, Hutcheson notices is founded upon an opinion of some perfection or some deficiency in those qualities that are perceived through the senses. He observes that many of the sensitive perceptions are pleasant and many painful and the cause for the same is indeterminable. However, he tries to arrive at the cause of such differences as due to the reception of the simple ideas by the mind or because of varied *fancy* or imagination entertained by different minds. Hutcheson frequently uses the word *fancy* in the sense of *imagination*. He states even the change of ideas, or

opinion from the Country or acquaintance brings about a change in the imagination. Hutcheson advances in his thought from that of Addison who regulated the rise of pleasure of imagination from the sense of sight that is specific to colours. Hutcheson on the other hand regards that pleasure of sense is that which is accompanied by simple ideas of sensation. He carries forward this thought by stating that the complex ideas of objects also enhances this sense of pleasure, that obtain names like Beautiful, Regular, Harmonious etc. So, delight is not restricted to colour alone, unlike Addison.

Hutcheson connotes the word *beauty* as the ideas raised in the mind and the sense of *beauty* is the power for receiving such ideas. Harmony, he defines as pleasant ideas arising from composition of sounds, a good ear and the power of perceiving this pleasure. All these put together, Hutcheson chooses to call the power of receiving the ideas as an *internal sense* and he reiterates that it is different from the perception of seeing and hearing which is a universal faculty that functions without even the sense of *beauty* and *harmony*. Thus, he classifies the powers of perception as the *external sense*. The *internal sense*, Hutcheson classifies as that which perceives *beauty* and in another order that which perceives the beauty of *theorems, universal truths, general causes, principles of action* etc. He defines *internal sense* as a passive power of receiving ideas of beauty from all objects in which there is uniformity amidst variety.

By further analysis, Hutcheson remarks that some objects are immediately given to the pleasure of *beauty*, and that we have sense fitted for perceiving it, and that it is distinct from that joy which arises upon prospect of advantage. Without this distinct sense of *beauty*, Hutcheson observes that one may be recommended with harmony, house, gardens, equipments that are convenient and fruitful but never as *beautiful*.

*Beauty* is either original or comparative, or the better terms, says Hutcheson, are absolute or relative. The Original or Absolute *beauty* he defines as that *beauty* which we perceive in objects without comparison to any thing external of which the object is supposed an imitation, or picture, where the *beauty* is perceived from the works of nature, artificial forms, figures. The Comparative or Relative *beauty* is defined as that which we perceive in objects, commonly considered as imitations or resemblances of something else. Hutcheson analyses these two forms of beauty in three sections of his first treatise.

### Original or Absolute Beauty

It is known that there are ideas of *beauty* and *harmony*. Now, the examination is with regard to the nature of quality in objects that excite these ideas. He enumerates the factors that bring about the ideas of *beauty* as:

- uniformity amidst variety
- grandeur
- novelty
- sanctity
- harmony

These, he observes these as the same foundation for the sense of *beauty* in the works of nature. Here, he concludes by stating that the pleasant *sensation* arises only from objects in which there is uniformity amidst variety.

This is unique to the theory of beauty propounded by Hutcheson where he deals with the beauty of theorems or universal truths. He lays down certain principles that govern the sense of *beauty* of theorems.

- Unity of infinity of objects
- Multitude of corollaries easily deducible

The delight in science or universal theorems, Hutcheson prefers to call it *sensation*, since it necessarily accompanies the discovery of any proposition and is distinct from bare knowledge itself. This echoes the idea of Aristotle in his ethical work thus, “we have certain natural Propensities to certain Actions, or to the Exercise of certain natural Powers, without a View to, or Intention of, obtaining those Pleasures which naturally accompany them.”

In the work of art, observes Hutcheson that are in the artificial structures, the foundation of *beauty* is some kind of uniformity, or unity of proportion. But he concludes stating that the underlying principle in the case of the original beauty is uniformity amidst variety.

### Comparative or Relative Beauty

All *beauty* is relative, says Hutcheson in the sense of some mind perceiving it, but relative is that which is apprehended in any object, commonly considered as an imitation of some original. This *beauty* he says is founded on conformity, or a kind of unity between the original and the copy. This does mean that there be *beauty* in the original along which is imitated, but the art makes it more beautiful even when it is void in the original. Hutcheson identifies the basic principle in the work of art as novelty and intention of the artist.

### Cause and Effect

In the following section, Hutcheson tries to show the connection between the cause that consist of design and wisdom which he infers from the *beauty* and regularity of effects. By way of inference he concludes that since regularity never arises from ‘undesigned force’ in an individual likewise regularity in the creation presupposes design in the cause. He traces that every effect flows from the intention of some cause. Hutcheson shows the impossibility in terms of the following objections:

- possibility by chance
- combination of chances
- combination of irregular forms,
- gross similarity by chance
- irregularities does not prove want of design

The next enquiry is conducted based on the *beauty* in effect thereby deriving design and wisdom in the cause. The main reason which Hutcheson cites is the observation of many useful or beautiful effects flowing from one general cause. He states, “This is certain, That we have some of the most delightful Instances of Universal Causes the Works of Nature, and that the most studious Men in these Subjects are so delighted with the Observation of them, that they always look upon them as Evidences of Wisdom in the Administration of Nature, from a SENSE OF BEAUTY.”



Universality of the Sense of Beauty

Hutcheson through another series of questions arrives at the following propositions:

- sense of *beauty* is designed to give positive pleasure but not a positive pain or disgust.
- Deformity is only the absence of *beauty*, or deficiency in the *beauty* expected in any species
- Association of Ideas make objects pleasant and delightful, which are not naturally apt to give any such pleasures
- The casual conjunctions of ideas may give a disgust, where there is nothing disagreeable in the Form itself, like by some association with accidental ideas serpents, swine, insects are disliked commonly.

Thereafter, he reverts to the original position that the universal agreement of mankind in their sense of *beauty* is from uniformity amidst variety. He concludes derived from the examination of various experiences thus, “This Sense of Beauty universal, “if all Men are better pleased with Uniformity in the simpler Instances than the contrary, even when there is no Advantage observed attending it and likewise if all Men, according as their Capacity in larges, so as to receive and compare more complex Ideas, have a greater Delight in Uniformity, and are pleased with its more complex Kinds, both Original and Relative.” Thus, he lays the foundation of beauty in works of art as regularity and uniformity.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain “Beauty is inward sentiments and principles.”

2) Distinguish primary pleasure and secondary pleasure according to Addison.

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### 3.5 DAVID HUME (1711-1776)

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*A Treatise of Human Nature*, is an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning by David Hume. He takes up the discussion on *Beauty* and *Deformity* in the second book of the treatise titled *Of the Passions*. He establishes the concept of impressions and ideas earlier and extends the thought in understanding *beauty* and *deformity*. He first differentiates *beauty* of any kind as the source of delight and satisfaction in contrast to *deformity* as that which produces pain, either in animate or inanimate object. Hume identifies these opposite sensations as related to the opposite passions, thus *beauty* becoming an object of pride and *deformity* of humility as a result of transition of impressions and ideas. The object of both these passions in the form of *beauty* and *deformity* is the self.

Hume tries to distinguish the *beauty* and *deformity* and arrives that *beauty* is that which is in order either seen in nature, or known by custom that gives pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. *Beauty* is thus different from *deformity* that has a natural tendency to produce uneasiness. Thus, the essence of *beauty* is pleasure and essence of *deformity* is pain. Hume logically presents that *beauty* provides a sense of security that is pleasant and in *deformity* there is the apprehension of danger, which is uneasy. He says, thus *beauty* cannot be defined but is discerned only by a *taste* or *sensation*. Based on this, he concludes that *beauty* is a form which produces pleasure in contrast to *deformity* which is a structure of parts that conveys pain. Since the determinant factor of *beauty* and *deformity* are pleasure and pain, which are sensation, then all the effect of these qualities also, Hume concludes must be derived from sensation. By a series of argument, Hume deduces that whatever is either useful, beautiful, or surprising, is an object of pride and it's contrary, of humility.

Further, Hume conducts two experiments based on which he derives,

- 1) an object produces pride merely by the interposition of pleasure; and that because the quality, by which it produces pride, is in reality nothing but the power of producing pleasure.
- 2) that the pleasure produces the pride by a transition along related ideas ; because when we cut off that relation the passion is immediately destroyed.

Thus, Hume positions *beauty* as contrast to *deformity*, one as the rise for pleasure and the other as that of pain, thus is the cause of pride and humility respectively.

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### 3.6 EDMUND BURKE (1729-1797)

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#### On Taste

In his introductory discourse *On Taste*, Burke begins with the proposition that the standard of both reason and *taste* is the same in all human creatures. He gives the reason that if some standard principles of judgement were not common in all then sufficient reason or passion cannot be maintained in the correspondence of life. But, he observes that unlike the standard examination on either truth or falsehood the sense of *taste* does not have a uniform principle. He further notes that this faculty of human seem not to be within the range of regulation of any standard. He explains the difficulty in assigning the principles to determine the *taste*. He claims that the term *taste* is not extremely accurate and does not attempt

to define it the real sense. However, Burke explains that *taste* could be understood as, “I mean by the word Taste no more than that faculty or those faculties of the mind, which are affected with, or which form a judgment of, the works of imagination and the elegant arts. This is, I think, the most general idea of that word, and what is the least connected with any particular theory.”

He engages in an enquiry to find whether there are any principles by which the imagination is affected which is so common. But he notes on the diversity of taste both in kind and degree that marks its indeterminate position. In this order of enquiry, Burke first categorises the natural powers of human, as the senses, imagination and judgement. Based on the analysis of the sense he draws certain ideas:

- *Taste* cannot be disputed; only means that the kind of pleasure or pain experienced through *taste* of a particular thing cannot be disputed.
- There is a general agreement with the notion of naturally pleasing or disagreeable to the sense
- There is a difference between natural *taste* and acquired *relish*
- There is in all men a sufficient remembrance of the original natural causes of pleasure, to enable them to bring all things offered to their senses to that standard, and to regulate their feelings and opinions by it.
- To judge a new thing one finds there is the affection in a natural manner and on the common principles.
- The pleasure of all senses is the same in all (or different to a very small degree)

Burke then defines ‘imagination’ as a kind of some creative power to represent at pleasure the images either in order as received by the senses, or by combining the images in a different order in a new manner. This power, he calls as imagination. He then adds that his power of imagination cannot produce anything new absolutely since it is given to the disposition of the ideas as received from the senses. He shows that since the imagination is based on the reception by the senses, the same principle governs the pleasure and pain experienced through imagination. The difference between the pleasure or pain received through the images of imagination from that of senses is that the senses are given to the original objects whereas the imagination is drawn from imitative forms. By the analysis of the faculty of imagination, Burke draws the following ideas:

- The mind has naturally a far greater alacrity and satisfaction in tracing resemblances than in searching for differences: because by making resemblances new images are created, united, enlarged.
- The imagination is not set to advance in case of distinctions since the task itself is viewed as severe and troublesome. Based on this principle, Burke observes that Homer and other oriental writers were very fond of similitudes.
- Thus, pleasure of resemblance is a principle that caters to imagination. The comparison is carried out based on the principle of knowledge.
- The difference in knowledge marks the difference in *taste*

- The improvement of knowledge does not affect the *taste*
- The critical *taste* does not depend on superior principle in human, but upon superior knowledge.
- The *taste* belonging to the imagination, its principle is the same in all
- there is no difference in the manner of their being affected, nor in the causes of the affection; but in the *degree* there is a difference, which arises from two causes principally; either from a greater degree of natural sensibility, or from a closer and longer attention to the object.

In the analysis of the ‘judgement’, Burke shows that works of imagination are not confined to the representation of sensible objects, nor to efforts upon the passions, but extend themselves to the manners, the characters, the actions, and designs, their relations, their virtues, and vices etc. These come within the province of the judgment, which is improved by attention, and by the habit of reasoning. All these make a very considerable part of what are considered as the objects of taste.

Further from the above ideas on sense, imagination and judgement, Burke tries to redefine *taste* as that which is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of imagination, and the of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty concerning various relations, passions, manners or customs. While he states that the principle governing *taste* is common in all, the degree to which it prevails in every individual is different that depends on sensibility and judgement which is commonly called as *taste*. Burke considers that the cause of a wrong *taste* is the result of the defect of judgement that arises from a natural weakness of understanding or due to lack of proper direction. A judgement is considered better than others, Burke states, is a sort of conscious pride and superiority that arises from thinking rightly. But this is identified by Burke as an ‘indirect pleasure’, a pleasure which does not immediately draw from the object under contemplation. Burke concludes that *taste* is improved exactly as one improves the judgement, by expansion of knowledge, steady attention to objects and by frequent exercise. However, he determines that there is no proof that *taste* is a distinct faculty.

Burke then proceeds to explain the nature of pleasure and pain. He defines *sublime* as that which has the source in the ideas of pain and danger, which is terrible or conversant with terrible objects leading to terror. Burke then differentiates passion as that which belong to the society and that which belong to self-preservation. He considers the passion of society is only lust. By refuting the idea of Addison, he shows that passions leading to preferences within the same species are not from the sense of beauty but due to lack of choice amongst other objects. Burke calls *beauty* a social quality. The complicated passions in a society that branches into a variety of forms that serve as a linking chain in the society. Burke identifies three such principal links in this chain, viz., *sympathy*, *imitation* and *ambition*.

### **Sympathy**

Burke considers sympathy as the first passion that makes one enter into the concern of others. It is a kind of substitution that one sees in the place of another person and there is a partake of either pain as a source of sublime or as pleasure bringing

about social affections. Burke states that it is by this principle that art forms transfuse passions that are capable of resulting in delight on wretchedness, misery or death. It is well known that a shock in real life is a tragic experience, and the same represented becomes the source of highest pleasure. He observes the effects of sympathy in the distress of the others and affirms that one has a degree of delight in the real misfortunes and pains of others. He draws from this tendency that terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too closely, and pity is a passion accompanied with pleasure, because it arises from love and social affection. Burke then differentiates the effects of tragedy from art forms is that of pleasure derived from imitative distress. Burke shows that however real sympathy is superior to that caused by imitative arts. There is a difference between pain in reality and a delight in the representation.

### Imitation

The second passion of society, Burke identified was *imitation* or a desire for imitating and consequently a pleasure in it. Imitation is carried out without an intervention of the reasoning faculty. Burke considers imitation as one of the strongest links of society, since learning takes place by imitation. He then tries to lay down a principle which attempts to describe the power of the arts to imitation or to the pleasure derived in the skill of the imitator. “When the object represented in poetry or painting is such as we could have no desire of seeing in the reality, then I may be sure that its power in poetry or painting is owing to the power of imitation, and to no cause operating in the thing itself. So it is with most of the pieces which the painters call still-life. In these a cottage, a dunghill, the meanest and most ordinary utensils of the kitchen, are capable of giving us pleasure. But when the object of the painting or poem is such as we should run to see if real, let it affect us with what odd sort of sense it will, we may rely upon that the power of the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself than to the mere effect of imitation, or to a consideration of the skill of the imitator, however excellent.”

### Ambition

Burke observes that even though imitation is one of the great instruments in bringing the nature towards its perfection, yet it cannot be stopped with that, it necessarily is to be followed by another, thus leading to a circle of eternity that provides scope for improvement. This, Burke calls as the sense of *ambition*. It is passion to excel and this idea of being distinct itself is pleasant. Burke reminds the idea of Longinus, his observation of that glorifying sense of inward greatness.

Let us summarise the ideas of Burke so far,

- the passions which belong to self-preservation turn on pain and danger
- they are painful when their causes immediately affect
- they are delightful when an idea of pain and danger is not real
- this delight is not called as pleasure because it turns on pain and is different from any positive pleasure
- that which excites this delight is called *sublime*
- the passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest passions



- Society is the final cause in relation to passions
- In society directed by the pleasure in object, the particular passion here is called *sympathy*, *imitation* and *ambition*.

Burke then continues his second part of inquiry, as to what things they are that cause in one the affections of the sublime and beautiful. He identifies the passion caused by the sublime as astonishment as the effect of highest degree. Astonishment he defines as that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. The inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect. Burke argues the ‘terror’ is the ruling principle of sublime. He observes that no passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting reasoning as fear. He identifies a necessary factor to make something terrible as obscurity. Burke quotes the lines of death by Milton to point out the uncertainty, confused, terrible – but sublime. Further, he enumerates the other causes of sublime as - power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, magnitude in building, infinity in pleasing objects, difficulty, magnificence, light (colours), sound and loudness, suddenness, and intermitting.

Burke considers distinguishing the *beautiful* from the *sublime*. He defines *beauty* as that quality or those qualities in bodies, by which they cause love, some similar passion. And love, he defines as that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating anything beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be, which is energy of the mind that hurries one on to the possession of certain objects, that does not affect as they are beautiful but by means altogether different. Burke at length argues that ‘proportion’ is not the cause of beauty and ‘deformity’ is not opposed to beauty. He then shows that fitness or utility is not the cause of beauty and even perfection cannot be considered as the cause of beauty. In this line of argument, he clarifies that proportion and fitness are not completely discarded in the works of art. In beauty the effect is previous to any knowledge of the use, but to judge of proportion the end is to be known for which any work is designed. Further, Burke argues that the idea of beauty cannot be applied to the qualities of the mind or to virtue. Having argued over what does not cause beauty, now Burke explains the cause of beauty.

He states beauty is a thing much too affecting not to depend on some positive qualities. Since the various features above mentioned are dismissed as the cause of beauty, here Burke says, “we must conclude that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses.”

Burke traces the cause of beauty as,

- small objects
- smoothness
- gradual variation
- delicacy
- colour
- physiognomy
- gracefulness

- elegance and speciousness
- touch, sound, taste and smell

Burke concludes here bringing out the difference between the *sublime* and *beautiful*.

Sublime	Beautiful
Vast dimensions	Small objects
Rugged and negligent	smooth and polished
There is right line; when deviates often makes a strong deviation	No right line, deviate insensibly
Dark and gloomy	not obscure
Solid and massive	light and delicate

Thus, Burke opines the difference between the sublime and the beautiful.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the sense of *taste* as defined and redefined by Burke.

2) ‘There is sense of pride in beauty’ – Comment based on Hume’s thought.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

We have very briefly seen the development of thought with regard to the idea of *beauty*. By going through the essence of the original works of the writers of the modern period we find a sharp distinction from the thought as found in the medieval age. The beginning of modern period raises many questions with regard to the experience of art. Though the art experience still has not found a distinct position to be classified as a study on the Philosophy of art, we do find certain important concepts that have emerged in this period that laid the basic foundation for the second phase of modern era in the aesthetic thought of the German thinkers. Hence the contribution of the first phase of modern thinkers is valuable in building

up the Philosophy of Art. We briefly surveyed the original works beginning from that of the Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury has not departed much from the development of art and artists of the Greece and is in a way stuck with the same determinants of that give rise to the notion of beauty. However his important contribution is to identify *taste* as a distinct factor that influences the notion of beauty in turn the art works and idea on artists. His two disciples, Addison and Hutcheson had considerably built upon the ideas of *taste*, *sensation* and *beauty*. David Hume though is not considered strictly to have given fresh understanding to the nature of art experience, but he has however brought it ideas of *beauty* in contrast to *deformity*. Burke does not opine to the view of Hutcheson or Hume with regard to deformity as absence of beauty and he builds up gradually on the notion of *taste*. He strictly distinguishes the *sublime* and the *beautiful* thus marking the beginning of new era on the understanding of art experience. The students are reminded here that we have still not arrived at the word ‘aesthetics’ and its relation to art experience.

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### 3.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Fancy</b>	:	imagination
<b>Internal sense</b>	:	sense of beauty and harmony
<b>External sense</b>	:	sense of empirical perception
<b>Uncommon</b>	:	new

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### 3.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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