

The Śāhitya-Darpana and the History of Sanskrit Poetics.

BY P. V. KANE

(3d^ded.) Bombay, 1951. Pp. 433+64+345. 8°.

Comparative Aesthetics

BY K. C. PANDEY.

Vol. I. *Indian Aesthetics* ('Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series', Studies, Vol II).
Benares, 1950. Pp. 486. 8°.

Dr. Kane's work is not of the kind which will appeal to a large number of readers outside India itself. The second part is confined to an edition of part of a Sanskrit treatise on poetics, *The Mirror of Literary Composition*, with very detailed notes which will make it the vade mecum of students of Indian culture. The first part, which alone need concern us, is itself a study of Indian poetics from Sanskrit source-material and includes a mass of untranslated quotations in which even the technical terms have been left in the original and, which is worse, in Nāgarī script. This is a further reason for saying a few words about it here, especially as this third edition is in effect a new work and the most ad-

vanced study to date concerned with this literature.

Like Dr. Kane's other published work, which is known principally from his monumental history of Indian law, this book is based on the perusal of treatises on poetics largely unknown in the West; its wealth of first-hand information is almost intimidating. We shall not dwell on the description of texts on rhetoric (which nevertheless takes up most of the space) nor with the problems of dating, authenticity, and interrelationships to which each one inevitably gives rise in the uncertain background of Indian philology. This is the realm of pure learning. It is rather the account given of literary theories which attracts our attention.

Reviews

The study of poetics grew slowly during the first centuries of our era, keeping pace with the hesitant early growth and later more rapid progress of profane poetry (poetics is one of the few thoroughly 'profane' branches of learning in ancient India) and laying its foundations at the time of Kālidāsa, probably in the fifth century. Moreover, it had borrowed a great deal from another discipline, dramatic art. For the Indians, dramatic art is an art in itself, of which poetics constitutes a distinct branch or instrument. The central idea of poetics, *rasa*, literally 'flavour' (*Stimmung* would be the nearest translation), remained influenced far more by drama than by poetry; it required the fascination and movement of dramatic action to release the complex mechanism of *rasa* and give it time to develop its effects. *Rasa* is a subjective condition of the listener or reader whereby his states of mind (*bhāva*), harmonising with the work, are incited by the contact with it to express themselves and thus create a lasting sensation of delight. A whole scholastic philosophy has grown up round the idea of *rasa*, with an endless description of the complementary, concomitant, and transitory states in which *bhāva* can crystallise into *rasa*. The theory of the substructures of consciousness, which play a notable part in several types of speculation, is thus introduced into the field of aesthetics. The phenomenon of *rasa* is coincident with a kind of transference: the reader re-creates for himself and reflects within himself the original experience of the poet, but this experience does not give rise to *rasa* unless it takes the form of an

impersonal and as it were abstract feeling.

This search for a higher principle able to explain poetic creation corresponds to the unitary and totalitarian tendency at the foundation of most Indian doctrines. In this respect, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy.

Other principles have been put forward at different dates. Some authors reduced all poetical expression to 'form' or 'embellishment': indeed, that was the earliest theory to gain currency, no doubt because it rested on immediate appearances. But 'forms' were soon seen to be extraneous to the origins of poetry and unsuitable for explaining its essential character. Attention was therefore paid to its 'strangeness' and 'charm', to its qualities of 'rapture' and 'wonder', or even to its 'appropriation'. All of these terms were charged with more meaning than any of them could rightly convey. Some time, too, was spent on the idea of 'stilted diction', which seemed to some people to be characteristic of all stages of poetry, as distinct from the 'natural diction' of every-day speech.

The notion of *riti*, or 'approaches', 'ways', may be correlated immediately with our conception of 'style'. But *riti* is a mode of expression independent of the author's wishes or, at least, regulated by pre-established norms according to certain geographical fictions: a composition is in a certain *riti* as in music it is in a certain *raga*.

The most significant principle for which Sanskrit theory is responsible is that of *dhvani*, literally 'resonance'. It dominated other doctrines for at

least three centuries, from the eighth to the eleventh, until at last by a process of reversion, which may be seen in other aspects of Indian thought, the earlier values came again to the fore and poetics gradually declined in a futile attempt to return to its sources.

Dr. Kane does not say much about *dhvani*. Naturally, he gives his source references, but to avoid the trouble of tracing the path ourselves we must refer to Professor Pandey's important work, in which this notion of *dhvani* is central.

This first volume of *Comparative Aesthetics* also contains a general study of Sanskrit poetics and dramatics from their origins up to Jagannātha in the seventeenth century, who was the last author of any prominence. But the work is primarily concerned with Abhinavagupta, the great scholar and philosopher of the tenth century, who more than anyone else strove to establish *dhvani* as the supreme principle of literary aesthetics.

The advocates of *dhvani* held that, over and above the threefold power of the word—direct expression, syntactical force, and, lastly, its secondary or figurative expression—there is a fourth and most vital force which is none other than the power of *dhvani* or 'suggestion'. An example not taken from literature will enable us to understand what is at issue. Two lovers have arranged to meet by the banks of the Godāvārī. The young woman, who is the first to arrive, sees a man picking flowers; she wishes to induce him to go away without his discovering her intention. Knowing that he is frightened of a dog that is wont to prowl about in

those parts, she says to him: 'You need not be afraid of walking about: the dog was killed today by a fierce lion which lives in the jungle near the river.' The flight, as may be guessed, of the flower-gatherer is the effect, we are told, of *dhvani*.

It is difficult to imagine what a huge controversy was aroused by this idea, some trying to explain it as a kind of sub-species of 'figurative expression', while others regarded it as autonomous entity, superior to all other modes of explanation. Consideration of grammar, which governs the approach to poetics, had already led to the framing of a kindred concept, *sphota* or 'bursting forth': a permanent phonic substratum whereby the meaning of the word is brought into consciousness and of which the spoken word itself is no more than a spontaneous manifestation. 'Resonance' has also a part to play, on another level, in the mystical articulation of the *Tantra*. The perception of *rasa*, we are told by Abhinavagupta, is only the coming into consciousness of something already existing, namely, *dhvani*. The hull, enveloping the spirit and suffocating the potential enjoyment of which it is pregnant, bursts under the effect of this perception. One can recognise here the translation into aesthetic terminology of preoccupations which, in religious language, describe the access to Deliverance.

We await with great interest the consideration of poetic theories which will occupy Professor Pandey's second volume. The peculiarity of Indian ideas and their intimate relationship with Brahminic speculations, as appears from a perusal of this penetrating work, do

Reviews

not make the comparative method easy to apply, whether its purpose is to trace influences or to reveal a common foundation, or, simply, to discover

convergent tendencies. Of all the branches of learning which stem from the genius of India, few are as profoundly Indian as aesthetics.¹

¹ We must apologise for borrowing a few phrases from our own work *Sanskrit et Culture* (1950).