

BEAUTY AND LIFE

In a former article¹ we have taken an extreme case to prove that assertion that the quality which we cognize as beauty is not any formal essence or even the creative power of the artist, though in any appreciation these are certainly mingled; but only, and perhaps primarily, that ethereal influence which exalts perhaps primarily, that ethereal influence which exalts us to intuitive or sympathetic accord with the object. In those cases where we directly apprehend a beautiful thing as beautiful, we are conscious of our sympathy with the original, and if the artist does not succeed, by the exercise of his greater knowledge and power, in bringing down to the level of our ordinary consciousness the richness and perfection of the archetypal, we are not impressed. The capacity to do this, however, is not the specific inducement of beauty itself but of the call to power and perfection. **Perfect knowledge is not identical with perfect love.** Perfection in love is the truly cultural quality, not mere learning. Perfection in attainments, in yoga or occultism is of a different order, and should not be confused with Beauty or Life or Truth or Love. That is why one must contend that the beautiful character of an object lies not so much in its quality, as in our ability to sympathize and love; not so much in the representation of perfect types, as in the awakening of the life in each to respond to the life in all.

From the consideration of the representation of the ugly, essayed to find the psychology behind the appreciation of beautiful: for it cannot be maintained that we admire the perfect form of the representation—form

1 "The Meaning of Beauty"

being imperfect—not that we regard the accurate delineation of the subject as beauty. We merely, in the latter case, admire the skill of reproduction and the accurate correspondence, which may be almost photographic.

What we do delight in is the specific inducement to sympathy that is offered even in cases of the ugly and the terrible.

Light hides from us the truth and beauty of the night. It is darkness that awakens its to the song of the stars. Likewise, what hides from us the beauty of the object is its pulsating form and pleasant flavor, its desirable character. Therefore, what is hidden by the pleasant and the desirable is revealed in the investigation of the ugly and the terrible. If truth is gained by the doubt that burns up all our imperfections and complacent attitudes and destroys our acquiescence's so beauty also can only be recognized through sympathy with the darkness of the terrible and the deeper darkness of the ugly. As was written by Śrī Aurobindo Ghose

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“We erect a God of Love and Mercy, a God of good, a God Just, righteous and virtuous according to our moral conceptions of justice, virtue and righteousness, and all the rest we say is not he or is not His, but was made by some diabolical power which He suffered for some reason to work out its wicked will.....”

It is only a few religions which have the courage to say that this enigmatic world-power is one Deity, one Trinity; to lift up the image of Force that acts in the world in the figure not only of the beneficent Durga but of the terrible Kali in her blood-stained dance of Destruction; and to say “this too is the Mother, this also know to be God: this too, if thou hast the strength adore.”

Only when we are exalted to the level of equal sympathy with all creative manifestation, even with the various and opposing forms of expressive activity or emergence of new types of divine life, can it be said we have really loved. In the richness of experience which follows such sympathy-- love in essence, we appreciate truth, beauty and harmony and recreate them. Even in imperfect expressions there may be

charm , and there are often richer cadences in suggestion than can be expressed. All great artists aim at suggesting heights of imagination, allowing the preceptor to fill in the suggestion according to the measure of his own experience.

The great artist cultivates this sympathetic imagination in us by the wealth of his own artistic experience and the vicarious sharing of this. To understand great art requires great pains, laborious effort, concentration , attention and identification. These are truly the birth – pangs of what we call intuition – the product of strenuous self – purification and the rejection of all that bars the way to freedom to love Life.

All art is creative, most of all the art of living. A world where we might not sympathies with another could provoke nothing but desperation. To sympathies is to create in the light of appreciation, imagination or intuition. Whilst intuition is intrinsically the creator of the actual, imagination is the herald of what shall be as evolution proceeds or of what has been. Imagination pertains to the past and the future , intuition to the now , the present only. But it should not be said that we may not have an intuition into the past or the future when such a past or future is treated as an object. Intuition always leads to the intrinsic essence of being , imagination conjures up all that is relative to time and space. The point of contact between the two is the specific quality of seeking creative life.

To mould others on unique lines as we seek to do in the education of the children , with success, without distortion, imposition and impregnation, can only be achieved by sympathy , intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical or social. True education , as much as true artistic life, depends entirely on these two important factors- sympathy and imagination. Once this is grasped, what must be aimed at in life is an artistic life , not the mere living amidst art – productions : not in photographic of life in art, but in the unique success with which life is made to call out life to its fullest fruition and expression consists the true quality of creation.

The mere *contemplation* of ideals and essences of forms that prevail in the world of manifestation, which is the way of certain philosophers, as it is the way of certain schools of art to hold that the easiest way of living an artistic life is to live in abstractions

and concepts and essences, to dream away existence, to live in imagination that is uncreative and unconnected, is not what we seek. But if, as I believe, the true effective art is the art of living: then aesthetic fulfillment consists not in the imagination of ideals or concepts or essences, but in the realization of the unity of Life and its harmony.

That this may be achieved by the intuition of Life, and later, by and through the re-production of the archetypes. Is the view of some who think that the more we attain to the changeless the truer we shall be to ourselves. The unchanging is the truly real from their point of view. But I submit, here that in that case the unchanging would have to mean that which is persistent as substantially consistent and living, not the names and things of the external world and its forms, which are inherently passing, though in themselves permanent. One must reject the worn-out prejudices of traditions histories, and habits of thought as well as of memory, and the changing and varying calls of instinct, reflex and emotion to become more alive to the existence of the arche-types of perfect forms. This latter view is the persistent view of some of the greatest of artists. But one should not fail to note that this process may not only lead to the achievement of the arche-types: it may equally lead to the intuition of Life and being, for in either case the method of attainment is withdrawal and abstraction. These two processes are complementary; withdrawal pertains to the realm of thought; both are supported by the will to know the fundamentals of existence and purpose in a changing world. But it is always the motive that sanctifies an act, and so the direction of the will to knowledge characterizes abstraction as legitimate or otherwise. The archetypal artists and absolutistic philosophers err too much on the side of the view that the real ground of existence, and that pure being or the Absolute idea is the highest find of the abstractionist tendency. But abstraction when utilized to seek the truth and being of a thing is equivalent to disinterested perception of intellectual sympathy, a sympathy that is in no way related to the desirable or agreeable. Abstraction, in the later sense, leads to the individual uniqueness of existence and the true happiness that comes from such a realization of worth. The true value of abstraction and withdrawal consists in the attitude of disinterestedness that it produces, possessing which, we are lifted to the true knowledge of a thing and of ourselves.

Abstraction that ends in the survey of the realms of the arche-types and general ideas releases us from the contact with life, which is the surging richness of experience and existence. It is fatal to life, Life finds that not only has abstraction been untrue to itself, it has also been a mischievous weapon in the hands of thinkers and artists.

For it is only in the measure that the arche-types serve to inspire existence to higher levels of experience and aspiration and manifest themselves in Life that they serve to make life beautiful and more perfect. Insofar as they are callous to existential evolution, they are untrue, not life.

A true artist who serves the arche-types as their initiator and re-creator in the realm of experience. Also serves Life in calling it to higher aspirations and levels. He makes art Life and life Art. In this consists his eminent contribution to world evolution and creative power and significance. This is the true initiative of perfection in the world; its adorable character is however, the effort to make perfection and Life move in unison and harmony, so that matter and form may become a perfect whole.

Harmony in Life is invariably generated by the changes worked out in the forms, physical, ideal, and racial. This change towards perfect evolution is worked out by the creative inspiration of the true reformer and artist. The change in social ideals and environments is sought by the ethically inclined, and constitutes the social ideal. Since all life seeks delight in the harmony created through appreciation and fulfillment of ideals, in as far as one can infuse life and confidence in nature in nature in all to manifest uniqueness and perfection, the purposes of Life-truth, beauty, and goodness-are equally satisfied. It may happen that our consideration of nature may more and more verge towards the ideal of aesthetic valuation and intellectual sympathy, so as to make of this world a very heaven: and when this happens goodness passes beyond the realms of good and evil, and attains its unique and absolute character. Till then it is bound to the apron-strings of law and customary practice.

In the realm of Beauty or aesthetic, the problem is the reconciliation of the duality between the pleasurable and the painful, or the beautiful and the so-called ugly. In

the realm of truth, it takes on the hue of a problem between the true and the false or real and the unreal: in the realm of socialistic outlook or ethics, it become the problem of good and evil, or conscience and authority or law. Hence in these realms so long as duality prevails, no absoluteness can be claimed for any action or prevails, no absoluteness can be claimed for any action or perception or creation or perfection since they are bound in the cycle of relativity. The realm of dualism is the realm of relativity, and realm of harmony is beyond that. The latter does not make the realm of dualism false, it surpasses it. For harmony of Life is invariably stimulated by the constancy with which life is called out expressed, and evokes the same 'ecstasy of purpose' which life does for the artist. The debt the artist owes to life is to transmit this same sympathy and the appreciation of it to others, and in an equal measure.

It should now be clear why we refused to consider the *intrinsic* meaning of beauty to lie in the arches-types are *intrinsically desirable* (since they are perfect forms and ideals) , if evolution of Emergent characters should proceed to final perfections. But if we consider the absolutistic doctrine that such a realization or actualization of perfections would be attained as an *end*, or could ever be available in existence, or even be apprehended by the mind of the artist as a realized or lived ideal, it would lead us to the endless problem of proving the present less real and perhaps even untrue or wanting in beauty.

Such problems of worth and want of beauty cannot be suggested in a discussion requiring not dialectic but sympathy with the very imperfect expressions of life, ugly as they are, terrific as they appear, and frightful as they are, terrific as they appear, and frightful as they sometimes happen to be. Life is suffusing equally all existence, and therefore, it is the ultimate solution. Life is the most perfect activity that can ever be conceived of : and in it all things are perfect. For those that sympathies with Life in all its manifold manifestations, reach perfection in all the three ways of approach- intellectual , aesthetical and spiritual. Life is the most alluring presence, the most perfect beauty, and the highest attainment and perfection of truth. Knowing that, real artist knows that all is That. As the Veda runs: " Knowing the One , one knows all ."