

## Tagore's Philosophy of Creation: A New Dimension in Art and Culture

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### Abstract

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The present paper is an attempt to explain Tagore's view on creation from the philosophical point of view. In fact, Tagore follows the philosophy of Vedas and Upaniṣadas as the main sources of Indian spiritual thoughts and he clearly defines the human nature as the creative spirit that makes a man to be perfect in his infinite nature. Especially, Tagore's philosophy of creation also follows the synthetic idealism of Vedanta, Vishnavism, Buddhism, and his philosophy provides many notions such as the religion of man, man's finite and infinite nature, the man's creative nature, the surplus in man, the religion of an artist, man of the heart and the realization of truth. To identify the nature of creation as different from the construction, he has made a sharp distinction between the two. Following Tagore's view, here, I have taken an attempt to answer some important questions, these are: What is creation? Can a creation be separated from its creator? Why does Tagore think a man's creation is greater than all his gross desires? How does a man realize the truth in creation? According to Tagore, a creation is not only a spontaneous expression of an artist, but also a new work in which the two factors - the creator and his creation are closely related to each other; one cannot be separated from the other. When a man is able to realize his creative nature through the creation and its spontaneous expression through the aesthetic appreciation, he is the greater than all others those have no such creative abilities and he is also free from all bondage. Finally, Tagore accepts the subjective truth not only to define the individual experience of aesthetic appreciation of creation, but also to express the man's realization of truth in the realm of art and culture.

**Keywords:** construction, creation, man's creative nature, surplus, realization of truth

## **Introduction**

Rabindranath Tagore, a world famous poet and the first Asian as well as Indian Nobel Laureate, opens the door to discuss the man's creative nature from the artistic point of view. Though, he never claims himself as a so-called academic philosopher, yet his philosophical thoughts about the man's creative nature or infinite nature towards the creation of something new are obviously considered as modern interpretations based on Vedas and Upaniṣadas which make him perhaps a contemporary Indian philosopher.<sup>1</sup> In common view, a creation is an act of making or inventing or producing something new. Religious creationism believes that the God created the universe. So, He is the great creator of the world. Tagore however does not deny this view, rather he also believes the God as the ultimate reality existing behind the world and it makes him a theistic as well as idealistic philosopher. But, he introduces the notion of artistic creation as 'an innovative work of man' as well as 'the surplus in man' in the field of philosophy of art and culture. To discuss the nature of creation as an art-form, he mentions the man's creative nature in a new dimension. In his philosophical discourses, a creation means an artistic production, and it, thus, having aesthetic value, stands for spontaneous expression of conscious soul. In order to define the creation as an innovative work, he makes the distinction between construction and creation. A construction is a structural form of object that can be measured by us in its material nature, but a creation is not merely a construction produced as a form of matter, it is immaterial in its nature. For a new creation, he repeatedly reminds us that man has inner spirit, it is his surplus, and he can improve it by creating something new – that is called the creative spirit. But, what is creation? In his famous lecture on the topic "Construction versus Creation", he says "Creation is infinitely in excess of all measurements, it is the immaterial in matter."<sup>2</sup>

## **The Concept of Creation in the Philosophy of Art**

As a concept or a notion, the creation can be defined with its beginning from which it is originated within the context of religion, philosophy and science. In English literature, the term 'creation' means the act or process of making or building something to be produced newly, or something new that one has made. The Bible defines the term 'creation' as the making of world by the God. In the Old English, a creation is something new that has been produced by human skill. In religion, people very often use the term to refer to the whole universe as the creation of God. Many religious systems and philosophical traditions believe that the real creation is a divine act by which the God created the universe. The term "creation" is originated from the Latin word 'creato', and its etymological meaning is invention or production. The synonyms are origination, foundation, formation, construction, fabrication, generation, innovation, production, invention, etc. Many words are related to the creation such as new-concept, new-work, innovative work, original work, creative work, art-formation, imagination, conception, establishment, development, achievement, etc. In order to define the notion of creation with its

specific meaning, Tagore explains it as a new production of art that can be realized as truth by the aesthetic appreciation of beauty. The notion of creation as he used in his works is an artistic production which is sometimes defined as a concept in a thought- process, an act in a work, a voice of humanity in a speech, a spontaneous expression in an art and a truth in a realization.

In fact, in its meanings, the term 'creation' indicates two aspects - the action of making something new and the thing (as a result of the action) that has been made or invented. A creation is an act of starting something new for the first time or an act of introducing something new, it is either God's act or human act. There are some dimensions of creation that follow some acts of making or transformation: (i) The spiritual transformation makes the world as the great design of God (the divine creation), (ii) The biological transformation makes the different species of life (the gross creation or production), (iii) The physical transformation makes the different stages of body, (iv) The material transformation (combination of components) makes the different types of matter (natural creation), (v) Man can produce something new with his diligent effort to fulfil his needs or self-interest, and (vi) Man creates something new forms which are infinitely in excess of all basic and material needs. Tagore mentions his view of creation in the senses of (i) and (vi). The great influence of Vedas, Upaniṣadas and teachings of Buddha make him both a humanistic philosopher and a poet of spirit.<sup>3</sup> Even, his view on the ultimate reality as the creator of universe is considered as a theistic approach to the existence of God in His divine creation. It is true that Tagore follows the philosophy of Upaniṣadas but he does not believe that the physical world or the gross body is an illusory or false production. Rather, he believes that both the physical body and the conscious soul are real, but every production or construction is the finite nature of physical body, whereas the spontaneous creation of soul is the man's infinite nature.<sup>4</sup> In the sense, a creation is an act of producing something new for the first time along with its spontaneous expression as an artistic talent.

Generally, we can say that a concept may be a creation, and the vice-versa is also possible i.e. a creation may be a concept. The religious creationism holds that the universe including its nature, earth and life (human and non-human beings) are originated from the supernatural acts of divine power. The God created this beautiful world where we feel our existence. It is very often contrasted with scientific creationism which provides many theories regarding the creation of world and the evolution for the origin and development of natural or living phenomena, such as cosmology, evolution, archaeology, etc. Tagore never deny these different theories of creation and evolution, but he deeply follows Upaniṣadas and maintains that human being having a conscious soul can realise the whole universe as a great creation and his life as a whole in his infinite nature.<sup>5</sup> If a man being nothing but a living entity tries to make himself to be true by his isolated self where he merely exists without imagination, innovation and aesthetic appreciation, he is never true like a greater being.

From the metaphysical point of view, the world-nature as a great creation, according to Tagore, is the sign of divine nature of God, and when an artist draws a picture for it, from the aesthetical point of view, it is the spontaneous expression of man's infinite nature which is measured not by his basic needs of gross life, but by the joy of life. In fact, no creation is measured truly by its material output, because it is infinite in its nature. The life in the fulfilment of needs in its unlimited desire has neither great end nor real joy, but the man who is in his life as exists in his creative nature can realize the truth in the form of joy. To define the nature of creation he says, "Creation is the revelation of truth through the rhythm of forms."<sup>6</sup> Every creation has its spontaneous expression in which it reveals within itself as the true-nature of beauty – it is the ultimate manifestation ending itself in its infinite nature. For instance, in our civilization, man expresses humanity in his true-nature – it is his creative expression which does not exist in his mussel power. Sometimes, as a rational animal man tries to express his animal behaviour with the help of rationality in order to establish himself as a powerful living being in the world. But it is not creation, because it is not good for others in the human society. Without humanity our works become a mere construction of mechanism, but with humanity it is more than mechanism, i.e., a creation of soul. According to Tagore, creation is not a mere measurement of material things; it has the immaterial aspect which is totally infinite in its nature.<sup>7</sup> He makes a sharp distinction between the divine creation (such as the world) and human creation (such as a beautiful composition of music). God is the ultimate reality in His completeness of creation. The whole world is the divine creation of God; it is neither the result of mechanism, nor the product of mere matter. Rather, the natural beauty, completeness, harmony, consciousness, etc. prove that it is a great divine creation as revealed under the grand design of God. In his true nature, man has a creative mind, and as an artist he can create the art which is known as his spontaneous response to the evergreen call of soul. Indeed, human life becomes true in itself when it is a creation.<sup>8</sup> Following Tagore's view on creation, we can draw the following characteristics of creation:

- i. A creation must be something new.
- ii. A creation depends on imagination and innovation.
- iii. A creation, therefore, an innovative work.
- iv. A creation expresses its rhythm of forms for the revelation of truth.
- v. It becomes true when it is free from inhumanity.
- vi. A creation is an outcome of spontaneous expression of man's infinite nature.
- vii. It is not mere construction.
- viii. It must be original, not merely a copy to copy.
- ix. It must be free from unethical or gross desires.
- x. A creation can never be separated from its creator.
- xi. The world of art is a world of creation.
- xii. A creation is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real.

- xiii. A creation can be realized through the aesthetical appreciation of its beauty.
- xiv. Thus, a creation reveals the man's wealth of life.
- xv. Like a great creator, a true artist is very humble in his creation.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Difference between Construction and Creation**

Generally, we often use the two words "construction" and "creation" in the same sense. For example, we use the two terms in a same sense for a new building. For us, the two statements "the building is a new construction" and "the building is a new creation" are true. Even, we use the two words simultaneously for the new-building to express its structure, design, view, beauty, etc. But, Tagore never uses the two terms in the same sense; rather he defines the creation as something newly produced that is quietly different from the construction. So, a question may be raised here, is construction a creation? Tagore's answer is that a creation is not mere construction; rather it is quietly distinguished from construction by its immaterial nature. Even, it is something more than material composition of mechanism. Tagore makes the sharp distinction between construction and creation in the following way. It is obviously true that every creation has two aspects – the material and the expression, which makes a dualism consisting in the realms of construction and creation. A thing which has only material composition without any spontaneous expression is called construction; it is made by the specific composition of different matters, but it lacks the harmony of nature. A work, on the other hand, is called creation if it has a spontaneous expression. For example, a lamp without light is a mere material construction, but when it gives us light with a gleaming beauty, it is a creation.

But, Tagore does not follow the utilitarianism to express the essential nature of creation. His concept of creation is always closely connected with the concept of surplus as something qualitative in excess of all quantitative material utilities. In the example of lamp, he actually wants to mention the light of lamp as its expression like the consciousness of soul. Similarly, when a poet tries to write a poem he must follow the rules of grammar which maintains the construction of poem, because it is necessary for the poem, but without poetic expression it is mere construction.<sup>10</sup> Human body has two sides - one is its physical side that is based on the systematic growth of mechanism and depended on the mechanical direction of brain and other is its mental sided that is not merely depended on psychological mechanism. The physical body without any creative expression is mere construction in its different parts, but it is a creation when it has the spontaneous expression in its wholeness. Human mind in its expression is also a creation when it is free from psychological mechanism. When we feel the beauty of a flower, it is not merely an object of matter, but a creation. Because, these feelings are the aesthetic appreciations of beauty. In a laboratory, the different parts of the flower are nothing but constructions, but its beautiful expression as a whole is the creation.<sup>11</sup> When an artist opens his art in a picture which contains violence of man's muscle power or aggressiveness of man's gross or sensual desires in a rude way, the form of art-

expression is nothing other than the expression of vulgar, and it is finally considered as a mere construction. But, it becomes a creation when he avoids the vulgarity and expresses the power of man's infinite nature for promoting the manifestation of perfection of creative unity. As a creator, a true artist must have the knowledge about the difference between the power that creates violence and manipulates us and the power that can manifest the perfection of creative unity.<sup>12</sup>

### **Man's Creative Nature as the Surplus in Man**

According to Tagore, man indeed has two aspects in his life – one is man as ordinary and other is man as the great. As an ordinary living being, he tries to fulfil his basic needs or requirements, but as a great man he tries to overcome these by realizing his infinite nature. In his whole life, he tries to transform himself from a rational animal to a spiritual human or from an ordinary man to a great man. He can do it by his creative spirit of infinite nature. In fact, simple life is a creative life where the conscious self is manifested as the great soul.<sup>13</sup> In humanity and in morality, all human beings always try to express themselves as extra as perfect in their infinite nature. This humanistic nature is called “surplus in man” which is also creative in its wholeness. In the spontaneous expressions, men are revealed and they are purely creative.<sup>14</sup> Tagore defines the notion of surplus as the excess of basic requirements of human life. In order to explain this notion, he says, “But the most important fact that has come into prominence along with the change of direction in our evolution, is the possession of a Spirit which has its enormous capital with a surplus far in excess of the requirements of the biological animal in man”<sup>15</sup> Human life, according to him, is not merely a living being like animal, it has special significance that differs him from non-human beings. In *The Religion of an Artist*, he says, “Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of the immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in the varied forms of self-realisation.”<sup>16</sup> In *Personality*, he explains the man's creative nature as the surplus in man that is found in the great heart of an artist who reveals himself by the creation, here the creation is considered as the proper function of art.<sup>17</sup> In his creative nature, man realizes his greatness that is called surplus, it makes him true and finally he feels the infinite nature by this creation.<sup>18</sup>

All the great works created by man have to be judged not only by his effort or skill but also by the creative spirit – the power of consciousness which is spontaneous itself towards the growth of life. According to Tagore, the creative spirit is the inner power of men's soul; it is by nature spiritual and infinite in excess of basic need and gross interest. By the creative spirit, a man can be differentiated from other ordinary men – it is his surplus. In order to establish his surplus, man always tries to create something new that comes from his inner spirit of soul. To define man's infinite nature or his inner spirit, Tagore admits the idealistic view of Vedanta, and he offers a synthetic idealism which does not ignore the man's finite (or temporal) nature, but still holds the eternal spirit.<sup>19</sup> The creative spirit depends on man's internal powers

such as intelligence, intuition, imagination, etc. Sometimes, it follows human emotion to convey the spontaneous expression of soul. In the field of art and culture, a creation becomes a great work when it comes from the inner spirit of the great soul and produces something new that is an evergreen call of the soul. It is the expression of humanity - the surplus as the excess of basic needs of human life that is found in the Man of the Heart (*maner mānuṣ*).<sup>20</sup> In this regard, he says: “But, man has a surplus where he can proudly assert that knowledge is for the sake of knowledge, because there knowledge is freedom. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man’s civilization is built upon his surplus.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Creation as the Religion of an Artist**

According to Tagore, every artist in his creative nature belongs to the one community in which he builds the world of art. The world of art is a world of creation. When Tagore defines the nature of creation as the revelation of truth through the rhythm of forms, he actually wants to mention it as a creation of an artist. From the metaphysical point of view, the world is a rhythm of forms that has a harmony in its nature. Here, rhythm is the systematic movement generated and regulated by harmonious restriction and it is the creative spirit or force by which an artist creates something new in the nature of his religion. Man in his creative nature has an inherent tendency to create something new, and his artistic nature for creating new art-production is so unique and great. To an artist, a real art-production is ultimately a new creation that expresses its beauty as the truth of art. According to Tagore, a creation is the religion of an artist; it is a perfect combination of rhythm and harmony. A rhythm, to him, is of two kinds - perfect and imperfect. Imperfect rhythm cannot force to create the true art, but only perfect rhythm can it through its creative nature. In a true music, we find it as a perfect form of beauty and observe it in its esthetical expression that exists in excess of all logical sequences and mathematical accounts. Like music, a perfect picture of an artist always contains its beautiful art-form in a harmony.<sup>22</sup> There are large numbers of non-musical notes in an imperfect composition of music that is out of tunes, but this imperfectness is not found in a perfect composition of true music. In the world-music, the musical rhythm along with its harmony proves that this music is the great creation. The true music is obviously created by the music-maker and based on the harmony of tunes and rhythms that gives us aesthetical pleasure; we also feel joy in its true nature.<sup>23</sup>

### **Relation between Creation and its Creator**

The very old but an important question is: Can a creation be separated from its creator? For answer, generally we can say that at least one creator is needed for a creation; he must be involved in the process of creation. The Cārvāka – the materialist and the top heretic school of Indian philosophy (*nāstika śiromaṇiḥ*) does not accept the God as conscious being for the great design of World.<sup>24</sup> The major theistic schools of Indian philosophy believe that only things which are merely considered as material causes or components (*upādāna kāraṇa*) cannot produce

something new as creation without any plan and programme of conscious being (*nimitta kāraṇa*). Tagore, as an Upanishadic thinker, does not accept the materialistic view, but he follows the Upaniṣadas and accepts the concept of ultimate reality (*Parama Brahma*) for the creation of the universe. His view as he used in a sentence is: “Upaniṣads have said that all things are created and sustained by an infinite joy.”<sup>25</sup> Here, infinite joy is absolutely free from all gross desire, but man can appreciate it through the inner power of his soul which is gifted by the God not only for the creator but also for other appreciators. In the appreciation of joy, one feels the eternal union of soul and life or creator and creation. In this union, the creator cannot be separated from his creation. It is true not only for divine creation in the realm of the universe but also for human creation in the fields of art and culture. Tagore very often feels that when he is a music-maker or a creator of song, his creation cannot be separated from him. In this regard, he says, “What is more, music and the musician are inseparable. When the singer departs, his singing dies with him; it is in eternal union with the life and joy of the master. This world-song is never for a moment separated from its singer.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Creative Unity**

As a great Upanishadic thinker, Tagore finally advocates the ultimate creation that is created by the one and established as the one. Here, the first one is creative ideal or the creative spirit of the God, and the second one indicates the whole universe that is known to him as the creative unity. To him, this one is considered as the universe of many in its creation which expresses the creative unity in its endless show of variety. In the case of man’s creation such as picture, music, poem, etc., we can appreciate the joy, because they express the creative unity in a perfect harmony.<sup>27</sup> In a creation, there is a close relation between the creator and the creation, which also indicates another relation between beauty and truth. When one, by the power of reasoning, tries to understand the status of creation from the logical point of view he can understand it as the different intellectual proportions that indicate the truth as a combination of facts, but from the aesthetical point of view, he can appreciate it as a whole which represents the truth as a harmony of facts. It is true that, individual facts in their variation are the different proportions of one truth, but in a harmony of facts they never break their relationship which ultimately provides the unity in diversity.<sup>28</sup> Here, it is necessary to be mentioned that when Tagore mentions the creative unity in the exposition of art-creation, it indicates not only the close relation between the creation and the creator, but also the concrete unity in its relation to the appreciators. The both creation and creative unity are true from the aesthetical point of view. The creations such as poem, picture, music, song, etc. are something more than other ideas or concepts. The unity in different creations indicates the unity in diversity.<sup>29</sup>



### Realization of Truth in Creation

In our life, we have the two aspects – one is finite where we are very common and exhaustive in the all stages of our gross desire, and other is infinite where we are basically creative in our true-nature and able to realize our divine nature. In our infinite nature, we have different immortal elements like feeling, aspiration, sacrifice, devotion, realization, joy, etc. Like the two, there are also two worlds – one is created by the God as the great divine creation and other is created by man as the world of art. According to Tagore, man can be regarded as a creator in its infinite nature when he creates the world of art by the combination of truth and beauty; though it is his living world, yet he can realize the truth in his own world that he has made out of God's world. It is his surplus in his infinite nature, when he feels that the world of art is not merely a structure of the real world, but an artistic creation which has aesthetic expression out of our basic needs. As an artist, a man is true in his creation where he can realize his infinite nature. In fact, the realization of truth is the realization of infinite - it is also the ocean of joy.<sup>30</sup> But, how can this realization be possible? For answer, Tagore follows the terminology as well as theoretical expositions of Upaniṣadas where the different remarkable sayings open the door to find out the solution. Self-consciousness and self-realization are the two necessary states of mind by which one can realize the true nature of creation. To define the self-consciousness and self-realization, he accepts subjective idealism and subjective truth, and for it he follows the Upaniṣadic idealism, though he does not deny the empirical knowledge of external reality.<sup>31</sup> The partial knowledge, according to Upaniṣadas, cannot grasp the absolute reality which is absolutely pure in its divine nature. Therefore, we in our finite nature with limited knowledge cannot realize the absolute. But, we can know the infinite nature as the divine nature of absolute reality by the inner spirit (consciousness) of our soul. Our individual inner soul (*antarātman*) can realize the supreme soul (*paramātman*) by the state of consciousness. When one knows that the time, space and all elements of evolution are merged in unity and the union of two souls are considered as the one in the consciousness, he can realize the truth of creation.<sup>32</sup> The realization of creation is indeed a realization of the combination of truth and beauty, finally it is the realization of the infinite. For it, an aesthetical appreciation is possible when the appreciator has the capability by which he is able to feel the beauty in a harmony of creation. As a result, he can appreciate the real nature of freedom as the expression of joy which is inherent in the soul and considered to be immaterial. Here, Tagore accepts the subjective truth for the realization of truth in creation. For individual knower, an aesthetical appreciation of beauty is no doubt a subjective matter of the subject who appreciates it. For this reason, the realization of truth in art through the appreciation of beauty may be varied person to person or subject to subject, even it can be different due to the different perspectives. The realization of truth as the beauty of creation, according to him, depends on individual experience, knowledge, feelings, sense of aesthetic appreciation, etc. For realization, he also accepts subjective idealism which holds that the appreciation of beauty in creation depends

on the subjective condition of how the mind has perceived it. When one can appreciate the beauty of creation and realize the truth of great creation from the aesthetical point of view, he also realizes the joy of perfection. To express the status of realization when the human soul is directly connected with the God's creation, Tagore in his *Gitanjali* (poetry -78) wrote, "When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the Gods held their assembly in the sky and sang 'Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!'"

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the discussion, we have observed that the main aim of the Tagore's philosophy of creation is to make a distinction between construction and creation by which one can identify a creation as a beautiful expression of soul that contains the harmony along with a relation between truth and beauty. His view on the creation provides the man's creative spirit based on love, peace and aesthetic appreciation. The world of art is a world of creation; it is more than its structural construction (or its syntax).<sup>33</sup> When Tagore defines the creation as something new or a new art, it is however not a construction, but an artistic expression of man's creative nature. According to him, when a creation is an art, it is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real.<sup>34</sup> Both creation and construction may be considered as new productions with their originality and novelty, but creation is different thing in its creative nature that includes the spontaneous expression of truth, beauty and harmony. Like Kant, he points out that an artistic expression, in aesthetic appreciation, is beautiful when it is natural as Nature, and the Nature is also beautiful in aesthetic appreciation when it is an art.<sup>35</sup> For aesthetical appreciation of creation, he actually accepts subjectivism that holds that the appreciation of beauty what a creation contains in an art-form depends on the realization of individual appreciator. However, creation is not possible when the humanity lacks. Humanity (the very essence of human being) is characterized as the religion of man, whereas creation is considered as the religion of an artist. He strongly claims, "My religion is essentially a poet's religion."<sup>36</sup> It is no doubt true to all of us; moreover, we can add something here that his religion in its nature is obviously a religion of an artist. According to him, when a man becomes true in his humanity, he is a great artist and finally a great man. Hence, without humanity no artist is perfect in his art-expression in spite of his large contributions to the field of art and culture. Similarly, without a perfect combination of truth and beauty or rhythm and harmony, no art would be a creation. The artistic creation can neither be measured by the rules of mathematics, nor be derived from the logic, but can be realized and manifested by the spontaneous expression of soul. The science and metaphysics deal with abstract truth, but the art-creation deals with real truth; the two worlds – the world of reality and the world of joy belong to the world of creation. Tagore strongly argues that the man's creative personality depends not only on his infinite nature, but also on his realization of truth and his contribution to the field of art and culture. In fact, the man's personality and his creativity can go together. To be a perfect man, one exists in the

world out of his gross desire and moves forward to realize his infinite nature.<sup>37</sup> Following Tagore's philosophy of creation, it is possible to say for conclusion that in the field of creation, a painter, a music-maker and a dancer know the uses of artistic expression of colours, musical notes and the postures of body respectively in a certain way which cannot be known by a physicist or a chemist or an anatomist or a doctor. The standard of one's aesthetic taste depends not only on his strength of spontaneous art-expression, but also on his ability of aesthetic appreciation.<sup>38</sup> By aesthetical appreciation, one can realize the beauty of creation, the nature of joy and the nature of ecstasy. The experience of subjective truth as the knowledge of an artist is not the same as the experience of objective truth known by a scientist. The beauty of a sculpture that an artist can appreciate, a geologist cannot, an engineer cannot as an architect sees it. So, aesthetic appreciation of art-creation, as individual artist feels, depends on the subjective experience of beauty (*rasabodha*).<sup>39</sup>

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