

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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*TO FIND HIGHEST BEAUTY IS TO FIND GOD*



“*To find highest beauty is to find God.*”

*Sri Aurobindo*

We continue in this issue our exploration of Art through the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, its deeper meaning and its role in our lives.

... art is not an imitation or reproduction of outward Nature, but rather missioned to give by the aid of a transmuting faculty something more inwardly true than the external life and appearance. (C26: 227)

... the ancient Indian idea is absolutely true that delight, Ananda, is the inmost expressive and creative nature of the free self because it is the very essence of the original being of the Spirit. But beauty and delight are also the very soul and origin of art and poetry. It is the significance and spiritual function of art and poetry to liberate man into pure delight and to bring beauty into his life. (C26: 224)

To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God. (C25: 145)

The sources of the quotations are indicated thus:

*Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)* — S

*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)* — C

*Collected Works of the Mother 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* — M

*Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* — B

For example: (M1: 17) stands for *Collected Works of the Mother 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Volume 1, page 17.



. . . that which we are seeking through beauty is in the end that which we are seeking through religion, the Absolute, the Divine. The search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and the vital impressions, impulsions, desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination. Behind them the soul of beauty in us desires the contact, the revelation, the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things which it feels to be present, but which neither the senses and instincts by themselves can give, though they may be its channels, — for it is suprasensuous, — nor the reason and intelligence, though they too are a channel, — for it is suprarational, supra-intellectual, — but to which through all these veils the soul itself seeks to arrive. When it can get the touch of this universal, absolute beauty, this soul of beauty, this sense of its revelation in any slightest or greatest thing, the beauty of a flower, a form, the beauty and power of a character, an action, an event, a human life, an idea, a stroke of the brush or the chisel or a scintillation of the mind, the colours of a sunset or the grandeur of the tempest, it is then that the sense of beauty in us is really, powerfully, entirely satisfied. It is in truth seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.



## *Section 1*

### **Striving after a Nobler Beauty**

#### **The Artist Creates an Ideal World**

. . . All art starts from the sensuous and sensible, or takes it as a continual point of reference or, at the lowest, uses it as a symbol and a fount of images; even when it soars into invisible worlds, it is from the earth that it soars; but equally all art worth the name must go beyond the visible, must reveal, must show us something that is hidden, and in its total effect not reproduce but create. We may say that the artist creates an ideal world of his own, not necessarily in the sense of ideal perfection, but a world that exists in the idea, the imagination and vision of the creator. More truly, he throws into significant form a truth he has seen, which may be truth of hell or truth of heaven or an immediate truth behind things terrestrial or any other, but is never merely the external truth of earth. By that ideative truth and the power, the perfection and the beauty of his presentation and utterance of it his work must be judged. (C26: 7-8)

#### **Aim of All True Art**

The aim of poetry, as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image, but an interpretation by the images she herself affords us, not on one but on many planes of her creation, of that which she conceals from us, but is ready, when rightly approached, to reveal. (C26: 27)

#### **Art is not an Imitation — Artist is a Creator**

Each artist is a creator of his own world — why then insist on this legal fiction that the artist's world must appear as an exact imitation of the actual world around us? Even if it does so seem, that is only a skilful make-up, an appearance. It may be constructed to look like that — but why must it be? (C27: 112)

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. . . for art cannot merely reproduce, it cannot help heightening . . . (C26: 228)

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. . . art is not an imitation or reproduction of outward Nature, but rather missioned to give by the aid of a transmuting faculty something more inwardly true than the external life and appearance. (C26: 227)

### **The Nature of Art**

. . . the nature of art is to strive after a nobler beauty and more sustained perfection than life can give . . . (C26: 170)

### **True Art is a Whole**

True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life. You see something of this intimate wholeness in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt; for there pictures and statues and all objects of art were made and arranged as part of the architectural plan of a building, each detail a portion of the whole. It is like that in Japan, or at least it was so till the other day before the invasion of a utilitarian and practical modernism. A Japanese house is a wonderful artistic whole; always the right thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it needed to be, and the house itself blends marvellously with the surrounding nature. In India, too, painting and sculpture and architecture were one integral beauty, one single movement of adoration of the Divine.

There has been in this sense a great degeneration since then in the world. From the time of Victoria and in France from the Second Empire we have entered into a period of decadence. The habit has grown of hanging up in rooms pictures that have no meaning for the surrounding objects; any picture, any artistic object could now be put anywhere and it would make small difference. Art now is meant to show skill and cleverness and talent, not to embody some integral expression of harmony and beauty in a home.

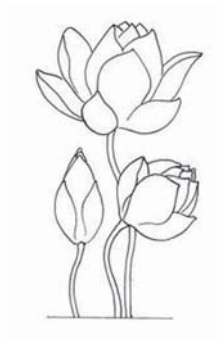
But latterly there has come about a revolt against this lapse into bourgeois taste. The reaction was so violent that it looked like a complete aberration and art seemed about to sink down into the absurd. Slowly, however, out of the chaos something has emerged, something more rational, more logical, more coherent to which can once more be given the name of art, an art renovated and perhaps, or let us hope so, regenerated. (M3: 109-10)

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*Mother, I did not understand what you have said: “True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life.”*

What I have said? Nothing else but that true art is the expression of beauty in the material world; and in a world entirely changed spiritually, that is to say, one expressing completely the divine reality, art must act as a revealer and teacher of this divine beauty in life; that is to say, an artist should be capable of entering into communion with the Divine and of receiving inspiration about what form or forms ought to be used to express the divine beauty in matter. And thus, if it does that, art can be a means of realisation of beauty, and at the same time a teacher of what beauty ought to be, that is, art should be an element in the education of men’s taste, of young and old, and it is the teaching of true beauty, that is, the essential beauty which expresses the divine truth. This is the *raison d’être* of art. Now, between this and what is done there is a great difference, but this is the true *raison d’être* of art.

(M5: 331-32)



## *Section 2*

### **Art, Beauty, Ananda**

#### **Art, Beauty and Ananda**

Art is a thing of beauty and beauty and Ananda are closely connected — they go together. If the Ananda is there, then the beauty comes out more easily — if not, it has to struggle out painfully and slowly. That is quite natural.

\*

Beauty is Ananda taking form — but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul. What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one.

\*

. . . The lines of Keats also give one aspect only which it tries to generalise. In fact, Beauty is Ananda thrown into form — if it casts a shadow of pain, it is because the Divine Bliss which we mean by Ananda is watered down in the dullness of terrestrial consciousness into mere joy or pleasure and also because even that does not last for long and can easily have its opposite as a companion or a reaction. But if the consciousness of earth could be so deepened and strengthened and made so intensively receptive as not only to feel but hold the true Ananda, then the lines of Keats would be altogether true. But for that it would have to acquire first a complete liberation and an abiding peace.

\*

Beauty is not the same as delight, but like Love it is an expression, a form of Ananda, — created by Ananda and composed of Ananda, it conveys to the mind that delight of which it is made. Aesthetically, the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty. The spiritual realisation has a sight, a perception, a feeling which is not that of the mind and vital; — it passes beyond the aesthetic limit, sees the universal beauty, sees behind the object what the eye cannot see, feels what the emotion of the heart cannot feel and passes beyond Rasa and Bhoga to pure Ananda — a thing

more deep, intense, rapturous than any mental or vital or any physical rasa reaction can be. It sees the One everywhere, the Divine everywhere, the Beloved everywhere, the original bliss of existence everywhere, and all these can create an inexpressible Ananda of beauty — the beauty of the One, the beauty of the Divine, the beauty of the Beloved, the beauty of the eternal Existence in things. It can see also the beauty of forms and objects, but with a seeing other than the mind’s, other than that of a limited physical vision — what was not beautiful to the eye becomes beautiful, what was beautiful to the eye wears now a greater, marvellous and ineffable beauty. The spiritual realisation can bring the vision and the rapture of the All-Beautiful everywhere.

\*

The word “expression” means only something that is manifested by the Ananda and of which Ananda is the essence. Love and Beauty are powers of Ananda as Light and Knowledge are of Consciousness. Force is inherent in Consciousness and may be called part of the Divine Essence. Ananda is always there even when Sachchidananda takes on an impersonal aspect or appears as the sole essential Existence; but Love needs a Lover and Beloved, Beauty needs a manifestation to show itself. So in the same way Consciousness is always there, but Knowledge needs a manifestation to be active, there must be a Knower and a Known. That is why the distinction is made between Ananda which is of the essence and Beauty which is a power or expression of Ananda in manifestation. These are of course philosophical distinctions necessary for the mind to think about the world and the Divine.

\*

*I find it hard to understand how beauty, Rasa and delight are connected with one another.*

That can hardly be realised except by experience of Ananda. Ananda is not ordinary mental or vital delight in things. Rasa is the mind’s understanding of beauty and pleasure in it accompanied usually by the vital’s enjoyment of it (bhoga). Mental pleasure or vital enjoyment are not Ananda, but only derivations from the concealed universal Ananda of the Spirit in things. (C27: 699-702)

## **Beauty and Truth**

*Is it not true that Beauty and Truth are always one — wherever there is Beauty there is Truth too?*

In beauty there is the truth of beauty. What do you mean by Truth? There are truths of various kinds and they are not all beautiful. (C27: 703)

### **The Good and the Beautiful**

*In one of his recent essays, Rabindranath Tagore says that goodness and beauty are so intimately correlated that they are always found together. “The good is necessarily beautiful,” he says, and “Beauty is the picture of the good; goodness is the reality behind beauty.”*

I can't say that I understand these epigrammatic sentences. What is meant by good? what is meant by beauty? The divine Good is no doubt necessarily beautiful, because on a higher plane good and beauty and all else that is divine in origin meet, coalesce, harmonise. But what men call good is often ugly or drab or unattractive. Human beauty is not always the picture of the good, it is sometimes the mask of evil — the reality behind that mask is not always goodness. These things are obvious, but probably Rabindranath meant good and beauty in their higher aspects or their essence. (C27: 703)

### **Universal Beauty and Ananda**

There is a certain consciousness in which all things become full of beauty and Ananda — what is painful or ugly becomes an outward play, and becomes suffused with the beauty and Ananda behind. It is specially the Overmind consciousness of things — although it can be felt from time to time on the other planes also. A great equality and the view of the Divine everywhere is necessary for this to come fully.

\*

As you say, there is a truth behind Tagore's statement. There is such a thing as a universal Ananda and a universal beauty and the vision of it comes from an intensity of sight which sees what is hidden and more than the form — it is a sort of *viśvarasa* such as the Universal Spirit may have had in creating things. To this intensity of sight a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the *guna*, the *rasa* which it was meant to embody. But I doubt how far one can make an aesthetic canon upon this foundation. It is so far true that an artist can out of a thing that is ugly, repellent, distorted create a form of aesthetic power, intensity, revelatory force. The murder of Duncan is certainly not an act of beauty, but Shakespeare can use it to make a great artistic masterpiece. But we cannot go so

far as to say that the intensity of an ugly thing makes it beautiful. It is the principle of a certain kind of modern caricature to make a face intensely ugly so as to bring out some side of the character more intensely by a hideous exaggeration of lines. In doing that it may be successful, but the intensity of the ugliness it creates does not make the caricature a thing of beauty; it serves its purpose, that is all. So too ugliness in painting must remain ugly, even if it gets out of itself a sense of vital force or expressiveness which makes it preferable in the eyes of some to real beauty. All that hits you in the midriff violently and gives you a sense of intense living is not necessarily a work of art or a thing of beauty. I am answering of course on the lines of your letter. I do not know what Tagore had precisely in view in thus defining beauty. (C27: 702-03)

## Experience of Beauty

*In a recent poem, Harin makes the following observation on Beauty:*

*Beauty is not an attitude of sense  
Nor an inherent something everywhere,  
But keen reality of experience  
Of which even beauty is all unaware,  
Adding to it a living truth; intense  
And ever living, that were else, not there.*

*How far is it correct to say that Beauty has no objective existence in itself  
and that it consists only of the subjective experience of the observer?*

All things are creations of the Universal Consciousness, Beauty also. The “experience” of the individual is his response or his awakening to the beauty which the Universal Consciousness has placed in things; that beauty is not created by the individual consciousness. The philosophy of these lines is not at all clear. It says that the experience of beauty is a living truth added to beauty, a truth of which beauty is unaware. But if beauty is only the experience itself, then the experience constitutes beauty, it does not add anything to beauty; for such addition would only be possible if beauty already existed in itself apart from the experience. What is meant by saying that beauty is unaware of the experience which creates it? The passage makes sense only if we suppose it to mean that beauty is a “reality” already existing apart from the experience, but unconscious of itself and the consciousness of experience is therefore a living truth added to the unconscious reality, something which brings into it consciousness and life. (C27: 704)

## The Right Way of Appreciating Beauty

That is the right consciousness, not to desire or to be attached to the possession of anything for oneself, but to take the universal beauty etc. for a spiritual selfless Ananda.

\*

There is nothing harmful in the thing [*aspiration for beauty*] itself — on the contrary to awake to the universal beauty and refinement of the Mahalakshmi force is good. It is not an expression of greed or lust — only into these things a perversion can always come if one allows it, as into the Mahakali experience there may come rajasic anger and violence, so here there may come vital passion for possession and enjoyment. One must look at the beauty as the artist does without desire of possession or vital enjoyment of the lower kind.

\*

*Is it possible to get rid of vital impurities without getting rid of vital enjoyment?*

How can that be done? The enjoyment you speak of is vital-physical, while beauty has to be enjoyed with the aesthetic sense — either human or divinised.

\*

It is usually a good rule for other inward things beside the appreciation of the beauty of Nature — to keep it for oneself or else to share it only with those who have the same sense or the same experience. (C27: 705)

## Artistic Look and Vital Look

*Why should the pure sense of beauty have been so distorted by human beings as to be turned into desire for touch or sex?*

It is part of the general degradation which things divine have been subjected to in the evolution out of the material Inconscience under the pressure of the Powers of the Ignorance.

*Are there people who have not been affected by this vital impurity and who appreciate beauty in a subtle aesthetic way only?*

Yes, certainly. Artists who have trained their mind to a purely aesthetic look at beauty and beautiful things — for one instance. There are many others also, who have a sufficiently developed refinement of the aesthetic sense not to associate it with the crude vital wish for possession, enjoyment or sensual contact.

\*

The aesthetic and impersonal vision of things can develop into the sight of the Divine Beauty everywhere which is in its nature entirely pure.

\*

*What is the difference between the artistic look and the vital look?*

In the artistic look there is only the perception of beauty and the joy of it because it exists and one has seen and felt it. There is no desire to possess or enjoy in the vital way. (C27: 707-08)

### **Beauty of the Human Form**

*In regard to beauty in women, is there something inherent in the body that we call beautiful, a well-formed shape, physiognomy, harmony of movements, etc. It seems to most men it is colour + skin + physiognomy. But there are some women who do not have these in the body and yet are attractive. Is it something in their vital that gives them this beauty?*

It is something vital in some cases, something psychic in others that gives a beauty which appears in the body but is not beauty of shape, colour or texture.

*Often the vital and mental character of persons who have physical beauty is not good, sometimes it is even repulsive. Many would refuse to recognise it as beautiful.*

If it is vital in its origin, it need not come from beauty of mind or character; it is something in the life-force which may go with a good character but also with a bad one.



*Indians hardly appreciate the beauty of the Chinese or Japanese; like Europeans, they cannot appreciate beauty in Negroes. Many Asiatics could not appreciate the beauty of European models or actresses, who are so lacking in modesty according to their conceptions.*

Modesty is not part of physical beauty, that is a mental-vital element. As for physical beauty, different races have different conceptions. Indians and Europeans like curves, Chinese detest them in a woman.

*An intellectual would find beauty only in an intellectual woman; an emotional person would call a woman beautiful only if she has refined tender feelings; for a Gandhian a woman would be beautiful only if she spins eight hours a day or works for Harijans.*

That has nothing to do with beauty in the ordinary sense as it is beauty of intellect or beauty of character or beauty of spinning and Harijanising.

*Perhaps at a certain stage of psychic development one could look at human beauty as one looks at beauty in cats or dogs — recognising the beauty without any attraction.*

One can recognise and feel without any desire of possession or sexual feeling etc. That is how the artists look at beauty — they delight in it for its own sake.

*Supposing people developed the faculty of seeing the layers below the skin, would not their whole conception of beauty crumble down?*

Yes, probably, unless the mind reconstructed a new idea of it.

*Does not the conception of beauty differ according to race, temperament and level of consciousness?*

Yes.

*Are not attractiveness and beauty different?*

Yes.

*Is there nothing constant called “beauty”?*

There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty which is seen by the

inner eye, heard by the inner ear etc. — but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions. There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony. (C27: 706-07)

### **On Nandalal Bose’s Ideas on Art**

*Nandalal Bose says: “In art three points are essential. We may say that the top point of the triangle is inspiration and the two points of the base are the study of nature and the study of tradition.”*

Nandalal’s saying is true; but the three have to be combined and developed and harmonised in their combination to a sufficient degree before they bear the fruit of finished or great art.

\*

*In a letter to me, Nandalal wrote of love as “the only thing for Art”.*

It is a way of speaking, I suppose, in accordance with his own experience. It is the creative Force which he calls Love — others might call it by another name because they see it in another aspect. (C27: 685-86)

### **The Physical Expressing the Divine**

Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine — but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual which expresses itself through the form. (C27: 699)

### **Supramental Beauty**

*What is the meaning of Supramental Beauty? Is it the perception of the Divine as the All-Beautiful and All-Delight?*

No, that you can get on any plane, and it becomes easy as soon as one is in contact with the higher Mind. Beauty is the special divine Manifestation in the physical as Truth is in the mind, Love in the heart, Power in the vital. Supramental beauty is the highest divine beauty manifesting in Matter. (C27: 699)

**Supramental Action and Beauty**

*Is the work of supermind direct, as one sees in the lower grades of creation?*

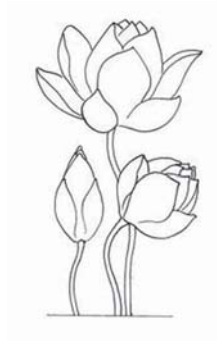
Yes — supermind action is direct, spontaneous and automatic like that of inframental Nature — the difference is that it is perfectly conscious. As there is no disagreement or strife within itself, it produces a perfect harmony and beauty. (C27: 699)

**The Full Power of Beauty**

Beauty does not get its full power except when it is surrendered to the Divine.  
(M15: 232)

**Beauty in Simplicity**

There is a great beauty in simplicity. (M14: 150)



## *Section 3*

### **The Evolutionary Curve**

#### **The Evolutionary Curve of Art**

*Why does evolution go in spirals instead of being a constant progress?*

It is a constant progress. But if you made it in a straight line, you would cover only a single part — the world is a globe, it is not a line.

*If it were a cylinder!*

Even for a cylinder, if you drew only one line, one part of the cylinder would escape you altogether. This movement in a spiral is precisely to try and make everything enter this phenomenon of evolution — so that not only one thing may advance whilst the others remain behind. And so, according to the centre where the progress is concentrated, one seems to move away from one thing and enter into another. But in the long run, when one evolves consciously, one does not forget one thing in order to do another. What is bad at present is forgetfulness; it is that when following a certain activity for a realisation, one forgets all the others or they go into the background, they have no longer any intensity. But this is a human shortcoming which can be corrected — it ought to be corrected.

*Do all progress in a spiral, and all together or separately?*

I fear it is not very harmonious, for the world seems to me rather chaotic! If indeed the march were totally organised, it would be a harmonious development, and if one could see where one is going — having the line of what has been done, one could prolong these lines and see what would come. But for the moment this is open only to an élite. And the mass follows the movement, and all the movements are not homogeneous and simultaneous — certain things are slower to put into line and movement than others. So, even a little difference like this suffices for it to create an immense difference in the movement.

There is even a considerable number of spirals intersecting and giving the impression of contradiction. If one could follow in its totality the movement of universal progress, one would see that there is such a great number of spirals which intersect, that finally one does not know at all whether one is advancing or going back. For, at the same moment some things are going up and others falling back

into the darkness, and all these are not absolutely independent of one another. There is a kind of coordination, so that instead of imagining a spiral like that, we should have to think of spherical spirals. If this could be described, all these spirals taken together would form an immense globe. And it is at the intersection of these spirals that there are moments of progress. But before the progress is coherent, total, there must be an inner organisation of life, different from that of Nature, arranged in accordance with a plan. For Nature — her plan is only made with an aspiration, a decision and a goal. And the road seems quite fantastic, following the impulses of every minute — trials, set-backs, contradictions, progress and demolition of what has already been done; and it is such a chaos that one can understand nothing there. She has the air of somebody doing things impulsively — giving out certain impulses and destroying them, beginning others again, and going on and on like that. She makes and unmakes, she remakes and again demolishes, she mixes, destroys, constructs and all this at the same time. It is incomprehensible. And yet, she evidently has a plan, and herself goes towards a certain goal which is very clear to her but quite veiled to human consciousness. . . . It is very interesting. If one could construct something like that, it would give an idea: a globe made of intersecting spirals of different colours, and each representing one aspect of Nature's creation. And these aspects are made to complete one another — but so far they are rather in competition than collaboration, and it seems she is always obliged to destroy something in order to make another, which makes for a terrible wastage, and a still greater disorder. But if all this were seen in its totality, it would be extremely interesting. For it is an extremely complex criss-crossing, in all possible directions, of a spiralling ascent.

Now, for your question, there could be another answer. What I have said just now is also exactly the same for art, it also follows an evolution and at a certain moment seems to drift away from its goal and at others it draws close to a greater height. But there is something else, that is a social point of view: there is a period, like the Age of Louis XIV for example, in which what predominated was the sense of artistic creation, and this sense seems to have given a certain perception of beauty at that moment; but afterwards social evolution brought in other needs and other ideas, and now, for more than a century it is commercialism which is uppermost in the world, and there is nothing more in contradiction with art than commerce. For it is precisely the vulgarisation of something which ought to be exceptional. It is putting within everybody's range something which could be understood only by an élite. And as we are in an age of mechanisation and commercialism, it is a time altogether uncongenial for a blossoming of art. And probably this is why art, not finding the conditions necessary for its full flowering, tries to seek another outlet and enters the mental and vital field for its expression. That is the reason. When the time comes to shake off, so to say, to reject this mercantilism and to wake up to a more beautiful reality, then art too will be reborn in a greater consciousness of harmony. (M5: 333-36)

## Great Artistic Periods

*Why are great artists born at the same time in the same country?*

That depends on the person to whom you put the question. The explanation will be different accordingly. From the point of view of evolution, I think Sri Aurobindo has explained this very clearly in *The Human Cycle*. Evolution, that is to say, culture and civilisation, describes a more or less regular spiral movement around the earth, and the results of one civilisation, it may be said, slowly go to form another; then, when the total development is harmonious, this creates simultaneously the field of action and the actors, in the sense that at the time of the great artistic periods all the conditions were favourable to the development of art, and naturally, the fact that all the circumstances were favourable, attracted the men who could use them. There have been concrete movements like that, great ages like that of the Italian Renaissance or the similar period in France, almost at the same time, when artists from all countries were gathered at the same place because the conditions were favourable to the development of their art. This is one of the reasons — a so-to-say external reason — for the formation of civilisations.

There is another, this is that from an occult point of view it is almost always the same forces and same beings which incarnate during all the ages of artistic beauty upon earth and that, according to occultists, there are cycles of rebirth: beings return, group themselves through affinity at the time of birth; so it happens that regularly, almost all come together for a similar action. Some occultists have studied this question and given very precise numbers based upon the actual facts of the development of the earth: they have said that once in a hundred years, once in a thousand years, once in five thousand years, etc., certain cycles were repeated; that certain great civilisations appeared every five thousand years, and that it was (according to their special knowledge) the same people who came back. This is not quite exact, that is why I am not going into details, but in a sense this is true: it is the same forces which are at work. It is the same forces and they are grouped according to their affinities and, for a reason which may be quite material or for a mental or cyclic reason, they reunite at a certain place, and in this place there is a new civilisation or a special progress in a civilisation or a kind of effervescence, blossoming, flowering of beauty, as in the great ages in Greece, Egypt, India, Italy, Spain. . . . Everywhere, in all the countries of the world, there have been more or less beautiful periods.

If you put the question to astrologers, they will explain this to you by the position of the stars; they will say that certain positions of the stars have a certain effect on the earth. But, as I have told you, all these things are “languages”, a way of expression, of making oneself understood; the truth is deeper, it is more complex, more complete. (M4: 309-11)

## Modern Art — the Beginnings

The story began with . . . the man who used to do still-life and whose plates were never round. . . . Cézanne! It was he who began it; he said that if plates were painted round that would not be living; that when one looks at things spontaneously, never does one see plates round: one sees them like this (*gesture*). I don't know why, but he said that it is only the mind that makes us see plates as round, because one knows they are round, otherwise one does not see them round. It is he who began. . . . He painted a still-life which was truly a very beautiful thing, note that; a very beautiful thing, with an impression of colour and form truly surprising (I could show you reproductions one day, I must be having them, but they are not colour reproductions unfortunately; the beauty is really in the colour). But, of course, his plate was not round. He had friends who told him just this, "But after all, why don't you make your plate round?" He replied, "My dear fellow, you are altogether mental, you are not an artist; it is because you think that you make your plates round: if you only see, you will do it like this" (*gesture*). It is in accordance with the impression that the plate ought to be painted; it gives you an impact, you translate the impact, and it is this which is truly artistic. It is like this that modern art began. And note that he was right. His plates were not round, but he was right in principle.

What has made art what it is (do you want me to tell you this, psychologically?) is photography. Photographers did not know their job and gave you hideous things, frightfully ugly; it was mechanical, it had no soul, it had no art, it was horrible. All the first attempts of photography until . . . not very long ago, were like that. It is about fifty years ago that it became tolerable, and now with gradual improvement it has become something good; but it must be said that the process is absolutely different. In those days, when your portrait was taken, you sat in a comfortable chair, you had to sit leaning nicely and facing an enormous thing with a black cloth, which opened like this towards you. And the man ordered, "Don't move! Steady!" That, of course, was the end of the old painting. When the painter made something lifelike, a life-like portrait, his friends said, "Why now, this is photography!"

It must be said that the art of the end of the last century, the art of the Second Empire, was bad. It was an age of businessmen, above all an age of bankers, financiers, and taste, upon my word, had gone very low. I don't believe that businessmen are people necessarily very competent in art, but when they wanted their portrait, they wanted a likeness! One could not leave out the least detail, it was quite comic: "But you know I have a little wrinkle there, don't forget to put it in!" and the lady who said, "You know, you must make my shoulders quite round", and so on. So the artists made portraits which indeed turned into photography. They were flat, cold, without soul and without vision. I can name a number of artists of that period, it was truly a shame for art. This lasted till about the end of the last century, till about 1875. Afterwards, there started the reaction. Then there was an

entire very beautiful period (I don't say this because I myself was painting) but all the artists I then knew were truly artists, they were serious and did admirable things which have remained admirable. It was the period of the impressionists; it was the period of Manet, it was a beautiful period, they did beautiful things. But people tire of beautiful things as they tire of bad ones. So there were those who wanted to found the “Salon d'Automne”. They wanted to surpass the others, go more towards the new, towards the truly anti-photographic. And my goodness, they went a little beyond the limit (according to my taste). They began to depreciate Rembrandt — Rembrandt was a dauber, Titian was a dauber, all the great painters of the Italian Renaissance were daubers. You were not to pronounce the name of Raphael, it was a shame. And all the great period of the Italian Renaissance was “not worth very much”; even the works of Leonardo da Vinci; “You know, you must take them with a pinch of salt.” Then they went a little further; they wanted something entirely new, they became extravagant. And then, from there, there was only one more step to take for the palette-scrapings and then it was finished.

This is the history of art as I knew it.

Now, to tell you the truth, we are climbing up the curve again. Truly, I think we had gone down to the depths of incoherence, absurdity, nastiness — of the taste for the sordid and ugly, the dirty, the outrageous. We had gone, I believe, to the very bottom. (M4: 298-301)

## A Story

I have known artists who were great artists, who had worked hard and produced remarkable things, classical, that is, not ultra-modern. But they were not in fashion because, precisely, one had not to be classical. When a brush was put in the hands of an individual who had never touched a brush, and when a brush was put on a palette of colours and the man had never touched a palette before, then if this individual had in front of him a bit of canvas on an easel and he had never done a picture before, naturally he daubed anything at all; he took the colours and threw them in a haphazard way; then everybody cried out “Admirable”, “Marvellous”, “It is the expression of your soul”, “How well this reveals the truth of things”, etc.! This was the fashion and people who knew nothing were very successful. The poor men who had worked, who knew their art well, were not asked for their pictures any longer; people said, “Oh! This is old-fashioned, you will never find customers for such things.” But, after all, they were hungry, you see, they had to pay their rent and buy their colours and all the rest, and that is costly. Then what could they do? When they had received rebuffs from the picture dealers who all told them the same thing, “But try to be modern, my friend; look here, you are behind the times”, as they were very hungry, what could they do? . . . I knew a painter, a disciple of



Gustave Moreau; he was truly a very fine artist, he knew his work quite well, and then . . . he was starving, he did not know how to make both ends meet and he used to lament. One day, a friend intending to help him, sent a picture dealer to see him. When the merchant entered his studio, this poor man told himself, "At last! Here's my chance", and he showed him all the best work he had done. The art dealer made a face, looked around, turned over things and began rummaging in all the corners; and suddenly he found . . . Ah! I must explain this to you, you are not familiar with these things: a painter, after his day's work has at times some mixed colours left on his palette; he cannot keep them, they dry up in a day; so he always has with him some pieces of canvas which are not well prepared and which he daubs with what are called "the scrapings of palettes" (with supple knives he scrapes all the colours from the palette and applies them on the canvases) and as there are many mixed colours, this makes unexpected designs. There was in a corner a canvas like that on which he used to put his palette-scrapings. The merchant suddenly falls upon that and exclaims, "Here you are! My friend, you are a genius, this is a miracle, it is this you should show! Look at this richness of tones, this variety of forms, and what an imagination!" And this poor man who was starving said shyly, "But sir, these are my palette-scrapings!" And the art-dealer caught hold of him: "Silly fool, this is not to be told!" Then he said, "Give me this, I undertake to sell it. Give me as many of these as you like; ten, twenty, thirty a month, I shall sell them all for you and I shall make you famous." Then, as I told you, his stomach was protesting; he was not happy, but he said, "All right, take it, I shall see." Then the landlord comes to demand his rent, the paint merchant comes demanding payment of the old bill; the purse is quite empty, and what is to be done? So though he did not make pictures with palette scrapings, he did something which gave the imagination free play, where the forms were not too precise, the colours were all mixed and brilliant, and one could not know overmuch what one was seeing; and as people did not know very much what they saw, those who understood nothing about it exclaimed, "How beautiful it is!" And he supplied this to his art-dealer. He never made a name for himself with his real painting, which was truly very fine (it was really very fine, he was a very good painter), but he won a world reputation with these horrors! And this was just at the beginning of modern painting, this goes back to the Universal Exhibition of 1900; if I were to tell you his name, you would all recognise it. . . . Now, of course, they have gone far beyond, they have done much better. However, he had the sense of harmony and beauty and his colours were beautiful. But at present, as soon as there is the least beauty, it won't do at all, it has to be outrageously ugly, then that, that is modern! (M4: 296-98)

## The Downward and the Upward Curves

*Are we really going up again?*

I think so. Recently I saw some pictures which truly showed something other than ugliness and filth. It is not yet art, it is very far from being beautiful, but there are signs that we are going up again. You will see, fifty years hence we shall perhaps have beautiful things to see. I felt this some days ago, that truly we had come to the end of the descending curve — we are still very low down, but are beginning to climb up. There is a kind of anguish and there is still a complete lack of understanding of what beauty can and should be, but one finds an aspiration towards something which will not be sordidly material. For a time art had wanted to wallow in the mire, to be what they called “realistic”. They had chosen as “real” what was most repulsive in the world, most ugly: all deformities, all filth, all ugliness, all the horrors, all the incoherences of colour and form; well, I believe this is behind us now. I had this feeling very strongly these last few days (not through seeing pictures, for we do not have a chance to see much here, but by “sensing the atmosphere”). And even in the reproductions we are shown, there is some aspiration towards something which would be a little higher. It will need about fifty years; then . . . Unless there is another war, another catastrophe; because certainly, to a large extent, what is responsible for this taste for the sordid are the wars and the horrors of war. People were compelled to put aside all refined sensibility, the love of harmony, the need for beauty, to be able to undergo all that; otherwise, I believe, they would really have died of horror. It was so unspeakably foul that it could not be tolerated, so it perverted men’s taste everywhere and when the war was over (admitting that it ever ended), they wanted only one thing, to forget, forget, forget. To seek distraction, not to think of all the horror they had suffered. Then, one goes very low. The whole vital atmosphere is completely vitiated and the physical atmosphere is terribly obscure.

Hence, if we can escape another world war . . . Because war is there, it has never stopped. It has been there from almost the beginning of this century; it began with China, Turkey, Tripolitania, Morocco — you are following? — the Balkans, it has never stopped, it has become worse, but each time it has become a world war, it has assumed altogether sordid proportions. All you my children, you have been born after the war (I am speaking of the First [World] War), so you do not know much about this, and then you have been born here, in a country which has been truly privileged. But the children born in Europe, latterly, these little ones, who were children of the war, carry something in them which will be very difficult to eradicate, a kind of horror, a fright. One could not have been mixed up with that without knowing what horror is. The first war was perhaps worse than the second. The second was so atrocious that all was lost. . . . But the first, oh! I don’t know. . . . The last months I spent in Paris were truly fantastic. And it can’t be told. The life in

the trenches, for example, is something that cannot be told. The new generations do not know. . . . But, you see, the children born now will not even know if this was true, all these horrors which are related to them. What happened in the conquered countries, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in France — the frightful things, unbelievable, unthinkable, which took place — unless one has been very close by, has seen, one cannot believe it. It was . . . I was saying the other day that the vital world is a world of horrors; well, all the horrors of the vital world had descended upon earth, and upon earth they are still more horrible than in the vital world, because in the vital world, if you have an inner power, if you have the knowledge, if you have strength, you act upon them — you act, you can subdue them, you can show yourself stronger. But all your knowledge, all your power, all your strength is nothing in this material world when you are subjected to the horrors of a war. And this acts in the terrestrial atmosphere in such a way that it is very, very difficult to eradicate it.

Naturally, men are always very anxious to forget. There are already those who have begun to say, “Are you quite sure it was like that?” But those who have gone through that, do not want it to be forgotten; so the places of torture, massacre — hideous places which go beyond all the worst the human imagination can conceive — some of these places have been preserved. You can go and visit the torture-chambers the Germans built in Paris, and they will never be destroyed, I hope, so that those who come and say, “Oh! You know, these things have been exaggerated” (for one does not like to know that such frightful things have happened), could be taken by the hand and told, “Come and see, if you are not afraid.”

This forms character. If it is taken in the right way (and I think there are people who have taken it in the right way), this may lead you straight to yoga, straight. That is, one feels such a deep detachment for all things in the world, such a great need to find something else, an imperious need to find something which is truly beautiful, truly fresh, truly good . . . then, quite naturally, this brings you to a spiritual aspiration. And these horrors have, as it were, divided men: there was a minority which was ready and rose very high, there was a majority which was not ready and went down very low. These wallow in the mud at present, and hence, for the moment, one does not get out of it; and if this continues, we shall go towards another war and this time it will truly be the end of this civilisation — I don't say the end of the world, because nothing can be the end of the world, but the end of this civilisation, that is to say, another will have to be built. You will perhaps tell me that this would be very well, for this civilisation is in its decline, it is on the way to perish; but after all, there are very beautiful things in it, worthy of being preserved, and it would be a great pity if all this disappeared. But if there is another war, I can tell you that all this will disappear. For men are very intelligent creatures and they have found the means of destroying everything, and they will make use of this, for what's the good of spending billions to find certain bombs, if one might not use them? What is the use of discovering that one can destroy a city in a few minutes, if it is not for destroying it! One wants to see

the fruit of one’s efforts. If there is war, this is what will happen.

There we are, I am telling you things which are not very cheerful, but it is sometimes good to knock some sense into you to make one think. (M4: 301-04)

## **Modern Art**

*Why is modern art so ugly?*

I believe the chief reason is that people have become more and more lazy and do not want to work. They want to produce something before having worked, they want to know before having studied and they want to make a name before having done anything good. So, this is the open door for all sorts of things, as we see. . . . Naturally, there are exceptions. (M4: 296)

## **Movement of Art**

*What do you mean by “mushroom species”?*

Don’t you know what a mushroom is? how mushrooms grow? Mushrooms spring up anywhere and seem not to belong to any cultivation. The idea is of a kind of spontaneous growth which has no roots in the totality of creation. These are things which do not belong to a whole, which are as though extraneous. Instead of mushrooms I could have said parasites on trees. You know there are parasites on trees, like the mistletoe on the oak; here too I have seen them on certain trees; I have seen plants grow clinging to the tree, plants which lived on the life of the tree, which did not have their own separate life, their own roots, which did not take their food directly from the soil; they clung to another plant, as though they made use of others’ work. The others work to obtain the food and these cling upon them and live by it. Really, how parasites live on animals!

I don’t know, I thought I went into great detail. But I have said enough about it for those who know. . . . In the old days, I mean in the artistic ages, as for instance in Greece or even during the Italian renaissance (but much more in Greece and Egypt), buildings were made for public utility. Mostly too, in Greece and Egypt, a kind of sanctuary was built to house their gods. Well, what they tried to do was something total, beautiful in itself, complete. And in that they used architecture, that is to say, the sense of harmony of lines, and sculpture to add to architecture the detail of expression, and painting to complete this expression, but all this was held in a coordinated unity which was the created monument. The sculpture formed a part of the building, the painting was a part of the building. These were not things

apart, just put there one knew not why — they belonged to the general plan. And so, when these people made a temple, for example, it was a whole wherein were found almost all the manifestations of art, united in a single will to express the beauty they wished to express, that is, a garment for the god they wished to adore. All the beautiful periods of art were of this kind. But precisely, these days, though not quite recently — at the end of the last century, art became commercial, mercenary, and pictures were made to be sold; they were painted on canvas, a frame was put and then, without any definite reason, a picture was put here or another there, or else some sculpture was made representing one thing or another, and it was put no matter where. It had nothing to do with the house in which it was placed. It did not fit in. Things could be beautiful in themselves but they had no meaning. It was not a whole having cohesion and attempting to express something: it was an exhibition of talent, cleverness, the ability to make a picture or a statue. So too the architecture of those days, it had no precise meaning. One did not build with the idea of expressing the force one wanted to incarnate in that building; the architecture was not the expression of an aspiration or of something that uplifts your spirit or the expression of the magnificence of the godhead one wanted to house. They were nothing else but mushrooms. They put up a house here, a house there, made this and that, pictures, statues, objects of all kinds. So, on entering a house one saw, as I have just told you, a bit of sculpture here, a bit of painting there, show-cases with a heap of bizarre objects having no connection with one another. And wherefore all this? To make a sort of exhibition, a show of art-objects which had nothing to do with art and beauty! But that — one must understand the deep meaning of art to feel to what an extent this was shocking. Otherwise, when one is accustomed to it, when one has lived in that period and that milieu, it seems quite natural — but it is not natural. It is a commercial deformation.

There is only one justification, that is to make it a means of education. Then it becomes a museum. If you make a museum, it is a historical sampling of all that has been done. It serves to give you a historical knowledge of things. But a museum is not something beautiful in itself, far from it! For an artist it is something quite shocking. From the point of view of education it is very good, for specimens of all kinds of things have been collected there in a single place; and in this way you may learn, acquire erudition. But from the point of view of beauty, it is frightful.

And so there was an attempt, later, to return (for instance, at the beginning of this century — I am speaking of the first years of this century) an attempt to create what was called “decorative art”, that is, to try to get back to a vision of the ensemble and to make, when arranging a house, a coordinated whole in which things were in a certain place because they were meant to be there, and where every object had not only its *raison d'être* but its exact place and could not be displaced. An ensemble was created, a whole. So that was already a little better. They were trying.

Here (in India), it is altogether different, for there is a tradition of art which has

remained, the whole country is full of things which were made at a fine moment of the artistic history of the country. One lives in its midst. One has hardly undergone the after-effects of what happened in the rest of the world, above all in Europe. Only those parts of India which are a little too anglicised have lost the sense of beauty. There are certain schools in Bombay, schools of artists, which are frightful. And then, there was that attempt of the Calcutta School to revive Indian art, but that was only on a very small scale. From the point of view of art what you have most within your reach are the old creations, the old temples, old pictures. All that was very good. And that had been made to express a faith. And it was done precisely with a sense of the whole, not in disorder.

You have followed very little of this movement of art I am speaking about, which is related to European civilisation, it has not been felt much here — just a little but not deeply. Here, the majority of creations (this is a very good example), the majority of works, I believe even almost all the beautiful works, are not signed. All those paintings in the caves, those statues in the temples — these are not signed. One does not know at all who created them. And all this was not done with the idea of making a name for oneself as at present. One happened to be a great sculptor, a great painter, a great architect, and then that was all, there was no question of putting one’s name on everything and proclaiming it aloud in the newspapers so that no one might forget it! In those days the artist did what he had to do without caring whether his name would go down to posterity or not. All was done in a movement of aspiration to express a higher beauty, and above all with the idea of giving an appropriate abode to the godhead who was evoked. In the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, it was the same thing, and I don’t think that there too the names of the artists who made them have remained. If any are there, it is quite exceptional and it is only by chance that the name has been preserved. Whilst today, there is not a tiny little piece of canvas, painted or daubed, but on it is a signature to tell you: it is Mr. So-and-so who made this! (M5: 338-41)

## Ultra-modernism

If your brain is a little unwell — fever, cold — it is very difficult to make it work properly. There is lassitude and something vague, a difficulty in catching things with precision; there occur even very strange phenomena, ideas get mixed up before one is able to express them, things enter into conflict and contradict each other; instead of joining together and coming in this way (*gesture*); you see, they begin to do this (*gesture*), so then it creates a disorder. So one tries to catch this one and it escapes. One goes to look for that one, hop! It runs away. And all this just because there is fever which has disturbed things a little, or a cold, you know, what is called a cold in the head, which has slightly disturbed the functioning. If you rise above it,

you are absolutely lucid, you are fully conscious, have complete lucidity. Even if you are extremely ill, it makes no difference. Up there you know everything perfectly, you see everything perfectly, you understand everything perfectly, there is no change.

But if you want to put all that on paper, take pencil and paper and begin to write and formulate it, you will see that a slight disturbance comes in like that, as I said; instead of things being grouped together and directed as it usually happens in one's normal state, they do this or go like that or like that (*gestures*), there is disorder . . . why, strangely it resembles ultra-modern painting. It is like that.

I always think that the artists who do this painting must be doing it in a fit of pretty high fever. Things come up in this way and when you try to put them in some reasonable order, there are always some which escape or hide themselves or run away like that, or come and knock against others, and all this creates an incoherence.

It must be the most favourable condition for painting in the latest style, it must be the very height of fever. Oh, I suspect they produce this by artificial means. God knows what drug they take or what kind of hashish they eat or smoke, in what opium dreams they live — surely. People who smoke opium say they have marvellous visions. It must be something like that. (*Laughter*)

I am speaking to you about this because soon perhaps you will be shown a collection of coloured photographs which we have received from a photographer in . . . I think it's California. Los Angeles is in California, isn't it? (*Mother asks Pavitra*) I still know my geography!

Well, you see, it is absolutely ultra-modern painting. It is photography. There is no painting there, it is photography. They are negatives printed on photographic paper in colour. The colour is admirable. I don't know any painter who can produce such beautiful, living warm colours, so marvellously beautiful. But the composition is ultra-modern. What is most . . . oh, let us call it "reasonable" — if I say "reasonable" they immediately think: "Then it must be ugly", but it is true, from a certain point of view it is true, yet — the most reasonable thing which is still not reasonable enough to be ugly, is, I think, the portrait of the photographer-artist; I don't know, he doesn't say that it is his photo but he gives a small name, you see: "So-and-so is concentrating", I think, or something like that: "Someone is concentrating, reflecting, going within", something like that. The titles are very fine, they are also ultra-modern. There is this one: so we see the gentleman a bit tenuous as though seen through a veil, a light veil, but it is still a man's head. We see that it's the photograph of a head, and the head is not distorted. It is completely there, only a little withdrawn in the background, you see; and then right in the foreground there are brilliant lines with tortuous forms, zigzags, intercrossing things, others which sprout up like the beginnings of branches and leaves, with brilliant colours. All this is in the front, because you see he came out of the physical, went into the background and entered within himself — inside himself — that's it, these zigzags, twistings, efflorescences. And the colour is marvellous, exquisite. This is "Mr. So-and-so goes within". It's

the thing we can understand best, we poor people who are not ultra-modern. That's what we can understand best. There are others. We wonder why there's the title on the picture. You should ask the author, he would explain it to you. But just imagine, it is beautiful; it doesn't make sense, it has a false feel, but it is beautiful. It is so beautiful that I said we had to have an exhibition, that it gave me the idea of making photographs like that . . . not I, I am no photographer, I know nothing about it, but to have photographs like this made by a photographer; but then unfortunately with an idea at the back. So that will not be at all ultra-modern. But if one could find, you see, how to use these colours for something which I call expressive, it could become wonderful, truly wonderful. That will take a year, perhaps more to be realised. But still, the guilty one is this gentleman with his photography.

It seems that he is famous all over the world — but I understand nothing of all this, you see — and that it means a considerable labour to do something like this. Of course, these are superimpositions of negatives, a negative taken of these superimpositions, and this is still very complicated. I am not trying to explain it to you, I don't understand anything about it, but I am told that it was a lot of work, very difficult, the mastery of an extremely complicated technique and an effect which has never been achieved before. These are coloured photographs as large as this, that's very large for coloured photographs. And there's a red in them . . . Oh, the most beautiful reds that Nature has been able to produce in flowers or sunsets — this is still more beautiful. But how he has done it I don't know. There is brown, there is green, there is yellow, there are all kinds of things. Some are more pretty, some less pretty, there are mixtures more or less happy; some photographs seem to have been taken with the help of a microscope: infinitely small things which, becoming large, look extraordinary; things like that. And we can see very clearly that there are superimpositions, but there are exceptional colour effects. There we are.

I don't know when they will show this to you — one of these days, unless they have been sent back already, I don't know, I must find out. I know I asked that they should be shown to you. Well, I find this better . . . oh, my goodness, happily there is no painter here . . . (*laughter*), better than modern painting. And this is photography. For modern painting has not yet been able to use colours with such transparency and brilliance. Water colour becomes something completely dull beside this. Oil colour is like mud. The stained glass could perhaps do something; but there, you see, it is the sun playing behind which is the great master. But that is more difficult.

Stained glasses — I had thought of making them. You see, what I wanted were visions which I would have liked to give. I tried several times to reproduce visions in painting — it becomes stupid. It becomes stupid because the means of expression is bad. I had thought of stained glass, but you see, stained glass — these are bits of coloured glass and they have to be joined. So they are joined with a small leaden thread; but that's horrible. All these little leaden threads are like that, it is frightful.

But this is quite good, we shall be able to do something. (M7: 44-48)



## **We Have Lost the Sense of True Beauty**

When I read these ancient texts, I really have the impression that from the inner point of view, from the point of view of the true life, we have fallen back terribly and that for the acquisition of a few ingenious mechanisms, a few encouragements to physical laziness, the acquisition of instruments and gadgets that lessen the effort of living, we have renounced the reality of the inner life. It is that sense which has been lost and it needs an effort for you to think of learning the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, the goal towards which we must advance, towards which all life advances, whether you want it or not. One step towards the goal, oh! it needs so much effort to do that. And generally one thinks of it only when the outer circumstances are not pleasant.

How far we are from the times when the shepherd, who did not go to school and kept watch over his flock at night under the stars, could read in the stars what was going to happen, commune with something which expressed itself through Nature, and had the sense of the profound beauty and that peace which a simple life gives!

It is very unfortunate that one has to give up one thing in order to gain another. When I speak of the inner life, I am far from opposing any modern inventions, far from it, but how much these inventions have made us artificial and stupid! How much we have lost the sense of true beauty, how much we burden ourselves with useless needs!

Perhaps the time has come to continue the ascent in the curve of the spiral and now with all that this knowledge of matter has brought us, we shall be able to give to our spiritual progress a more solid basis. Strong with what we have learnt of the secrets of material Nature, we shall be able to join the two extremes and rediscover the supreme Reality in the very heart of the atom. (M3: 205-06)

## **Inspiration of Modern Art**

. . . It is evidently inspired from the vital world — from a certain part of it which seems to be breaking out in much of today's literature and art. All that comes from this source is full of a strange kind of force, but out of focus, misshaped in thought or vision or feeling, sometimes in the form too, ominous and perverse. For that matter, the adverse vital world is very much with us now, — the War was the sign of its descent on the earth and the After-war bears its impress. But from another point of view that is not a cause for alarm or discouragement — for it has always been predicted from occult sources that such a descent would be the precursor of the Divine Manifestation. (C27: 433)

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There is a sort of mysticism here that wants to express the inexpressible, the concealed, the invisible — reduce expression to its barest bareness and you get nearer the inexpressible, suppress as much of the form as may be and you get nearer that behind which is invisible. It is the same impulse that pervaded recent endeavours in Art. Form hides, not expresses the reality; let us suppress the concealing form and express the reality by its appropriate geometrical figures — and you have cubism. Or since that is too much, suppress exactitude of form and replace it by more significant forms that indicate rather than conceal the truth — so you have “abstract” paintings. Or, what is within reveals itself in dreams, not in waking phenomena, let us have in poetry or painting the figures, visions, sequences, designs of dreams — and you have surrealist art and poetry. (C27: 418)

### **Embryo of a New Art**

*Why are today's painters not so good as those of the days of Leonardo da Vinci?*

Because human evolution goes in spirals. I have explained this. I said that art had become an altogether mercenary affair, obscure and ignorant, from the beginning of the last century till its middle. It had become something very commercial and quite remote from the true sense of art. And so, naturally, the artistic spirit does not come! It followed bad forms, yet it tried to manifest to counteract the degradation of taste which prevailed. But naturally, as with every movement of Nature in man, some having gone to one extreme, others went to the other extreme; and as these made a sort of servile copy of life — not even that, in those days it was called “a photographic view” of things, but now one can no longer say that, for photography has progressed so much that it would be doing it an injustice to say this, wouldn't it? Photography has become artistic; so a picture cannot be criticised by calling it photographic; nor can one call it “realistic” any longer, for there is a realistic painting which is not at all like that — but it was conventional, artificial and without any true life, so the reaction was to the very opposite, and naturally to another absurdity: “art” was no longer to express physical life but mental life or vital life. And so came all the schools, like the Cubists and others, who created from their head. But in art it is not the head that dominates, it is the feeling for beauty. And they produced absurd and ridiculous and frightful things. Now they have gone farther still, but that, that is due to the wars — with every war there descends upon earth a world in decomposition which produces a sort of chaos. And some, of course, find all this very beautiful and admire it very much.

I understand what they want to do, I understand it very well, but I cannot say that I find they do it well. All I can say is that they are trying.

But it is perhaps (with all its horror, from a certain point of view), it is perhaps better than what was produced in that age of extreme and practical philistinism: the Victorian age or in France the Second Empire. So, one starts from a point where there was a harmony and describes a curve, and with this curve one goes completely out of this harmony and may enter into a total darkness; and then one climbs up, and when one finds oneself in line with the old realisation of art, one becomes aware of the truth there was in this realisation, but with the necessity of expressing something more complete and more conscious. But in describing the circle one forgets that art is the expression of forms and one tries to express ideas and feelings with a minimum of forms. That gives what we have, what you may see (I believe we have reproductions of the most modern painters in the University Library). But if one goes a little farther still, this idea and these feelings they wish to express and express very clumsily — if one returns to the same point of the spiral (only a little higher), one will discover that it is the embryo of a new art which will be an art of beauty and will express not only material life but will also try to express its soul.

Anyway, we have not yet come to that, but let us hope we shall reach there soon. So that's all. (M5: 332-33)

### **Developing a New Sense of Beauty**

. . . humanity as a whole seems to have reached a very dangerous turning-point. Those who are trying to find a solution to the general corruption preach a return to the simplicity of yore, but of course that is quite impossible: you cannot go back.

We must go farther on, we must advance, climb greater heights and go beyond the arid search for pleasure and personal welfare, not through fear of punishment, even punishment after death, but through the development of a new sense of beauty, a thirst for truth and light, through understanding that it is only by widening yourself, illumining yourself, setting yourself ablaze with the ardour for progress, that you can find both integral peace and enduring happiness.

One must rise up and widen — rise up . . . and widen. (M3: 236)

### **New Technique for New Beauty**

*But how does it happen that after having reached so high the art of painting becomes so ugly and childish?*

But have you ever seen that the human ascent is like that, a funicular ascent, quite straight? It turns all the time. So if you assume that there are vertical lines which are lines of a kind of human progress, then when things come there, they progress, but

when they go further away they degenerate.

I shall tell you perhaps in ten years . . . I don't know, perhaps in ten years I shall tell you whether there is something in modern painting. Because I am going to tell you something curious: for the moment I find it downright ugly, not only ugly but stupid; but what is frightening is that it makes you completely sick of all other pictures. When one sees painting as it is done today . . . for we receive all the time art reviews in which, with much intelligence, are put reproductions of both ancient and modern pictures, and they are put side by side, which makes the thing very interesting, you can see both and compare. I can't manage to have yet a very clear notion of beauty in what modern painters do, I confess this, I haven't yet understood; but what is curious is that they have succeeded in taking away from me all the taste for the painting of old; except some very rare things, the rest seems to me pompous, artificial, ridiculous, unbearable.

Now this means that behind this incoherence and chaos there certainly is, there must be a creative spirit which is trying to manifest.

We have passed from a particular world which had reached its perfection and was declining, this is absolutely obvious. And so to pass from that creation to a new creation (because . . . well, suppose that it is the forces of ordinary Nature which are acting), instead of passing through a continuous ascent, there was evidently a fall into a chaos, that is, the chaos is necessary for a new creation.

The methods of Nature are like that. Before our solar system could exist, there was chaos. Well, in passing from this artistic construction which had reached a kind of summit, before passing from this to a new creation, it seems to me still the same thing, evidently a chaos. And the impression I have when I look at these things is that they are not sincere, and that's what is annoying. It is not sincere: either it is someone who has amused himself by being as mad as possible or perhaps it is someone who wanted to deceive others or maybe deceive even himself, or again, a kind of incoherent fantasy in which one puts a blot of paint in one place and then says immediately, "Why, it would be funny to put it there, and if one put it here, like this, and again if one put this like that, and again . . ." There, for the moment this is the impression it gives me, and I don't feel that it is something sincere.

But there is a sincere creative spirit behind, which is trying to manifest, which, for the moment, does not manifest, but is strong enough to destroy the past. That is, there was a time when I used to look at the pictures of Rembrandt, of Titian, of Tintoretto, the pictures of Renoir and Monet, I felt a great aesthetic joy. This aesthetic joy I don't feel any more. I have progressed because I follow the whole movement of terrestrial evolution; therefore, I have had to overpass this cycle, I have arrived at another; and this one seems to me empty of aesthetic joy. From the point of view of reason one may dispute this, speak of all the beautiful and good things which have been done, all that is a different affair. But this subtle something, precisely, which is the true aesthetic joy, is gone, I don't feel it any longer. Of course I am a hundred

miles away from having it when I look at the things they are now doing. But still it is something which is behind this that has made the other disappear. So perhaps by making just a little effort towards the future we are going to be able to find the formula of the new beauty. That would be interesting. It is quite recently that this impression came to me; it is not old. I have tried with the most perfect goodwill, by abolishing all kinds of preferences, preconceived ideas, habits, past tastes, all that; all that eliminated, I look at their pictures and I don't succeed in getting any pleasure; it doesn't give me any, sometimes it gives me a disgust, but above all the impression of something that's not true, a painful impression of insincerity.

But then quite recently, I suddenly felt this, this sensation of something very new, something of the future pushing, pushing, trying to manifest, trying to express itself and not succeeding, but something which will be a terrific progress over all that has been felt and expressed before; and then, at the same time is born the movement of consciousness which turns to this new thing and wants to grasp it. This will perhaps be interesting. That is why I told you: ten years. Perhaps in ten years there will be people who have found a new expression. A great progress would be necessary, an immense progress in the technique; the old technique seems barbarous. And now with the new scientific discoveries perhaps the technique of execution will change and one could find a new technique which would then express this new beauty which wants to manifest. We shall speak about it in ten years' time.

(M7: 186-88)

## **Art and Tradition**

The Mother finds the pictures of X hideous and monstrous, she would not dignify them with the name of art. But it is not because they depart from tradition. The Mother does not believe in tradition — she considers that Art should always develop new forms — but still these must be according to a truth of Beauty which is universal and eternal — something of the Divine. (S25: 368)

## **The World of Harmony — the Source of All Art**

There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth. For instance, there is a certain line of music, consisting of a few supreme notes, that was behind the productions of two artists who came one after another — one a concerto of Bach, another a concerto of Beethoven. The two are not alike on paper and differ to the outward ear, but in their essence they are the same. One and the same vibration of consciousness, one wave

of significant harmony touched both these artists. Beethoven caught a larger part, but in him it was more mixed with the inventions and interpolations of his mind; Bach received less, but what he seized of it was purer. The vibration was that of the victorious emergence of consciousness, consciousness tearing itself out of the womb of unconsciousness in a triumphant uprising and birth.

If by Yoga you are capable of reaching this source of all art, then you are master, if you will, of all the arts. Those that may have gone there before, found it perhaps happier, more pleasant or full of a rapturous ease to remain and enjoy the Beauty and the Delight that are there, not manifesting it, not embodying it upon earth. But this abstention is not all the truth nor the true truth of Yoga; it is rather a deformation, a diminution of the dynamic freedom of Yoga by the more negative spirit of Sannyasa. The will of the Divine is to manifest, not to remain altogether withdrawn in inactivity and an absolute silence; if the Divine Consciousness were really an inaction of unmanifesting bliss, there would never have been any creation. (M3: 112-13)

### **Change by Spiritual Coercion**

It is only when something absolutely new and absolutely superior enters the earth atmosphere and changes it by a kind of spiritual coercion, it is only at that moment that human consciousness will change sufficiently for circumstances also to change.

As for me, I have no illusions on the subject, because I know that Sri Aurobindo saw the truth of things and therefore, if humanity were ready to be transformed simply by the vision of the truth of things, well, at least all those who are in contact with this truth should be transformed. Well, they aren't.

You know all the defects which you have, personally and collectively, and how in spite of a goodwill which must be obvious, there is still much to do for the world to be as one conceives it when one comes out of ordinary notions — simply, let us say a world of harmony, peace, understanding, broadmindedness, goodwill, unselfishness, disinterested consecration to a higher ideal, self-forgetfulness . . . you want more of these things, there are still many more. You must begin with just a little at first, simply this: to have slightly greater ideas, a little vaster understanding, not to be sectarian.

(M7: 185)

## *Section 4*

### **Art — East and West**

#### **Eastern and Western Art**

*It is said that a synthesis of western and eastern art could be made?*

Yes. One can make a synthesis of everything if one rises sufficiently high.

*What will come out of it?*

If it is necessary, it will be done. But fundamentally, these are things in the making. For, the advantage of modern times and specially of this hideous commercialism is that everything is now mixed up; that things from the East go to the West, and things from the West to the East, and they influence each other. For the moment this creates a confusion, a sort of pot-pourri. But a new expression will come out of it — it is not so far from its realisation. People cannot intermix, as men today are intermixing, without its producing a reciprocal effect. For instance, with their mania of conquest, the nations of the West which conquered all sorts of countries in the world, have undergone a very strong influence of the conquered countries. In the old days, when Rome conquered Greece it came under the influence of Greece much more than if it had not conquered it. And the Americans — all that they make now is full of Japanese things, and perhaps they are not even aware of it. But since they occupied Japan, I see that the magazines received from America are full of Japanese things. And even in certain details of objects received from America, one now feels the influence of Japan. That happens automatically. It is quite strange, there always comes about a sort of equilibrium, and he who made the material conquest is conquered by the spirit of the vanquished. It is reciprocal. He made the material conquest, he possesses materially, but it is the spirit of the conquered one who possesses the conqueror.

So, through mixing . . . The ways of Nature are slow, obscure and complicated. She takes a very long time to do a thing which could probably be done much more rapidly, easily and without wastage by means of the spirit. At present there is a terrible wastage in the world. But it is getting done. She has her own way of mixing people.

*Is it intentional?*

Not the way men understand “intentional”. But it is certainly the expression of an intention and a goal towards which one is going. Only, all depends on the amount of consciousness. For a man this seems a confusion, for he can see only details, and it appears to be a terrible loss of time, because for him the idea of time is limited to the duration of his person. But Nature has eternity before her. And it is all the same to her to waste, for she is like someone who had a huge cauldron; she throws things in and makes a mixture, and if that does not succeed she throws all this out, for she knows that by taking back the same things she will make another mixture. And that is how it is. Nothing is lost, for it comes into use again all the time. Forms are broken and the substance is taken back, and it goes on constantly like that. It is made, it is unmade, it is turned inside out — what harm can it do her to try a hundred thousand times if it so pleases her! For there is nothing that is wasted, except her work. But her work is her pleasure. Without work she would not exist.

*It is a pleasure for her, not for people!*

No, certainly, I quite agree. I find it a little too cruel an amusement. (M5: 341-43)

## **Indian and European Art**

Its [*Art's*] normal sphere, however, is interpretation of a less pregnant and forceful kind. Here too, there are three things which it can interpret in the object it selects, the causal part or thing in itself; the psychical part or its passing imaginations, phases, emotions; or the physical part, the outward appearance, incident or movement as our eyes see them. Indian Art attaches itself to the two higher interpretations, European to the two lower. They meet in the middle term of Art, the imaginative and emotional; but each brings with it the habits of vision, the conventions, the mastering movement and tendency of the soul downward to earth or upward to heaven, born of their main preoccupation, so that even here, though they meet on common ground, they remain diverse and unreconciled. (C1: 538-39)

## **Sight or Soul-Sight**

In dealing with the form the question between them is Shall I reproduce what the eye sees or shall I reproduce what the soul sees? The lower type of European Art is content with reproducing what the eye sees. This it calls realism and fidelity to Nature — narrowing Nature to the limited confines of the materially sensible. The



reproduction, of course, is not a real reproduction, but only an approximation within the limitations imposed by the canvas, the brush and the paintbox. It is really as close an imitation as our instruments will allow, absolute fidelity being rarely possible. This style of Art had perhaps its utility, but now that we have photographs and can put colour into the photographs, its separate field is in danger of being taken from it. (C1: 539)

### **Form and Emotion**

A higher European Art takes imitation of the form as its basis, but its nobler objective is not the imitation of form, but the imitation of emotion. The artist tries to see and recover on canvas not only the body, but so much of the feeling as the body can for the moment express. This may often be a great deal. In certain moments of powerful feeling or critical action a great deal of our psychical selves may come out in the eyes, the face, the gesture, the pose. This the artist imitates. He not only shows us an object or an incident, but he fixes on the canvas a moment in the soul-life of the object. The habitual mood also stamps itself to a great extent on the face and certain traits of character betray themselves in expression and feature. These too the imitative artist transfers to the canvas. When not exaggerated or theatrical, this kind of art can be strong, effective and dramatic. But it has serious limitations. So much of the inner truth as the outward form interprets, this Art interprets. Its interpretation is secondhand, its vision derived and unable to go beyond its authority. (C1: 539-40)

### **Imaginative Art**

A still higher reach is attained by imaginative European Art. Imagination, according to the European idea, is creative, not interpretative. What is really meant is that the imaginative artist transfers something that belongs to himself into the object of his study, some fancy that has flashed across or some idea that has mastered his mind. Either he reads it into his subject by unconscious transference or he deliberately uses his subject as a mere excuse for putting his fancy or his idea into line and colour. The artist is interpreting himself, not his subject. This egoistic Art has often a very high value and some of the best European work has been done in this kind. More rarely his imaginative sympathy enables him to catch a glimpse of the thing itself hidden in the form. His imagination usually plays with it and prevents the vision from being true in all its parts, but he is able to do work of the highest attractiveness, vigour or artistic beauty. (C1: 540)

## **Breaking the Fetters of Form**

In all these kinds the European binds himself by the necessity of reproducing the actual outward form imposed by material Nature. He is a bondsman to form and such do not attain to that spiritual freedom which is the first condition of the sight spiritual. When he tries to interpret the thing in itself, he degenerates usually into allegory. Recently the Impressionist school in Europe have tried to break the fetters of the form; they have insisted that what one really sees in an object is not the rounded, solid material form but something rarer and different. In reality, they are groping their way towards an attempt at seeing and interpreting something hidden in the object, something the soul sees before the eye can catch it. Ignorant of the way, they seldom rise beyond a striking and fantastic imagination, but sometimes an inspired eye catches the true vision. (C1: 540)

## **Soul-Sight**

The Indian begins at the other end. He sees the thing itself either by sukshmadrishti, the soul-sight, or by dhyana, a spiritual union with the object studied in which the truth it expresses dawns on the mind by the process of revelation. This he transfers to canvas by letting his inspired and informed Will guide the pencil and the brush instead of using his intellect or merely technical means to find the best way of expression. He uses technique with power, but does not rely on it chiefly. The body he paints is the one which will in every part of it express the thing itself, not the actual material body which largely conceals it. When he descends into the psychical part and seeks to express imaginations, emotions, or passing phases, he carries his method with him. Not content with expressing as much of the feeling as the actual body reveals, he sees the emotion in its fullness by dhyana or soul-sight and forces the body into a mould fit for its absolute expression. He sees the soul and paints it or he sees the heart or mind and paints it. He sees and can, if he will, paint the body merely. But usually he does not will it. (C1: 541)

## **The Art of Japan**

*What is the difference between Japanese art and the art of other countries, like those of Europe, for example?*

The art of Japan is a kind of directly mental expression in physical life. The Japanese use the vital world very little. Their art is extremely mentalised; their life is extremely mentalised. It expresses in detail quite precise mental formations. Only, in the

physical, they have spontaneously the sense of beauty. For example, a thing one sees very rarely in Europe but constantly, daily in Japan: very simple people, men of the working class or even peasants go for rest or enjoyment to a place where they can see a beautiful landscape. This gives them a much greater joy than going to play cards or indulging in all sorts of distractions as they do in the countries of Europe. They are seen in groups at times, going on the roads or sometimes taking a train or a tram up to a certain point, then walking to a place from where one gets a beautiful view. Then at this place there is a small house which fits very well into the landscape, there is a kind of small platform on which one can sit: one takes a cup of tea and at the same time sees the landscape. For them, this is the supreme enjoyment; they know nothing more pleasant. One can understand this among artists, educated people, quite learned people, but I am speaking of people of the most ordinary class, poor people who like this better than resting or relaxing at home. This is for them the greatest joy.

And in that country, for each season there are known sites. For instance, in autumn leaves become red; they have large numbers of maple-trees (the leaves of the maple turn into all the shades of the most vivid red in autumn, it is absolutely marvellous), so they arrange a place near a temple, for instance, on the top of a hill, and the entire hill is covered with maples. There is a stairway which climbs straight up, almost like a ladder, from the base to the top, and it is so steep that one cannot see what is at the top, one gets the feeling of a ladder rising to the skies — a stone stairway, very well made, rising steeply and seeming to lose itself in the sky — clouds pass, and both the sides of the hill are covered with maples, and these maples have the most magnificent colours you could ever imagine. Well, an artist who goes there will experience an emotion of absolutely exceptional, marvellous beauty. But one sees very small children, families even, with a baby on the shoulder, going there in groups. In autumn they will go there. In springtime they will go elsewhere.

There is a garden quite close to Tokyo where irises are grown, a garden with very tiny rivulets, and along the rivulets, irises — irises of all possible colours — and it is arranged according to colour, organised in such a way that on entering one is dazzled, there is a blaze of colour from all these flowers standing upright; and there are heaps and heaps of them, as far as the eye can reach. At another time, just at the beginning of spring (it is a slightly early spring there), there are the first cherry-trees. These cherry-trees never give fruit, they are grown only for the flowers. They range from white to pink, to a rather vivid pink. There are long avenues all bordered with cherry-trees, all pink; they are huge trees which have turned all pink. There are entire mountains covered with these cherry-trees, and on the little rivulets bridges have been built which too are all red: you see these bridges of red lacquer among all these pink flowers and, below, a great river flowing and a mountain which seems to scale the sky, and they go to this place in springtime. . . . For each season there are flowers and for each flower there are gardens.

And people travel by train as easily as one goes from house to house; they have a small packet like this which they carry; in it they have a change of clothes, that's quite enough for them; on their feet they wear rope or fibre sandals; when these get worn out they throw them away and take others, for they cost nothing at all. All their life is like that. They have paper handkerchiefs, when they have used them they get rid of them, and so on — they don't burden themselves with anything. When they go by train, at the stations small meals are sold in boxes (it is quite clean, quite neat), small meals in boxes of white wood with little chop-sticks for eating; then, as all this has no value, when one has finished, one puts them aside, doesn't bother about them or encumber oneself. They live like that. When they have a garden or a park, they plant trees, and they plant them just at the place where when the tree has grown it will create a landscape, will fit into a landscape. And as they want the tree to have a particular shape, they trim it, cut it, they manage to give it all the shapes they want. You have trees with fantastic forms; they have cut off the unnecessary branches, fostered others, contrived things as they liked. Then you come to a place and you see a house which seems to be altogether a part of the landscape; it has exactly the right colour, it is made of the right materials; it is not like a blow in your face, as are all those European buildings which spoil the whole landscape. It is just there where it should be, hidden under the trees; then you see a creeper and suddenly a wonderful tree: it is there at the right place, it has the right form. I had everything to learn in Japan. For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder.

And in the cities, a city like Tokyo, for example, which is the biggest city in the world, bigger than London, and which extends far, far (now the houses are modernised, the whole centre of the city is very unpleasant, but when I was there, it was still good), in the outlying parts of the city, those which are not business quarters, every house has at the most two storeys and a garden — there is always a garden, there are always one or two trees which are quite lovely. And then, if you go for a walk . . . it is very difficult to find your way in Tokyo; there are no straight streets with houses on either side according to the number, and you lose your way easily. Then you go wandering around — always one wanders at random in that country — you go wandering and all of a sudden you turn the corner of a street and come to a kind of paradise: there are magnificent trees, a temple as truly beautiful, you see nothing of the city any longer, no more traffic, no tramways; a corner, a corner of trees with magnificent colours, and it is beautiful, truly beautiful. You do not know how you have reached there, you seem to have come by luck. And then you turn, you seek your way, you wander off again and go elsewhere. And some days later you want to come back to this very place, but it is impossible, it is as though it had disappeared. And this is so frequent, this is so true that such stories are often told in Japan. Their literature is full of enchantment. They tell you a story in which the hero comes suddenly to a magic place: he sees fairies, he sees marvellous beings, he

spends exquisite hours among flowers, music; all is splendid. The next day he is obliged to leave; it is the law of the place, he goes away. He tries to come back, but never does. He can no longer find the place: it was there, it has disappeared! . . . And everything in this city, in this country, from beginning to end, gives you the impression of impermanence, of the unexpected, the exceptional. You always come to things you did not expect; you want to find them again and they are lost — they have made something else which is equally charming. From the artistic point of view, the point of view of beauty, I don't think there is a country as beautiful as that.

Now, I ought to say, to complete my picture, that the four years I was there I found a dearth of spirituality as entire as could be. These people have a wonderful morality, live according to quite strict moral rules, they have a mental construction even in the least detail of life: one must eat in a certain way and not another, one must bow in a certain way and not another, one must say certain words but not all; when addressing certain people one must express oneself in a certain way; when speaking with others, one must express oneself in another. If you go to buy something in a shop, you must say a particular sentence; if you don't say it, you are not served: they look at you quizzically and do not move! But if you say the word, they wait upon you with full attention and bring, if necessary, a cushion for you to sit upon and a cup of tea to drink. And everything is like that. However, not once do you have the feeling that you are in contact with something other than a marvellously organised mental-physical domain. And what energy they have! Their whole vital being is turned into energy. They have an extraordinary endurance but no direct aspiration: one must obey the rule, one is obliged. If one does not submit oneself to rules there, one may live as Europeans do, who are considered barbarians and looked upon altogether as intruders, but if you want to live a Japanese life among the Japanese you must do as they do, otherwise you make them so unhappy that you can't even have any relation with them. In their house you must live in a particular way, when you meet them you must greet them in a particular way. . . . I think I have already told you the story of that Japanese who was an intimate friend of ours, and whom I helped to come into contact with his soul — and who ran away. He was in the countryside with us and I had put him in touch with his psychic being; he had the experience, a revelation, the contact, the dazzling inner contact. And the next morning, he was no longer there, he had taken flight! Later, when I saw him again in town after the holidays, I asked him, "But what happened to you, why did you go away?" — "Oh! You understand, I discovered my soul and saw that my soul was more powerful than my faith in the country and the Mikado; I would have had to obey my soul and I would no longer have been a faithful subject of my emperor. I had to go away." There you are! All this is authentically true. (M4: 305-09)

## *Section 5*

### **Art, Reason, and Beyond**

#### **Seeking for Beauty Springs from the Roots of Our Life**

*Sweet Mother, Sri Aurobindo has said: “. . . this seeking for beauty . . . springs from the roots of our life . . .”*

It springs from the roots of our life — so?

*What are the roots of our life?*

He means that it is instinctive, that it isn't rational, it doesn't depend on the domain of reason, it is something instinctive. We have a sense of beauty and love beauty without even knowing why, and there are things which give the sense of beauty without our knowing why, without our reasoning. It is instinctive. He says that this is the infrarational stage of the aesthetic sense. It is absolutely obvious that a child, who sees a pretty flower and has the feeling of beauty he does not know why, would never be able to tell you that it's because the form is balanced and the colours are lovely; he cannot explain it. Therefore it is not rational, it is altogether instinctive, it is an attraction, an impulse drawing one towards something, a harmony one feels, without being able to define it. But most often it is like that. It is rarely that one is able to say, “This thing is beautiful because of that, because of this,” and to give a whole lecture on the beauty of something. Usually, one simply feels that it is beautiful; if later one wonders, “Why did I feel it is beautiful?” then, by making an effort with one's intelligence one may succeed in understanding it; but at the beginning one is not preoccupied with the why, one feels that it is beautiful, and that's all, one is satisfied with that.

For example, you enter a historical building, and suddenly you are seized by the sense of a great beauty; how do you explain it? If someone asks you about it you would say, “Well, I feel that it is beautiful.” But if an architect enters a building and has the same feeling that it is beautiful, he will immediately tell you, “It's because the lines meet harmoniously, the mass of the volumes is in harmony, the entire structure follows certain laws of beauty, order and rhythm”, and he will explain them to you. But that's because he is an architect, and yet you could have felt the beauty as much as he without being able to explain it. Well, your feeling for beauty is what Sri Aurobindo calls infrarational, and his feeling for beauty is what Sri Aurobindo calls rational, because he can explain with his reason why he finds it beautiful.

But even when you look at someone, a person, and find her beautiful, would you be able to tell yourself why? Not often. If you make an effort, look attentively, reflect, then you may begin to tell yourself, “Yes, why! it is for this, it is for that”, and it is not at all certain that you are right.

In fact, beauty is something very elusive. It is a kind of harmony which you experience much more than think, and the true suprarational relation with beauty is not at all a “reasonable” relation (Sri Aurobindo will tell you this at the end), it completely overpasses reason, it is a contact in a higher realm. But what precisely he tells us in this paragraph is that when it is an instinct it is found mixed with movements of ignorance and a lack of culture and refinement. So this instinct is sometimes very gross and very imperfect in its expression. One can experience an aesthetic pleasure (let us call it that) in seeing something which is truly beautiful and at the same time something else which is not beautiful, but which gives one some sort of pleasure, because it is mixed, because one’s aesthetic instinct is not pure, it is mixed with all kinds of sensations which are very crude and untrained. So it is here, as he says, that reason has its role, that it comes in to explain why a thing is beautiful, to educate the taste; but it is not final, and reason is not the final judge; it can very well make mistakes, only it is a little higher, as judgment, than that of a completely infrarational being who has no reason and no understanding of things. It is a stage. It is a stage, that’s what he says, it is a stage. But if you want to realise true beauty, you must go beyond that, very far beyond this stage. In what follows in our reading he will explain it. But this is the summary of what he has said in this paragraph. At first your sense of beauty is instinctive, impulsive, infrarational, lacking light, wanting reason, simply without any true understanding, and so, because the origin of the aesthetic sense is infrarational, it is understood, one always says this: “There’s no disputing tastes and colours.” You know, there are all kinds of popular proverbs which say that the appreciation of the beautiful is not a matter of reasoning, everyone likes a particular thing he doesn’t know why, he takes pleasure in looking at a thing, and this pleasure cannot be discussed. Well, this is the infrarational stage of the aesthetic sense. (M7: 181-83)

### **The Materialism of Science — its Effect on Art and Other Pursuits**

Even in its negative work the materialism of Science had a task to perform which will be useful in the end to the human mind in its exceeding of materialism. But Science in its heyday of triumphant Materialism despised and cast aside Philosophy; its predominance discouraged by its positive and pragmatic turn the spirit of poetry and art and pushed them from their position of leadership in the front of culture; poetry entered into an era of decline and decadence, adopted the form and rhythm of a versified prose and lost its appeal and the support of all but a very limited

audience, painting followed the curve of Cubist extravagance and espoused monstrosities of shape and suggestion; the ideal receded and visible matter of fact was enthroned in its place and encouraged an ugly realism and utilitarianism; in its war against religious obscurantism Science almost succeeded in slaying religion and the religious spirit. But philosophy had become too much a thing of abstractions, a seeking for abstract truths in a world of ideas and words rather than what it should be, a discovery of the real reality of things by which human existence can learn its law and aim and the principle of its perfection. Poetry and art had become too much cultured pursuits to be ranked among the elegances and ornaments of life, concerned with beauty of words and forms and imaginations, rather than a concrete seeing and significant presentation of truth and beauty and of the living idea and the secret divinity in things concealed by the sensible appearances of the universe. Religion itself had become fixed in dogmas and ceremonies, sects and churches and had lost for the most part, except for a few individuals, direct contact with the living founts of spirituality. A period of negation was necessary. They had to be driven back and in upon themselves, nearer to their own eternal sources. Now that the stress of negation is past and they are raising their heads, we see them seeking for their own truth, reviving by virtue of a return upon themselves and a new self-discovery. They have learned or are learning from the example of Science that Truth is the secret of life and power and that by finding the truth proper to themselves they must become the ministers of human existence. (C25: 78-79)

## Science and Art

*How is it that in people occupied with scientific studies artistic imagination is lacking? Are these two things opposed to each other?*

Not necessarily.

*In general?*

They do not belong to the same domain. It is exactly as though you had what is called “a torchlight”, a small beacon-light in your head at the place of observation. Scientists who want to do a certain work turn the beacon in a particular way, they always put it there and the beacon remains thus: they turn it towards matter, towards the details of matter. But people with imagination turn it upward, because up above there is everything, you know, all inspirations of artistic and literary things: this comes from another domain. It comes from a much more subtle domain, much less material. So these turn upward and want to receive the light from above. But it is the same instrument. The others turn it downwards, and it is just a lack of gymnastic



skill. It is the same instrument. It is the same power of a luminous ray upon something. But as one has made it a habit of concentrating it in a certain direction, one is no longer supple, one loses the habit of doing things otherwise.

But you can at any time do both the things. When you are doing science, you turn it in one direction and when you do literature and art, you turn it in the other direction; but it is the same instrument: all depends on the orientation. If you have concentration, you can move this power of concentration from one place to another and in every way it will be effective. If you are occupied with science, you use it in a scientific way, and if you want to do art, you use it in an artistic way. But it is the same instrument and it is the same power of concentration. It is simply because people do not know this that they limit themselves. So the hinges get rusty, they do not turn any more. Otherwise, if one keeps the habit of turning them, they continue to turn. Moreover, even from the ordinary point of view, it is not rare to find a scientist having as his hobby some artistic occupation — and the reverse also. It is because they have found that the one was not harmful to the other and that it was the same faculty which could be utilised in both.

Essentially, from the general point of view, particularly from the intellectual viewpoint, the most important thing is the capacity of attention and concentration, it is that which one must work at and develop. From the point of view of action (physical action), it is the will: you must work and build up an unshakable will. From the intellectual point of view, you must work and build up a power of concentration which nothing can shake. And if you have both, concentration and will, you will be a genius and nothing will resist you. (M5: 127-28)

## **Reason and the Artist**

*What kind of reason guides the realistic and surrealist artists who are so gross?*

What kind of reason! But why do you suppose that it is reason? Unless reason is just an explanation we give of what they do! But otherwise why do you suppose that it is reason?

*No, because Sri Aurobindo has said [. . .] that it is here that reason guides.*

But perhaps it is just because it does not guide them that they do what they do and as they do it, isn't that so? (M7: 186)

## Reason and Beauty

*Mother, even in ordinary life, how can reason help in the appreciation of beauty, for example?*

It cannot do it. That’s exactly what Sri Aurobindo is going to tell you in here: that reason is quite useless for appreciating beauty. In the last analysis, it is worthless, because beauty is something analogous to religion and goes beyond reason. The whole chapter is going to explain this to you. That is why he calls it the suprarational beauty. The higher principle of beauty is a suprarational principle and therefore reason understands nothing at all about it. If you want to judge art by reason you are sure to say foolish things.

In here (I think it is in this very chapter), he shows that beauty belongs to a domain as lofty as that of religion; that through beauty one can come into contact with the Divine even as through religion. And the next chapter [*in The Human Cycle*] is “The Suprarational Good”, and there he is going to show that reason cannot be the final judge also for what is good and not good; that the final judge is a suprarational judge. Only, in the same way, it can be a preparation, it can prepare the road by which to go there; but it is only a preparation. Of course, to understand fully what he wanted to tell us, we should have to read the entire book. But that way it would take us something like ten years, so I am not trying. I have taken only these because these two subjects are very interesting, apart from all the others: beauty and the good.

Beauty is the aesthetic instinct of man, and the good is his ethical instinct, and these two things are very important in human education and growth; and that is why I have chosen these two chapters for you. But to have the full development of the idea you must read the whole book. Later you will read it . . . perhaps some of you will have the curiosity to read it. (M7: 172-73)

## Suprarational Beauty

*Sweet Mother, what is the suprarational beauty?*

Ah! That, my child, when we have read the chapter you will know, because that’s the very subject of the chapter. So he is going to explain it to you right through. If I tell you about it now it won’t be worth the trouble to read the chapter. (*Laughter*)

*Is reason the highest function of the mind?*

Of the mind properly speaking, of the human mind, yes, certainly. That is, with the reason one doesn’t risk making mistakes, as long as one remains in the purely human and purely mental domain.

*How can reason become an obstacle to the spiritual life?*

Because it understands nothing about it. Spiritual life goes beyond it, it is not its domain, and it doesn't understand anything there. It is a very good instrument for all ethics, morality, self-control, but spiritual life goes beyond these things and reason understands nothing of it.

*But if one truly has reason, then reason has to admit that the spiritual life is higher!*

Yes.

*Then why does it become an obstacle?*

On condition that it keeps quiet, does not intervene any more . . . if it tries to intervene it is an obstacle, if it withdraws in an orderly way and remains quiet, then it is very good.

It is an obstacle if you want to use it as judge and master. But it is not an obstacle if you use it as an instrument, like all the other parts of the being. It is an excellent instrument on condition that it remains an instrument and doesn't want to become the master who decides and judges. It is a power of judgment which, in its field, is absolutely right. But as soon as it goes beyond its domain, it cannot understand, it has no discernment any longer.

So if the reason understands this and keeps quiet, with the attitude of an instrument and not of master and judge, it is perfect. But for this the growing consciousness must already be developed enough in a suprarational domain to be able to act on the reason from above and make it understand the thing, because that domain is not a part of reason. So naturally it denies it unless there is a part of the consciousness which is sufficiently developed to be able to put something upon it that will make it understand. All depends on the degree of development of the individual's consciousness. It is a purely individual question. (M7: 168-70)

## **Aesthetic Conscience**

[Mother reads from *The Human Cycle*, Chapter 14, "The Suprarational Beauty", second paragraph.]

What do you want to ask about this?

*Sweet Mother, what is an aesthetic conscience?*

It is the consciousness of beauty. Aesthetic means that which concerns beauty, art. There are people, for example, who move around in life and see landscapes, see people and things and have absolutely no sense of whether it is beautiful or not; and into the bargain, it makes no difference at all to them. They look at the sky, see whether there are any clouds, whether it will rain or be clear, for instance; or whether the sun is hot or the wind cold. But there are others — when they raise their eyes and look at a beautiful sky, it gives them pleasure, they say, “Oh! It is fine today, the sunrise is lovely today, the sunset is beautiful, the clouds have fine shapes.” So, the first kind do not have an aesthetic conscience, the second have. (M7: 179)

### **Classical and Romantic**

The art-creation which lays a supreme stress on reason and taste and on perfection and purity of a technique constructed in obedience to the canons of reason and taste, claimed for itself the name of classical art; but the claim, like the too trenchant distinction on which it rests, is of doubtful validity. The spirit of the real, the great classical art and poetry is to bring out what is universal and subordinate individual expression to universal truth and beauty, just as the spirit of romantic art and poetry is to bring out what is striking and individual and this it often does so powerfully or with so vivid an emphasis as to throw into the background of its creation the universal, on which yet all true art romantic or classical builds and fills in its forms. In truth, all great art has carried in it both a classical and a romantic as well as a realistic element, — understanding realism in the sense of the prominent bringing out of the external truth of things, not the perverse inverted romanticism of the “real” which brings into exaggerated prominence the ugly, common or morbid and puts that forward as the whole truth of life. The type of art to which a great creative work belongs is determined by the prominence it gives to one element and the subdual of the others into subordination to its reigning spirit. But classical art also works by a large vision and inspiration, not by the process of the intellect. The lower kind of classical art and literature, — if classical it be and not rather, as it often is, pseudo-classical, intellectually imitative of the external form and process of the classical, — may achieve work of considerable, though a much lesser power, but of an essentially inferior scope and nature; for to that inferiority it is self-condemned by its principle of intellectual construction. Almost always it speedily degenerates into the formal or academic, empty of real beauty, void of life and power, imprisoned in its slavery to form and imagining that when a certain form has been followed, certain canons of construction satisfied, certain rhetorical rules or technical principles obeyed, all has been achieved. It ceases to be art and becomes a cold and mechanical workmanship. (C25: 139-40)

## Discrimination and Vision

This predominance given to reason and taste first and foremost, sometimes even almost alone, in the creation and appreciation of beauty arises from a temper of mind which is critical rather than creative; and in regard to creation its theory falls into a capital error. All artistic work in order to be perfect must indeed have in the very act of creation the guidance of an inner power of discrimination constantly selecting and rejecting in accordance with a principle of truth and beauty which remains always faithful to a harmony, a proportion, an intimate relation of the form to the idea; there is at the same time an exact fidelity of the idea to the spirit, nature and inner body of the thing of beauty which has been revealed to the soul and the mind, its *svarūpa* and *svabhāva*. Therefore this discriminating inner sense rejects all that is foreign, superfluous, otiose, all that is a mere diversion distractive and deformative, excessive or defective, while it selects and finds sovereignly all that can bring out the full truth, the utter beauty, the inmost power. But this discrimination is not that of the critical intellect, nor is the harmony, proportion, relation it observes that which can be fixed by any set law of the critical reason; it exists in the very nature and truth of the thing itself, the creation itself, in its secret inner law of beauty and harmony which can be seized by vision, not by intellectual analysis. The discrimination which works in the creator is therefore not an intellectual self-criticism or an obedience to rules imposed on him from outside by any intellectual canons, but itself creative, intuitive, a part of the vision, involved in and inseparable from the act of creation. It comes as part of that influx of power and light from above which by its divine enthusiasm lifts the faculties into their intense suprarational working. When it fails, when it is betrayed by the lower executive instruments rational or infrarational, — and this happens when these cease to be passive and insist on obtruding their own demands or vagaries, — the work is flawed and a subsequent act of self-criticism becomes necessary. But in correcting his work the artist who attempts to do it by rule and intellectual process, uses a false or at any rate an inferior method and cannot do his best. He ought rather to call to his aid the intuitive critical vision and embody it in a fresh act of inspired creation or recreation after bringing himself back by its means into harmony with the light and law of his original creative initiation. The critical intellect has no direct or independent part in the means of the inspired creator of beauty. (C25: 140-41)

## Reason and Insight

In the appreciation of beauty it has a part, but it is not even there the supreme judge or law-giver. The business of the intellect is to analyse the elements, parts, external processes, apparent principles of that which it studies and explain their relations

and workings; in doing this it instructs and enlightens the lower mentality which has, if left to itself, the habit of doing things or seeing what is done and taking all for granted without proper observation and fruitful understanding. But as with truth of religion, so with the highest and deepest truth of beauty, the intellectual reason cannot seize its inner sense and reality, not even the inner truth of its apparent principles and processes, unless it is aided by a higher insight not its own. As it cannot give a method, process or rule by which beauty can or ought to be created, so also it cannot give to the appreciation of beauty that deeper insight which it needs; it can only help to remove the dullness and vagueness of the habitual perceptions and conceptions of the lower mind which prevent it from seeing beauty or which give it false and crude aesthetic habits: it does this by giving to the mind an external idea and rule of the elements of the thing it has to perceive and appreciate. What is farther needed is the awakening of a certain vision, an insight and an intuitive response in the soul. Reason which studies always from outside, cannot give this inner and more intimate contact; it has to aid itself by a more direct insight springing from the soul itself and to call at every step on the intuitive mind to fill up the gap of its own deficiencies. (C25: 141-42)

### **History of Artistic Criticism**

We see this in the history of the development of literary and artistic criticism. In its earliest stages the appreciation of beauty is instinctive, natural, inborn, a response of the aesthetic sensitiveness of the soul which does not attempt to give any account of itself to the thinking intelligence. When the rational intelligence applies itself to this task, it is not satisfied with recording faithfully the nature of the response and the thing it has felt, but it attempts to analyse, to lay down what is necessary in order to create a just aesthetic gratification, it prepares a grammar of technique, an artistic law and canon of construction, a sort of mechanical rule of process for the creation of beauty, a fixed code or Shastra. This brings in the long reign of academic criticism superficial, technical, artificial, governed by the false idea that technique, of which alone critical reason can give an entirely adequate account, is the most important part of creation and that to every art there can correspond an exhaustive science which will tell us how the thing is done and give us the whole secret and process of its doing. A time comes when the creator of beauty revolts and declares the charter of his own freedom, generally in the shape of a new law or principle of creation, and this freedom once vindicated begins to widen itself and to carry with it the critical reason out of all its familiar bounds. A more developed appreciation emerges which begins to seek for new principles of criticism, to search for the soul of the work itself and explain the form in relation to the soul or to study the creator himself or the spirit, nature and ideas of the age he lived in and so to arrive at a right

understanding of his work. The intellect has begun to see that its highest business is not to lay down laws for the creator of beauty, but to help us to understand himself and his work, not only its form and elements but the mind from which it sprang and the impressions its effects create in the mind that receives. Here criticism is on its right road, but on a road to a consummation in which the rational understanding is overpassed and a higher faculty opens, suprarational in its origin and nature.

(C25: 142-43)

### **Mental and Psychic Subjectivism**

It is not impossible that behind the confused morning voices of the hour a light of this kind, still below the horizon, may be waiting to ascend with its splendours.

Such a turn of human thought, effort, ideas of life, if it took hold of the communal mind, would evidently lead to a profound revolution throughout the whole range of human existence. It would give it from the first a new tone and atmosphere, a loftier spirit, wider horizons, a greater aim. It might easily develop a science which would bring the powers of the physical world into a real and not only a contingent and mechanical subjection and open perhaps the doors of other worlds. It might develop an achievement of Art and Beauty which would make the greatness of the past a comparatively little thing and would save the world from the astonishingly callous reign of utilitarian ugliness that even now afflicts it. It would open up a closer and freer interchange between human minds and, it may well be hoped, a kindlier interchange between human hearts and lives. Nor need its achievements stop here, but might proceed to greater things of which these would be only the beginnings. This mental and psychic subjectivism would have its dangers, greater dangers even than those that attend a vitalistic subjectivism, because its powers of action also would be greater, but it would have what vitalistic subjectivism has not and cannot easily have, the chance of a detecting discernment, strong safeguards and a powerful liberating light.

Moving with difficulty upward from Matter to spirit, this is perhaps a necessary stage of man's development. . . . (C25: 252-53)

### **Art in a Spiritualised Society**

Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the supreme, even the guiding aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure. As it was to some imperfect extent in the ancient Vedic times with the cultural education of the higher classes, so it would be then with all education.

It would embrace all knowledge in its scope, but would make the whole trend and aim and the permeating spirit not mere worldly efficiency, though that efficiency would not be neglected, but this self-developing and self-finding and all else as its powers. It would pursue the physical and psychic sciences not in order merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but still more to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its masks and behind them. It would make it the aim of ethics not to establish a rule of action whether supplementary to the social law or partially corrective of it, the social law that is after all only the rule, often clumsy and ignorant, of the biped pack, the human herd, but to develop the divine nature in the human being. It would make it the aim of Art not merely to present images of the subjective and objective world, but to see them with the significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the Truth and Beauty of which things visible to us and invisible are the forms, the masks or the symbols and significant figures. (C25: 256)

### **An Exaltation of the Soul**

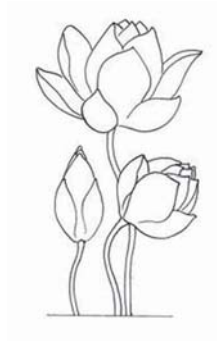
For the conscious appreciation of beauty reaches its height of enlightenment and enjoyment not by analysis of the beauty enjoyed or even by a right and intelligent understanding of it, — these things are only a preliminary clarifying of our first unenlightened sense of the beautiful, — but by an exaltation of the soul in which it opens itself entirely to the light and power and joy of the creation. The soul of beauty in us identifies itself with the soul of beauty in the thing created and feels in appreciation the same divine intoxication and uplifting which the artist felt in creation. Criticism reaches its highest point when it becomes the record, account, right description of this response; it must become itself inspired, intuitive, revealing. In other words, the action of the intuitive mind must complete the action of the rational intelligence and it may even wholly replace it and do more powerfully the peculiar and proper work of the intellect itself; it may explain more intimately to us the secret of the form, the strands of the process, the inner cause, essence, mechanism of the defects and limitations of the work as well as of its qualities. For the intuitive intelligence when it has been sufficiently trained and developed, can take up always the work of the intellect and do it with a power and light and insight greater and surer than the power and light of the intellectual judgment in its widest scope. There is an intuitive discrimination which is more keen and precise in its sight than the reasoning intelligence.

What has been said of great creative art, that being the form in which normally our highest and intensest aesthetic satisfaction is achieved, applies to all beauty, beauty in Nature, beauty in life as well as beauty in art. We find that in the end the



place of reason and the limits of its achievement are precisely of the same kind in regard to beauty as in regard to religion. It helps to enlighten and purify the aesthetic instincts and impulses, but it cannot give them their highest satisfaction or guide them to a complete insight. It shapes and fulfils to a certain extent the aesthetic intelligence, but it cannot justly pretend to give the definitive law for the creation of beauty or for the appreciation and enjoyment of beauty. It can only lead the aesthetic instinct, impulse, intelligence towards a greatest possible conscious satisfaction, but not to it; it has in the end to hand them over to a higher faculty which is in direct touch with the suprarational and in its nature and workings exceeds the intellect.

(C25: 143-44)



## **Section 6**

### **Artists**

#### **Artists and the Source of Their Inspiration**

There is one way in which Yoga may stop the artist's productive impulse. If the origin of his art is in the vital world, once he becomes a Yogi he will lose his inspiration or, rather, the source from which his inspiration used to come will inspire him no more, for then the vital world appears in its true light; it puts on its true value, and that value is very relative. Most of those who call themselves artists draw their inspiration from the vital world only; and it carries in it no high or great significance. But when a true artist, one who looks for his creative source to a higher world, turns to Yoga, he will find that his inspiration becomes more direct and powerful and his expression clearer and deeper. Of those who possess a true value the power of Yoga will increase the value, but from one who has only some false appearance of art even that appearance will vanish or else lose its appeal. To one earnest in Yoga, the first simple truth that strikes his opening vision is that what he does is a very relative thing in comparison with the universal manifestation, the universal movement. But an artist is usually vain and looks on himself as a highly important personage, a kind of demigod in the human world. Many artists say that if they did not believe what they do to be of a supreme importance, they would not be able to do it. But I have known some whose inspiration was from a higher world and yet they did not believe that what they did was of so immense an importance. That is nearer the spirit of true art. If a man is truly led to express himself in art, it is the way the Divine has chosen to manifest in him, and then by Yoga his art will gain and not lose. But there is all the question: is the artist appointed by the Divine or self-appointed? (M3: 106-07)

#### **Self-complacency and Art**

*Is self-complacency an obstacle to art?*

Yes, it is even an obstacle to intelligence. Fatuity is one of the greatest of human stupidities. There is a very great difference between having faith in what can be done, the will to realise it, the certitude of the possibilities open in creation (and also the certitude that these possibilities will be realised), and self-complacency; these are two things which turn their backs completely on each other. To be convinced

that nothing is impossible if one puts in the time, energy, will, trust, sincerity and all else, is very essential, but to be self-satisfied in any way whatever is always, without exception, a stupidity. And this is one of the things that takes you farthest away from the divine realisation, for it makes you foolish. And it is at the same time one of the things most contrary to the goodwill of Nature, for Nature laughs at you immediately. You become an object of ridicule at once. For, in truth, there is no human being who is something by himself. He is only a possibility created by the Divine and one which can be developed only by the Divine, which exists only by the Divine, and which should live only for the Divine. And so, in this I do not see any place for self-complacency; for, as we are nothing in ourselves but what the Divine makes of us, and as we can do nothing by ourselves except what the Divine wants to do through us, I don't see what satisfaction one can have in that. One can only have the feeling of one's perfect powerlessness. Only, what is very bad is to have this the wrong side out — for there is always a wrong side and a right to every state of consciousness — and, fundamentally, it is the same vanity which makes you say: "I can do nothing, I am good for nothing, I am incapable of doing anything whatsoever"; that, that is the wrong side of "I can, I am great, I have all sorts of powers in me." It is the same thing. One is the shadow and the other the light, but they are exactly alike: one is no better than the other. And if really one were aware of being nothing at all, one would not bother to know what one is like. That would already be something. But truly, sincerely, I tell you, and I have a sufficiently long experience of life, I know nothing so grotesque as people who are satisfied with themselves. It is truly ridiculous. They make themselves utterly ridiculous. There are people like that; some of them came to see Sri Aurobindo telling him all that they were capable of, all that they had done and all they could do, all that they had realised — and so Sri Aurobindo looked at them very seriously and replied: "Oh! you are too perfect to be here. It would be better for you to go away." (M5: 336-37)

### **At Work and at Home**

*I have also noticed that when one talks about business or work with an outsider, the conversation can be good and interesting, but as soon as one talks with the same person about his private life, the conversation immediately becomes painful.*

Yes, because work, especially if it is technical work, is the expression of the best in the man, while in his private life he comes down to a lower level, with very few exceptions. So many remarkable scholars, writers, artists who produce remarkable things, once they enter their homes, become detestable husbands, unpleasant fathers, intolerable people for those who are around them. And I am speaking of an élite,

those who make special studies, discoveries, who run big institutions: outside, they are uncommon people, men of great abilities; back home they become commonplace and often unbearable — they have a nice time, they take rest, relax themselves. And if they begin to amuse themselves, that’s the end of it all! I knew people of great intelligence, admirable artists who, as soon as they began to “relax”, became utterly foolish! They did the most vulgar things, behaved like ill-bred children — they were relaxing. Everything comes from this “need” of relaxation; and what does that mean for most men? It means, always, coming down to a lower level. They do not know that for a true relaxation one must rise one degree higher, one must rise above oneself. . . .

It is not by sinking below oneself that one removes fatigue. One must climb the ladder and there one has true rest, because one has the inner peace, the light, the universal energy. And little by little one puts oneself in touch with the truth which is the very reason of one’s existence.

If you contact that definitively, it removes completely all fatigue. (M4: 155-56)

### **Artists’ Conduct**

*Why are artists generally irregular in their conduct and loose in character?*

When they are so, it is because they live usually in the vital plane, and the vital part in them is extremely sensitive to the forces of that world and receives from it all kinds of impressions and impulsions over which they have no controlling power. And often too they are very free in their minds and do not believe in the petty social conventions and moralities that govern the life of ordinary people. They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them. As there is nothing to check the movements of their desire-being, they lead easily a life of liberty or license. But this does not happen with all. I lived ten years among artists and found many of them to be bourgeois to the core; they were married and settled, good fathers, good husbands, and lived up to the most strict moral ideas of what should and what should not be done. (M3: 106)

### **Ugliness of Action**

Generally, people are altogether blind to the ugliness of their own actions. They do wrong through ignorance, through unconsciousness, through smallness, through that sort of doubling back on oneself which comes from unconsciousness and ignorance, that obscure instinct of self-preservation which makes one ready to

sacrifice the whole world for the sake of one's own well-being. And the smaller one is, the more natural appears the sacrifice offered to one's smallness.

One must be very much higher on the scale to see that what one does is ugly. One must already have at the core of oneself a kind of foreknowledge of what beauty, nobility, generosity are, to be able to suffer from the fact that one doesn't carry them within oneself. (M3: 197)

## **Beauty and Cruelty**

*Can those who have a sense of beauty also become cruel?*

That's a psychological problem. It depends on where their sense of beauty is located. One may have a physical sense of beauty, a vital sense of beauty, a mental sense of beauty. If one has a moral sense of beauty — a sense of moral beauty and nobility — one will never be cruel. One will always be generous and magnanimous in all circumstances. But as men are made of many different pieces . . . For instance, I was thinking about all the artists I knew — I knew all the greatest artists of the last century or the beginning of this century, and they truly had a sense of beauty, but morally, some of them were very cruel. When the artist was seen at his work, he lived in a magnificent beauty but when you saw the gentleman at home, he had only a very limited contact with the artist in himself and usually he became someone very vulgar, very ordinary. Many of them did, I am sure of it. But those who were unified, in the sense that they truly lived their art — those, no; they were generous and good.

I remember a very amusing story that Rodin told me. You know Rodin — not the man but what he has done? Rodin put a question to me one day; he asked me, "How can one prevent two women from being jealous of each other?" (*Laughter*) I said to him, "Ah, here's a problem indeed! But won't you please tell me why?" Then he told me, "It's like this: most of my work I do in clay, at least much of it, before sculpting it in stone or casting it in bronze. And so this is what happens: at times I go away for a day or two or more. I leave my clay models covered with wet cloth because if it dries up it cracks and all the work is lost, I have to do it over again." All sculptors know this. And this is what happened to that poor man: he had a wife, and he had his favourite model who was quite . . . very intimate in the house, she came in when she liked — she was the model he used for his sculptures. Now, the wife wanted to be the wife. And when Rodin was absent, she came early every morning to the studio and sprinkled water on all the cloths, all the heads or bodies, everything. It was all covered up, wrapped in wet cloth. Water is sprinkled upon it as on plants. So she came and sprayed them. And then, after a while, two or three hours later, there came the model who had the key to the studio. She opened the

studio and she sprayed them. She saw very well that it was all wet, but she had the privilege of looking after the sculpture of her sculptor — and so she sprayed it. “And so,” said Rodin to me, “the result is that when I return from my travels, all my sculpture is melting and nothing of what I had done is any longer there!”

He was an old man, already old at that time. He was magnificent. He had a faun’s head, like a Greek faun. He was short, quite thick-set, solid; he had shrewd eyes. He was remarkably ironical and a little . . . He laughed at it, but still he would have preferred to find his sculpture intact!

*And what was your reply? (Laughter)*

I don’t remember now. (*Laughter*) Perhaps I answered by a joke. No, I remember one thing, I asked him, “But why don’t you say: this one will sprinkle the water?” He then pulled at the little hair that was left on his head and said, “But that would be a fight with knives.” (M6: 71-73)

### **Beauty and the Desire to Possess**

Take for instance . . . you see something which is — which seems to you or is — very beautiful, very harmonious, very pleasant; if you have the true consciousness, you experience this joy of seeing, of being in a conscious contact with something very beautiful, very harmonious, and then that’s all. It stops there. You have the joy of it — that such a thing exists, you see. And this is quite common among artists who have a sense of beauty. For example, an artist may see a beautiful creature and have the joy of observing the beauty, grace, harmony of movement and all that, and that’s all. It stops there. He is perfectly happy, perfectly satisfied, because he has seen something beautiful. An ordinary consciousness, altogether ordinary, dull like all ordinary consciousness — as soon as it sees something beautiful, whether it be an object or a person, hop! “I want it!” It is deplorable, you know. And into the bargain it doesn’t even have the joy of the beauty, because it has the anguish of desire. It misses that and has nothing in exchange, because there is nothing pleasant in desiring anything. It only puts you in an unpleasant state, that’s all.

The Buddha has said that there is a greater joy in overcoming a desire than in satisfying it. It is an experience everybody can have and one that is truly very interesting, very interesting.

There was someone who was invited — it happened in Paris — invited to a first-night (a first-night means a first performance) of an opera of Massenet’s. I think . . . I don’t remember now whose it was. The subject was fine, the play was fine, and the music not displeasing; it was the first time and this person was invited to the box of the Minister of Fine Arts who always has a box for all the first nights at

the government theatres. This Minister of Fine Arts was a simple person, an old countryside man, who had not lived much in Paris, who was quite new in his ministry and took a truly childlike joy in seeing new things. Yet he was a polite man and as he had invited a lady he gave her the front seat and himself sat at the back. But he felt very unhappy because he could not see everything. He leaned forward like this, trying to see something without showing it too much. Now, the lady who was in front noticed this. She too was very interested and was finding it very fine, and it was not that she did not like it, she liked it very much and was enjoying the show; but she saw how very unhappy that poor minister looked, not being able to see. So quite casually, you see, she pushed back her chair, went back a little, as though she was thinking of something else, and drew back so well that he came forward and could now see the whole scene. Well, this person, when she drew back and gave up all desire to see the show, was filled with a sense of inner joy, a liberation from all attachment to things and a kind of peace, content to have done something for somebody instead of having satisfied herself, to the extent that the evening brought her infinitely greater pleasure than if she had listened to the opera. This is a true experience, it is not a little story read in a book, and it was precisely at the time this person was studying Buddhist discipline, and it was in conformity with the saying of the Buddha that she tried this experiment.

And truly this was so concrete an experience, you know, so real that . . . ah, two seconds later, you see, the play, the music, the actors, the scene, the pictures and all that were gone like absolutely secondary things, completely unimportant, while this joy of having mastered something in oneself and done something not simply selfish, this joy filled all the being with an incomparable serenity — a delightful experience . . . Well, it is not just an individual, personal experience. All those who want to try can have it.

There is a kind of inner communion with the psychic being which takes place when one willingly gives up a desire, and because of this one feels a much greater joy than if he had satisfied his desire. Besides, most usually, almost without exception, when one satisfies a desire it always leaves a kind of bitter taste somewhere.

There is not one satisfied desire which does not give a kind of bitterness; as when one has eaten too sugary a sweet it fills your mouth with bitterness. It is like that. You must try sincerely. Naturally you must not pretend to give up desire and keep it in a corner, because then one becomes very unhappy. You must do it sincerely.

(M7: 38-40)

## **Artistic Taste**

One can, for example, very well make a very deep study of taste and have a very detailed knowledge of the different tastes of things, of the association between ideas

and taste, in order to acquire a full development — not positively vital, but a development of the senses. There is a great difference between this and those who eat through greediness, who think all the time about food. You see, for them eating is the most important thing; all their thoughts are concentrated on it, and they eat not because they need to eat but through desire and greed and gluttony.

In fact people who work in order to develop their taste, to refine it, are rarely very much attached to food. It is not through attachment to food that they do it. It is for the cultivation of their senses, which is a very different thing. It is like the artist, you know, who trains his eyes to appreciate forms and colours, lines, the composition of things, the harmony found in physical nature; it is not at all through desire that he does this, it is through taste, culture, the development of the sense of sight and the appreciation of beauty. And usually artists who are real artists and love their art and live in the sense of beauty, seeking beauty, are people who don't have many desires. They live in the sense of a growth not only visual, but of the appreciation of beauty. There is a great difference between this and people who live by their impulses and desires. That's altogether something else. (M7: 57-58)

### **Demand for Praise; Agni and the Conversion of the Vital**

One of the commonest demands of the vital is for praise. It hates to be criticised and treated as if it were of little importance. But it must be always prepared for rebuffs and stand them with absolute calm; nor must it pay attention to compliments, forgetting that each movement of self-satisfaction is an offering at the altar of the lords of falsehood. The beings of the subtle world of the life-force, with which our vital is connected, live and flourish on the worship of their devotees, and that is why they are always inspiring new cults and religions so that their feasts of worship and adulation may never come to an end. So also your own vital being and the vital forces behind it thrive — that is to say, fatten their ignorance — by absorbing the flatteries given by others. But you must remember that the compliments paid by creatures on the same level of ignorance as oneself are really worth nothing, they are just as worthless as the criticisms levelled at one. No matter from what pretentious source they derive, they are futile and empty. Unfortunately, however, the vital craves even for the most rotten food and is so greedy that it will accept praise from even the very embodiments of incompetence. I am reminded of the annual opening of the Arts Exhibition in Paris, when the President of the Republic inspects the pictures, eloquently discovering that one is a landscape and another a portrait, and making platitudinous comments with the air of a most intimate soul-searching knowledge of Painting. The painters know very well how inept the remarks are and yet miss no chance of quoting the testimony of the President to their genius. For such indeed is the vital in mankind, ravenously fame-hungry.



What, however, is of genuine worth is the opinion of the Truth. When there is somebody who is in contact with the Divine Truth and can express it, then the opinions given out are no mere compliments or criticisms but what the Divine thinks of you, the value it sets on your qualities, its unerring stamp on your efforts. It must be your desire to hold nothing in esteem except the word of the Truth; and in order thus to raise your standard you must keep Agni, the soul's flame of transformation, burning in you. It is noteworthy how, when Agni flares up, you immediately develop a loathing for the cheap praise which formerly used to gratify you so much, and understand clearly that your love of praise was a low movement of the untransformed nature. Agni makes you see what a vast vista of possible improvement stretches in front of you, by filling you with a keen sense of your present insufficiency. The encomium lavished on you by others so disgusts you that you feel almost bitter towards those whom you would have once considered your friends; whereas all criticism comes as a welcome fuel to your humble aspiration towards the Truth. No longer do you feel depressed or slighted by the hostility of others. For, at least, you are able to ignore it with the greatest ease; at the most, you appreciate it as one more testimony to your present unregenerate state, inciting you to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine. (M3: 137-38)

### **An Ardent and Creative Life**

The Buddha said or has been made to say that when one is free from all desire, one necessarily enters into infinite bliss. This bliss may be a little dry and anyway it does not seem to me to be the quickest way.

If at the outset one were to seize the problem bodily, jump into it with courage and determination and, instead of undertaking a long, arduous, painful, disappointing hunt after desires, one gives oneself simply, totally, unconditionally, if one surrenders to the Supreme Reality, to the Supreme Will, to the Supreme Being, putting oneself entirely in His hands, in an upsurge of the whole being and all the elements of the being, without calculating, that would be the swiftest and the most radical way to get rid of the ego. People will say that it is difficult to do it, but at least a warmth is there, an ardour, an enthusiasm, a light, a beauty, an ardent and creative life.

(M3: 268)

## *Section 7* **The Different Arts**

### **All Art Depends on the Artist, his State of Consciousness**

*Do certain arts express more truth than others?*

This is more or less a mental gymnastic!

There are people who say that certain arts are physical. If you frequent artists, painters, they will tell you that sculpture, oh! it is laborious, because sculptors work with the very matter, and painting may be considered not much of an intellectual art by a musician. The truth is that in all arts everything depends upon the artist, and what he does depends upon the state of consciousness in which he is. A sculptor may be an extremely spiritual man and his production extremely spiritual also, if he knows how to express his experience. And a poet can be quite a commonplace materialist if he does not receive his inspiration from a higher state. It is the mind which makes little categories (this is more convenient for it), but that does not resemble the truth very much. (M4: 312)

### **Each Art Has Its Own Province**

I fear I must disappoint you. I am *not* going to pass the Gods through a competitive examination and assign a highest place to one and lower places to others. What an idea! Each has his or her own province on the summits and what is the necessity of putting them in rivalry with each other? It is a sort of Judgment of Paris you want to impose on me? Well, but what became of Paris and Troy? You want me to give the crown or the apple to Music and enrage the Goddesses of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Embroidery, all the Nine Muses, so that they will kick at our publications and exhibitions and troop off to other places? We shall have to build in the future — what then shall we do if the Goddess of Architecture turns severely and says, “I am an inferior Power, am I? Go and ask your Nirod to build your house with his beloved music!”

Your test of precedence — universal appeal — is all wrong. I don't know that it is true, in the first place. Some kind of sound called music appeals to everybody, but has really good music a universal appeal? And, speaking of arts, more people go to the theatre or read fiction than go to the opera or a concert. What becomes then of the superior universality of music, even in the cheapest sense of universality?

Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* exercises a more universal appeal than was ever reached by Milton or Keats — we will say nothing of writers like Blake or Francis Thompson; a band on the pier at a seaside resort will please more people than a great piece of music with the orchestration conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a world of gods it might be true that the highest made the most universal appeal but here in a world of beasts and men (you bring in the beasts — why not play to Bushy and try how she responds?) it is usually the inferior things that have the more general if not quite universal appeal. On the other hand the opposite system you suggest (the tables turned upside down — the least universal and most difficult appeal makes the greatest art) would also have its dangers. At that rate we should have to concede that the cubist and abstract painters had reached the highest art possible, only rivalled by the up to date modernist poets of whom it has been said that their works are not at all either read or understood by the public, are read and understood only by the poet himself, and are read without being understood by his personal friends and admirers.

When you speak of direct appeal, you are perhaps touching something true. Technique does not come in — for although to have a complete and expert judgment or appreciation you must know the technique not only in music and painting where it is more difficult, but in poetry and architecture also, it is something else and not that kind of judgment of which you are speaking. It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity of using the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conceptions as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware that Housman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct — not to the soul but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object but the truth behind the object by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the very basis of all forms or else by figures that are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will now paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put underneath this powerful design, "Portrait of Nirod". Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self, — you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means —

the getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it is contrary to their nature — which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feelings. Maybe — or maybe not; as the Jains put it, *syād vā na syād vā*.

I have written so much, you will see, in order to say nothing — or at least to avoid your attempt at putting me in an embarrassing dilemma. Q.E.F.

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*I did not know what to make of your reply on art.*

If you did know, it would mean I had committed myself, which was just what I did not want to do. Or shall we put it in this way “Each of the great arts has its own appeal and its own way of appeal and each in its own way is supreme above all others”? That ought to do. (C27: 678-80)

### **Modern Art and Poetry**

Not only are there no boundaries left in some arts (like poetry of the ultra-modern schools or painting) but no foundations and no Art either. I am referring to the modernist painters and to the extraordinary verbal jazz which is nowadays often put forward as poetry. . . .

Modern Art opines that beauty is functional! that is, whatever serves its function or serves a true purpose is artistic and beautiful — for instance, if a clerk produces a neat copy of an official letter without mistakes, the clerk and his copy are both of them works of art and beautiful! (C27: 676-77)

### **Music and Poetry**

I do not know what to say on the subject you propose to me — the superiority of music to poetry, — for my appreciation of music is bodiless and inexpressible while about poetry I can write at ease and with an expert knowledge. But is it necessary to fix a scale of greatness between two fine arts when each has its own greatness and can touch in its own way the extremes of aesthetic Ananda? Music, no doubt, goes nearest to the infinite and to the essence of things because it relies wholly on the ethereal vehicle, *śabda* (architecture by the by can do something of the same kind

at the other extreme even in its imprisonment in mass); but painting and sculpture have their revenge by liberating visible form into ecstasy, while poetry though it cannot do with sound what music does, yet can make a many-stringed harmony, a sound-revelation winging the creation by the word and setting afloat vivid suggestions of form and colour, — that gives it in a very subtle kind the combined power of all the arts. Who shall decide between such claims or be a judge between these godheads?

(C27: 680-81)

## **On Music**

Written words are pale and lifeless things when one has to express the feelings raised by superb music and seem hardly to mean anything — not being able to convey what is beyond word and mere mental form — that is, at least, what I have felt and why I always find it a little difficult to write anything about music. (C27: 682)

## **Musical Excellence and General Culture**

I have not seen the remarks in question. I don't suppose all-round general culture has much to do with excelling in music. Music is a gift independent of any such thing and it can hardly be said that, given a musical gift in two people, the one with an all-round culture would go farther than the other in musical excellence. That would not be true in any of the arts. But something else was meant, perhaps, — that there is a certain turn or element in the excellence which an all-round culture makes possible? It is only in that sense that it could be true. (C27: 682)

## **The Subjective Element**

. . . All is relative here, Art and Beauty also, and our view of things and our appreciation of them depends on the consciousness which views and appreciates. Some critics recognise this and go in frankly for a purely subjective criticism — “this is why I like this and disapprove of that, I give my own values”. Most labour to fit their personal likes and dislikes to some standard of criticism which they conceive to be objective; this need of objectivity, of the support of an impersonal truth independent of our personality or anybody else's, is the main source of theories, canons, standards of art. But the theories, canons, standards themselves vary and are set up in one age only to be broken in another. Is there then no beauty of art independent of our varying mentalities? Is beauty a creation of our minds, a construction of our ideas and our senses, not at all existent in itself? In that case

Beauty is non-existent in Nature, it is put upon Nature by our minds through mental imposition, *adhyāropa*. But this contradicts the fact that it is in response to an object and not independently of it that the idea of beautiful or not beautiful originally rises within us. Beauty does exist in what we see, but there are two aspects of it, essential beauty and the forms it takes. “Eternal beauty wandering on her way” does that wandering by a multitudinous variation of forms appealing to a multitudinous variation of consciousnesses. There comes in the difficulty. Each individual consciousness tries to seize the eternal beauty expressed in a form (here a particular poem or work of art), but is either assisted by the form or repelled by it, wholly attracted or wholly repelled, or partially attracted and partially repelled. There may be errors in the poet’s or artist’s transcription of beauty which mar the reception, but even these have different effects on different people. But the more radical divergences arise from the variation in the constitution of the mind and its difference of response. Moreover there are minds, the majority indeed, who do not respond to “artistic” beauty at all — something inartistic appeals much more to what sense of beauty they have — or else they are not seeking beauty, but only vital pleasure.

A critic cannot escape altogether from these limitations. He can try to make himself catholic and objective and find the merit or special character of all he reads or sees in poetry and art, even when they do not evoke his strongest sympathy or deepest response. . . . These divergences rise from a conception of beauty and a feeling for beauty which belongs to the temperament. . . . All this however does not mean that criticism is without any true use. The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar beauty. (C27: 663-65)

### **Abiding Intuition of Poetic and Artistic Greatness**

Yes, of course there is an intuition of greatness by which the great poet or artist is distinguished from those who are less great and these again from those who are not great at all. But you are asking too much when you expect this intuition to work with a mechanical instantaneousness and universality so that all shall have the same opinion and give the same values. (C27: 665)

### **Art and Nature**

There is no incompatibility between the inspiration from within and the dependence on Nature. The essence of the inspiration always comes from within but the forms

of expression are based on Nature though developed and modified by the selective or interpretative sight of the artist.

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A painter can certainly bring home the aspects of the sea and the beauty of Nature, but he does it as an artist, in the way of Art. He does it by representation and suggestion, not by mere reproduction of the object. The question of Art or Nature being more beautiful therefore does not arise.

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Art cannot give what Nature gives; it gives something else. (C27: 685)

### **Harmony and Melody**

*In what form does music come to the great composers? That is, is it only the melody that comes or is it what we hear?*

But that depends upon the musician. This is just what I was saying. For example, here in India, the science of harmony does not exist much, so the thing is translated by melody. As soon as the vital intervenes, there comes a kind of harmonic complexity in the music. That gives it a richness, a plenitude which it did not have.

*But is it the melody that comes?*

No, it is the music, and music is not necessarily melody. It is a relation of sounds which is not necessarily melodic. Melody is a part of this relation of sounds.

(M5: 77-78)

### **European and Indian Music**

*What is the cause of the great difference between European and Indian music? Is it the origin or the expression?*

It is both but in an inverse sense.

This very high inspiration comes only rarely in European music; rare also is a psychic origin, very rare. Either it comes from high above or it is vital. The expression is almost always, except in a few rare cases, a vital expression — interesting, powerful.

Most often, the origin is purely vital. Sometimes it comes from the very heights, then it is wonderful. Sometimes it is psychic, particularly in what has been religious music, but this is not very frequent.

Indian music, when there are good musicians, has almost always a psychic origin; for example, the *rāgas* have a psychic origin, they come from the psychic. The inspiration does not often come from above. But Indian music is very rarely embodied in a strong vital. It has rather an inner and intimate origin. I have heard a great deal of Indian music, a great deal; I have rarely heard Indian music having vital strength, very rarely; perhaps not more than four or five times. But very often I have heard Indian music having a psychic origin, it translates itself almost directly into the physical. And truly one must then concentrate, and as it is — how to put it? — very tenuous, very subtle, as there are none of those intense vital vibrations, one can easily glide within it and climb back to the psychic origin of the music. It has that effect upon you, it is a kind of ecstatic trance, as from an intoxication. It makes you enter a little into trance. Then if you listen well and let yourself go, you move on and glide, glide into a psychic consciousness. But if you remain only in the external consciousness, the music is so tenuous that there is no response from the vital, it leaves you altogether flat. Sometimes, there was a vital force, then it became quite good. . . . I myself like this music very much, this kind of theme developing into a play. The theme is essentially very musical: and then it is developed with variations, innumerable variations, and it is always the same theme which is developed in one way or another. In Europe there were musicians who were truly musicians and they too had the thing: Bach had it, he used to do the same sort of thing, Mozart had it, his music was purely musical, he had no intention of expressing any other thing, it was music for music’s sake. But this manner of taking a certain number of notes in a certain relation (they are like almost infinite variations), personally I find it wonderful to put you in repose, and you enter deep within yourself. And then, if you are ready, it gives you the psychic consciousness: something that makes you withdraw from the external consciousness, which makes you enter elsewhere, enter within. (M5: 76-77)

## Origin of Music

*From what plane does music generally come?*

There are different levels. There is a whole category of music that comes from the higher vital, which is very catching, somewhat (not to put it exactly) vulgar, it is something that twists your nerves. This music is not necessarily unpleasant, but generally it seizes you there in the nervous centres. So there is one type of music which has a vital origin. There is music which has a psychic origin — it is altogether



different. And then there is music which has a spiritual origin: it is very bright and it carries you away, captures you entirely. But if you want to execute this music correctly you must be able to make it come through the vital passage. Your music coming from above may become externally quite flat if you do not possess that intensity of vital vibration which gives it its splendour and strength. I knew people who had truly a very high inspiration and it became quite flat, because the vital did not stir. I must admit that by their spiritual practices they had put to sleep their vital completely — it was literally asleep, it did not act at all — and the music came straight into the physical, and if one were connected with the origin of that music, one could see that it was something wonderful, but externally it had no force, it was a little melody, very poor, very thin; there was none of the strength of harmony. When you can bring the vital into play, then all the strength of vibration is there. If you draw into it this higher origin, it becomes the music of a genius.

For music it is very special; it is difficult, it needs an intermediary. And it is like that for all other things, for literature also, for poetry, for painting, for everything one does. The true value of one's creation depends on the origin of one's inspiration, on the level, the height where one finds it. But the value of the execution depends on the vital strength which expresses it. To complete the genius both must be there. This is very rare. Generally it is the one or the other, more often the vital. And then there are those other kinds of music we have — the music of the *café-concert*, of the cinema — it has an extraordinary skill, and at the same time an exceptional platitude, an extraordinary vulgarity. But as it has an extraordinary skill, it seizes you in the solar plexus and it is this music that you remember; it grasps you at once and holds you and it is very difficult to free yourself from it, for it is well-made music, music very well made. It is made vitally with vital vibrations, but what is behind is frightful.

But imagine this same vital power of expression, with the inspiration coming from far above — the highest inspiration possible, when all the heavens open before us — then that becomes wonderful. There are certain passages of César Franck, certain passages of Beethoven, certain passages of Bach, there are pieces by others also which have this inspiration and power. But it is only a moment, it comes as a moment, it does not last. You cannot take the entire work of an artist as being on that level. Inspiration comes like a flash; sometimes it lasts sufficiently long, when the work is sustained; and when that is there, the *same effect* is produced, that is, if you are attentive and concentrated, suddenly that lifts you up, lifts up all your energies, it is as though someone opened out your head and you were flung into the air to tremendous heights and magnificent lights. It produces in a few seconds results that are obtained with so much difficulty through so many years of yoga. Only, in general, one may fall down afterwards, because the consciousness is not there as the basis; one has the experience and afterwards does not even know what has happened. But if you are prepared, if you have indeed prepared your consciousness by yoga and then the thing happens, it is almost definitive. (M5: 74-76)

## Source and Expression

*Is sound particular only to the physical world or is there sound in the other domains also?*

There is sound there also.

*In the same way as here?*

There certainly is a sound in all the manifested worlds, and when one has the appropriate organs one hears it.

There are sounds which belong to the highest regions, and in fact, the sound we have here gives the feeling of a noise in comparison with that sound.

For example, there are regions harmonious and musical in which one hears something which is the origin of the music we have here — but the sounds of material, physical music seem absolutely barbaric in comparison with that music! When one has heard that, even the most perfect instrument is inadequate. All constructed instruments, among which the violin certainly has the purest sound, are very much inferior in their expression to the music of this world of harmonies.

The human voice when absolutely pure is of all instruments the one which expresses it best; but it is still . . . it has a sound which seems so harsh, so gross compared with that. When one has been in that region, one truly knows what music is. And it has so perfect a clarity that at the same time as the sound one has the full understanding of what is said. That is, one has the principle of the idea, without words, simply with the sound and all the inflexions of the . . . one can't call it sensations, nor feelings . . . what seems to be closest would be some kind of soul-states or states of consciousness. All these inflexions are clearly perceptible through the nuances of the sound. And certainly, those who were great musicians, geniuses from the point of view of music, must have been more or less consciously in contact with that. The physical world as we have it today is an absolutely gross world; it looks like a caricature.

It's the same thing with painting: all the pictures we know today look like daubings when one has seen the domain of form and colour, the source of the things expressed through the painting.

And fundamentally it is the same thing from the point of view of ideas. If one enters into contact with the domain of pure ideas beyond words, all words are such limitations, restrictions . . . it becomes a kind of caricature. The intensity of life contained in the idea is untranslatable. One can receive it if one is capable of entering consciously this domain. One can transmit it to a certain extent if one is master of its vibrations and can let them pass and emanate from him. But all that one says or all that one writes is truly a caricature. (M7: 345-47)

## Music — a Spiritual Art

Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life. But, here too, we have turned it into something independent and self-sufficient, a mushroom art, like operatic music. Most of the artistic productions we come across are of this kind and at best interesting from the point of view of technique. I do not say that even operatic music cannot be used as a medium of a higher art expression; for whatever the form, it can be made to serve a deeper purpose. All depends on the thing itself, on how it is used, on what is behind it. There is nothing that cannot be used for the Divine purpose — just as anything can pretend to be the Divine and yet be of the mushroom species.

Among the great modern musicians there have been several whose consciousness, when they created, came into touch with a higher consciousness. César Franck played on the organ as one inspired; he had an opening into the psychic life and he was conscious of it and to a great extent expressed it. Beethoven, when he composed the Ninth Symphony, had the vision of an opening into a higher world and of the descent of a higher world into this earthly plane. Wagner had strong and powerful intimations of the occult world; he had the instinct of occultism and the sense of the occult and through it he received his greatest inspirations. But he worked mainly on the vital level and his mind came in constantly to interfere and mechanised his inspiration. His work for the greater part is too mixed, too often obscure and heavy, although powerful. But when he could cross the vital and the mental levels and reach a higher world, some of the glimpses he had were of an exceptional beauty, as in Parsifal, in some parts of Tristan and Iseult and most in its last great Act.

(M3: 110-11)

## Dance and Sadhana

Dance alone with rhythm and significance can express something of the occult or of the Divine as much as writing or poetry or art — why should it not and why should there be anything in it condemnable?

\*

To feel the vibration and develop from it the rhythm of the dance is the right way to create something true; the other way, to understand with the mind and work out with the mind only or mainly, is the mental way; it is laborious and difficult and has not the same spontaneous inspiration.

\*

Dancing is a private thing — we can't deal with it as part of the Yoga. So it depends on your choice.

*Can dancing not become part of the yoga, like poetry, music and painting?*

If it is done in the right spirit, it can. (C27: 739-40)

## **Dance — an Expression of the Inner Life**

Look again at what the moderns have made of the dance; compare it with what the dance once was. The dance was once one of the highest expressions of the inner life; it was associated with religion and it was an important limb in sacred ceremony, in the celebration of festivals, in the adoration of the Divine. In some countries it reached a very high degree of beauty and an extraordinary perfection. In Japan they kept up the tradition of the dance as a part of the religious life and, because the strict sense of beauty and art is a natural possession of the Japanese, they did not allow it to degenerate into something of lesser significance and smaller purpose. It was the same in India. It is true that in our days there have been attempts to resuscitate the ancient Greek and other dances; but the religious sense is missing in all such resurrections and they look more like rhythmic gymnastics than dance.

Today Russian dances are famous, but they are expressions of the vital world and there is even something terribly vital in them. Like all that comes to us from that world, they may be very attractive or very repulsive, but always they stand for themselves and not for the expression of the higher life. The very mysticism of the Russians is of a vital order. As technicians of the dance they are marvellous; but technique is only an instrument. If your instrument is good, so much the better, but so long as it is not surrendered to the Divine, however fine it may be, it is empty of the highest and cannot serve a divine purpose. The difficulty is that most of those who become artists believe that they stand on their own legs and have no need to turn to the Divine. It is a great pity; for in the divine manifestation skill is as useful an element as anything else. Skill is one part of the divine fabric, only it must know how to subordinate itself to greater things. (M3: 111-12)

## **Photography**

Modern photography has become an art and, like all other arts, it can effectively express the inner feelings and the soul, with a true sense of beauty.

Photography is an art when the photographer is an artist. (M12: 241)

## Cinema

This is indeed something very interesting. . . . I have seen that material things are arranged in such a way at present that one could reach a high degree of perfection of the physical instrument in any field whatever, no matter what may be the degree of inner or psychic development. This was what I thought yesterday evening about the talkies. It is evidently a great progress in the cinematographic art and it can't be called in itself bad or good. It so happened that I had always seen only talkies of idiotic, vulgar, crude stories, indeed all the stupidities generally shown in cinemas, and this perfection of the instrument had made the crudity yet more crude, the stupidity yet more stupid, and this kind of impression of degradation yet more strong. But yesterday, when we saw that documentary with the beautiful birds singing. . . . Those who made this film have taken great pains, one can't imagine how much of effort and work it entails to film birds in their nests without disturbing them, then to record the sound accurately enough to be able to amplify it and make it perceptible to all. It is a very big work they have done there. And it is the same perfecting of the same instrument which permitted the production of the lovely thing we saw yesterday evening and that ignoble thing we saw sometime ago. . . . This makes us reflect deeply on material things.

Physical perfection does not at all prove, not in the least, that one has taken one step farther towards spirituality. Physical perfection means that the instrument the force will use — any force whatever — will be sufficiently perfected to be remarkably expressive. But the important point, the essential point is the force which will use the instrument, and it is there that the choice is necessary. . . . Do not sleep with satisfaction under the pretext that you have once made your choice: "Oh! Now it is all right, everything is all right." In principle everything is all right; in the sincerity of your choice lies also the guarantee of its duration. But for the sincerity to be perfect and the choice unshakable, one must never sleep — I don't mean you must not sleep physically, I mean the consciousness must not sleep! (M4: 324-26)

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I see no objection to your going for two or three days to Madras for this purpose [*to make a recording*]. I don't suppose you will paint the town red and the Cinema sounds harmless, though if the newspaper pictures are any guide, it is likely to be disappointing; I have yet to see anything that really suggested an artistic piece.

(C27: 686)

## *Section 8*

### **Form and Technique**

#### **Technique**

*I would very much like to have instructions from the Mother on portrait painting: drawing, developing the features, finishing the details and bringing out the personality of the sitter.*

For that each one must find his own technique. Only for you what you must find is a way to express the psychic instead of the vital. At present it is the vital you bring out. The psychic is the eternal character, the vital brings out only transient movements.

\*

The failure to bring out the personality is not at all due to any defect in the technique. With any technique the personality can be brought out. But to get it one must come out from one's own personality, one's ego with its characteristic and limited look on things, and identify oneself with the person of the sitter — that is how one seizes it and can naturally bring it out in the painting.

\*

The portrait does not seem to us to be successful. In the externals the long projection of the nose over the lips and the eyes close together modify the type of the face and give it another character. It is not a question of resemblance or external appearance, but the basis of character is affected. This however would not be so much of an objection — but for the inner expression as it comes out through the mouth and eyes. There is something introduced here from a vital world — undivine — which is not part of the Mother's vital. It has come in through that Influence of which the Mother spoke — it throws its own shadow and so changes the inner vision of the thing to be done, the face to be portrayed. There is no such element in your paintings of Nature, which catch very finely the inner truth of what you paint.

It was not with this portrait that we connected what I wrote about the wrong Influence that brought the obstruction and depression. (C27: 687-88)

\*

. . . in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection; but there are so many other steps, there is a whole world beyond before you can get near to what you seek; . . . (C26: 12-13)

### **Drawing from Nature**

*I have drawn four faces from my imagination, each with a different character and personality.*

Drawing from imagination is useless.

*I have the idea of drawing the pictures of Nandalal Bose.*

You can copy Nandalal — but drawing from Nature is best.

\*

*You said that studies of human figures should be done from nature. I would like to ask if this could be done other ways as well — from photographs and paintings, for instance.*

They must be done from nature. It is impossible to do it properly from photographs and paintings. (C27: 688-89)

### **Mastery of Drawing**

*May I enlarge your photograph? This will help me in drawing the human figure.*

You can try by copying human figures from drawings, not photographs.

\*

*I don't think I have succeeded in bringing out the resemblance in this sketch.*

To get the resemblance, one must concentrate so much as to be identified with what you see — then it comes.

\*

*Again that clumsiness in the drawing. It is due to want of practice, I suppose.*

Want of practice and some tamas of the body. It is when the consciousness comes in the body that the skill comes — when you shake off the tamas, there is no clumsiness in you. (C27: 689)

### **An Artist's Temperament**

*I was surprised at X's refusal to do the fresco.*

These things are matters of temperament. It is not a question of mastery of technique only as with a craftsman. A craftsman can go on working regularly always for any amount of time. An artist is not the same. He depends on his temperament (whether he is poet, painter or sculptor) and its response to a certain flow of force. If anything in it gets dull or jaded or does not respond, he ceases working — or if anything else goes wrong or is not responsive in him. Copy or original makes no difference to his method — he brings the same temperamental attitude to both. Of course there are artists whose temperament is so buoyant that they keep the flow at command almost (like Y with his poems), painting or working every day for hours together. Others cannot — they work sometimes more, sometimes less — sometimes after long intervals etc. (C27: 690)

### **Uncreative Periods**

*I have noticed that after doing some pictures, there comes a period when I do not feel like doing any painting, there is no inspiration.*

It is very common with artists, poets and all creators. The usual reason is that the vital gets fatigued and needs some time to recuperate itself and get back the creative effort.

*During such periods I have to deal with the impulses of the vital nature. Is it because of this that I cannot concentrate on painting?*

It is more likely that the vital, fatigued of the effort, begins to have movements of other kinds which you have then to control.



*I feel that I should go to deeper and higher sources of inspiration. Am I correct in having this feeling?*

It is correct. There is a movement to get at deeper and higher sources.

\*

*Sometimes something comes in and my inspiration for writing and painting fails. What is this?*

It is an obstruction to the natural action of the mind; that happens often enough. People who do creative work, writing or painting, are often stopped like that for a time — they do not feel the obstruction, only the result which they call a failure of inspiration. (C27: 690-91)

### **Unity of Idea and Design in the Arts**

*I would recommend that you send the architect Raymond to Hyderabad to observe the modernised Moghul style of some of the buildings. He could then make some improvements to his design: a big dome in the centre, for instance, and dome-like decorations in the corners.*

Two quite different styles cannot be mixed together — it would make a horribly inartistic effect. A dome would be utterly out of place in the plan of this building. Unity of idea and design is the first requisite in architecture as in any other art.

(C27: 677)

### **Necessity of Training Vision and Execution**

What you write about the expression of beauty through painting and the limitations of the work as yet done here, is quite accurate. The painters here have capacity and disposition, but as yet the work done ranks more as studies and sketches, some well done, some less well, than as great or finished art. What they need is not to be easily satisfied because they have put their ideas or imaginations in colour or because they have done some good work, but always to see what has not been yet achieved and train vision and execution-power till they have reached a truly high power of themselves. (C27: 692)

## Form and Colour

In order to get a significance through a picture there must be a definite form — form and colour are the essentials of painting and neither by itself is enough. Here [*in a painting sent to Sri Aurobindo*] there is colour but no form — or only a shapeless shape — as if you were trying to get rid of form and paint only forces or indefinite suggestions. But that is contrary to an art which depends on colour, line and design. (C27: 686)

## Necessity of Training

You can write to him that the Mother has seen his pictures. If he wants seriously to take up painting, it can't be done out of his own mind without help of competent teachers. He would have to undergo a complete and long training so as to train his eye as well as his hand; his eye to see things as they appear to the artistic vision and his hand to execute that vision with a sure technique. Technique cannot be acquired without a sound training. Also he must learn to know all that is necessary about the human body and its details; otherwise he will not be able to build faultlessly a human face or figure. For instance in his picture of the flowers he has put a hand in which the thumb is in an impossible position and the fingers begin at the same level as the thumb and not far below. In art a taste for the art or even a faculty for it is not sufficient; there is necessary also a training.

\*

*Do you think that I shall be able to learn painting?*

You can learn on condition you study and take pains. Painting is not like poetry which you can develop by the innate faculty and a growing inspiration with just a little knowledge of metrical technique. In painting you have to learn carefully any number of things — learn not by theory only but by practice with a good teacher, e.g. firm line and strong drawing, perspective, how to mix colours, how to use the right colours and what colours can go together and so on — all that goes by the name of technique. If you do not study that, no amount of inspiration will make you a good painter. You were progressing very well, but you must learn these things carefully and you must take more pains about details. (C27: 693-94)

## Welcoming Criticism

That is a great error of the human vital — to want compliments for their own sake and to be depressed by their absence and imagine that it means there is no capacity. In this world one starts with ignorance and imperfection in whatever one does — one has to find out one's mistakes and to learn, one has to commit errors and find out by correcting them the right way to do things. Nobody in the world has ever escaped from this law. So what one has to expect from others is not compliments all the time, but praise of what is right or well done and criticism of errors and mistakes. The more one can bear criticism and see one's mistakes, the more likely one is to arrive at the fullness of one's capacity. Especially when one is very young — before the age of maturity — one cannot easily do perfect work. What is called the juvenile work of poets and painters — work done in their early years — is always imperfect, it is a promise and has qualities — but the real perfection and full use of their powers comes afterwards. They themselves know that very well, but they go on writing or painting because they know also that by doing so they will develop their powers.

As for comparison with others, one ought not to do that. Each one has his own lesson to learn, his own work to do and he must concern himself with that, not with the superior or inferior progress of others in comparison with himself. If he is behind today, he can be in full capacity hereafter and it is for that future perfection of his powers that he must labour. You are young and have everything yet to learn — your capacities are yet only in bud, you must wait and work for them to be in full bloom — and you must not mind if it takes months and years even to arrive at something satisfying and perfect. It will come in its proper time, and the work you do now is always a step towards it.

But learn to welcome criticism and the pointing out of imperfections — the more you do so, the more rapidly you will advance. (C27: 694)

## Hard Work and Patience

If you work hard and patiently you can surely learn [*painting*] — but you must realise that you are very young and it takes years before an artist can learn to produce something really perfect. (C27: 695)

## Wanting to Learn

The difficulty with him [*a young painter of the Ashram*] is that he does not want to learn — it must all come by inspiration, as if such a thing were possible in things in

which knowledge of technique and careful and long assiduous practice are needed, as in art and music. Besides he cannot bear to be criticised and [to have] his mistakes shown to him. All the talent in the world will not serve, if he does not change in these two things.

\*

Someone who is learning to paint or play music or write and does not like to have his mistakes pointed out by those who already know — how is he to learn at all or reach any perfection of technique? (C27: 695)

### **When Practising Yoga**

The Mother had told you once that in your human figures you did not seem to be in contact with the right Influence and you had said that you felt the contact with an eternal Beauty in Nature but had not the same contact with regard to the human figure. It will be better then, now that you are practising Yoga and to be in contact with right Influences only is very important, to avoid dealing with human face and figure at present. In Yoga what may seem to the mind a detail may yet open the door to things that have strong effects on the consciousness, disturb its harmony or interfere with the sources of inspiration, vision and experience. (S25: 368)

\*

Your relation with Nature has been much more psychic than your relation with human beings. You must have met the latter mainly on the vital plane and not come in close contact with the eternal Beauty behind. In Nature you have felt the touch of the eternal and infinite and entered therefore into a truer relation with her.

The influence that comes in the human figure is a force of disharmony and ugliness — a manifestation of ignorance in form. (C27: 687)

### **Inspiration and the Vital**

*For the last two or three days I have been getting inspirations for painting. But I have a question about that. Do these inspirations come from the vital world? Is this harmful?*

It is of course vital. All art comes through the vital. But what manifests through it can only be said when one sees what it produces. (C27: 686)

### Correspondence with an Artist

If you copy, it is better to take very good models like the Japanese picture, so as to develop a sure style.

\*

You have skill of hand, but you must study regularly — copying things from Nature, observing how to do things, getting a firm technique and power of observation. Then the right inspiration may come.

\*

You can begin to study the human figure but from *nature*, not from books. Ask people to give you an hour sitting and make pencil sketches.

\*

The figure is quite unsuccessful as a drawing of the human body. You should study anatomy of the bones and muscles of the body — there ought to be a book showing them in the Library or the Dispensary.

\*

*The colours do not mix one with another.*

It is not expected that they should mix — the technique is to apply the colours by dots or short lines very close to one another but not to mix; it gives a much more *living* effect than the mixing and expresses well the play of colours and of light. (*Here the Mother made several quick colour sketches.*) You can make in that way all possible shades.

\*

You must not mix the colours before they are put on the paper. Put the colours on the paper with plenty of water. Apply the second colour before the first one is dry and mix them.

\*

You must be prepared to be unsuccessful many many times before you can truly learn. It is with the effort of many failures that you prepare a progress leading towards success.

\*

*I don't know how to bring out (X's) resemblance.*

To get the resemblance, one must concentrate so much as to be identified with what you see — then it comes. (B: Aug. 1996)

\*

Before doing a drawing you must find the proper place for the model to sit. Generally *near a window* where the lights and shadows will be clear and precise, is the best. Before starting the work, you must try several positions and choose the best.

\*

It is good to make sketches from Nature. It gives richness, variety and precision to the execution. (B: Nov. 1996)

\*

It is not bad. You can try it in painting. If you want the background to be far away you must be careful to keep it of a *paler shade* than the foreground. And pale mauve and pale blue can be used freely. And details must be left more indistinct than in front.

\*

It is not bad. The background is just a little too dark and the houses on the right side a little *too precise* which gives to them an air of toys.

\*

The fireworks must be of pale bright colours, golden, orange, and red chiefly. The reflections in the water must be of the same colours as the fireworks but a little fainter.

\*

Yes, you must do from bodies, otherwise you cannot learn. Anatomy is only a help so that you may be accurate and know what is or is not possible in movement, position etc. (B: Feb. 1997)

\*

The sketches of arms and legs are good except one foot (not the longer which is all right but the other which is clumsy).

The whole body sketch is not so good because you have not kept the right proportion between the bust and the legs. The bust is all right, the legs are too short by two inches at least. It is because you started the sketch too big and when you arrived towards the end your paper was too small. When you want to do a certain sketch on a certain sheet of paper, you must first establish roughly the whole of it keeping in view only the proportions. For a whole figure it will make it easier to keep the right proportion by keeping in mind that a normal body contains 7 heads including the head itself; less makes a short man and more a tall one.

\*

To continue the studies, it would be good if you could find some other benevolent model as a change in the form of hand and foot would be helpful.

\*

It is by doing that the hand becomes conscious and loses its clumsiness.

\*

When you want to express a movement, you must ask your model to do the movement and stop him in the midst of it just at the most expressive moment. If the position taken cannot be kept very long, look at it carefully in order to remember and make a rapid rough sketch of the most important points: the movement of an arm or leg, the position of the feet, etc.

In the present case, make X walk across your room and stop him in the middle of the movement which he must keep very exactly. You will see that the foot must be bent, it is the only way of showing the action of walking. (B: Apr. 1997)

\*

Yes — it is a mistake to do too quickly — one must take pains with the details, then all becomes perfect.

\*

You must learn to do with patience and concentration — because you have a real gift and it would be a pity not to develop it to its best. Mother will wait till you have finished the Buddha before she gives you more.

\*

It is when the consciousness comes in the body that skill comes — when you shake off the tamas, there is no clumsiness in you.

\*

It is better to choose the background before colouring the figure — for that colouring depends on the background. The two must go together.

\*

So-called black hair is never black. Look at it attentively and you will see that in the shadows there are deep browns, deep blues and purples. The lights are pale blue if the hair is very black and reddish brown if the hair is less black.

\*

Yes, much better work is done when one is calm and concentrated. But surely you can become so.

\*

Each artist has his own technique and does things as he understands them. Some choose to give a vivid reproduction of nature, some like to translate or to symbolise.

\*

Painting also is sadhana; so it is perfectly possible to make them one. It is a matter of dedicating the painting and feeling the force that makes you paint as the Mother's force. (B: Aug. 1997)

## **Art and Life**

There are artists and artists. A real artist with the spirit of artistry in his very blood will certainly be artistic in everything. But there are artists who have no taste and



there are artists who are not born but made. Your example of Tagore is a different matter. A mastery in one department of art does not give mastery in another — though there may be a few who excel equally in many arts. Gandhi's phrase about asceticism is only a phrase. You might just as well say that politics is an art or that cooking is the greatest of arts or apply that phrase to bridge or boxing or any other human field of effort. As for Tolstoy's dictum it is that of a polemist, a man who had narrowed himself to one line of ideas — and such people can say anything. There is the same insufficiency about the other quotations. An artist or a poet may be the medium of a great power but in his life he may be a very ordinary man or else a criminal like Villon or Cellini. All kinds go to make this rather queer terrestrial creation. (C27: 676)

### **'I Don't See any Necessity of Being the Greatest Artist'**

*But, Sweet Mother, at school it is not possible to take many subjects. We have to specialise.*

Yes, yes! I have heard that, especially from your teachers. I don't agree. And I know it very well, this is being continuously repeated to me: if anything is to be done properly, one must specialise. It is the same thing for sports also. It is the same for everything in life. It is said and repeated, and there are people who will prove it: to do something well one must specialise. One must do that and concentrate. If one wants to become a good philosopher, one must learn only philosophy, if one wants to be a good chemist, one must learn chemistry only. And if one wants to become a good tennis-player, one must play only tennis. That's not what I think, that is all I can say. My experience is different. I believe there are general faculties and that it is much more important to acquire these than to specialise — unless, naturally, it be like M. and Mme. Curie who wanted to develop a certain science, find something new, then of course they were compelled to concentrate on that science. But still that was only till they had discovered it; once they had found it, nothing stopped them from widening their mind.

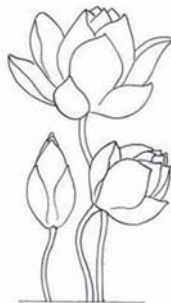
This is something I have heard from my very childhood, and I believe our great grandparents heard the same thing, and from all time it has been preached that if you want to succeed in something you must do only that. And as for me, I was scolded all the time because I did many different things! And I was always told I would never be good at anything. I studied, I did painting, I did music, and besides was busy with other things still. And I was told my music wouldn't be up to much, my painting wouldn't be worthwhile, and my studies would be quite incomplete. Probably it is quite true, but still I have found that this had its advantages — those very advantages I am speaking about, of widening, making supple one's mind and

understanding. It is true that if I had wanted to be a first-class player and to play in concerts, it would have been necessary to do what they said. And as for painting, if I had wanted to be among the great artists of the time, it would have been necessary to do that. That’s quite understandable. But still, that is just one point of view. I don’t see any necessity of being the greatest artist, the greatest musician. That has always seemed to me a vanity. And besides, it is a question of opinion. . . .

There is but one instance, that’s when one wants to make a discovery. Then, naturally, one must dedicate all one’s effort to that. But that is not necessarily a whole lifetime’s effort — unless one chooses a very difficult subject as the Curies did. There was a time they had made their discovery — they could go beyond it.

Yet spontaneously, people who wish to keep their balance rest from one activity and take up another. Examples are always cited of great performers or great artists or great scientists who have a kind of hobby, a diversion. You have perhaps heard of Ingres’s violin. Ingres was a painter; he did not lack talent and when he had some free time he started playing the violin, and his violin interested him much more than his painting. It seems he did not play the violin very well but it interested him more. And his painting he did very well and it interested him less. But I believe that was quite simply because he needed balance. Concentration on a single thing in order to attain one’s aim is very necessary for the human mind in its normal functioning, but one can arrive at a different working that’s more complete, more subtle. Naturally, physically one is bound to be limited, for in physical life one depends a great deal on time and space, and also it is difficult to realise great things without special concentration. But if one wants to lead a higher and deeper life, I believe one can acquire perhaps much greater capacities by other means than those of restriction and limitation. There is a considerable advantage in getting rid of one’s limits, if not from the point of view of realisation in action, at least from that of spiritual realisation.

(M6: 18-20)



## *Section 9*

### **Towards a Life More Complete**

#### **Uniting the Two Ends of Existence**

A divine life in a material world implies necessarily a union of the two ends of existence, the spiritual summit and the material base. The soul with the basis of its life established in Matter ascends to the heights of the Spirit but does not cast away its base, it joins the heights and the depths together. The Spirit descends into Matter and the material world with all its lights and glories and powers and with them fills and transforms life in the material world so that it becomes more and more divine. The transformation is not a change into something purely subtle and spiritual to which Matter is in its nature repugnant and by which it is felt as an obstacle or as a shackle binding the Spirit; it takes up Matter as a form of the Spirit though now a form which conceals and turns it into a revealing instrument, it does not cast away the energies of Matter, its capacities, its methods; it brings out their hidden possibilities, uplifts, sublimates, discloses their innate divinity. The divine life will reject nothing that is capable of divinisation; all is to be seized, exalted, made utterly perfect. . . .

In the pursuit of perfection we can start at either end of our range of being and we have then to use, initially at least, the means and processes proper to our choice. . . . It is not that the action from the two ends cannot meet and the higher take into itself and uplift the lower perfection; but this can usually be done only by a transition from the lower to a higher outlook, aspiration and motive: this we shall have to do if our aim is to transform the human into the divine life. But here there comes in the necessity of taking up the activities of human life and sublimating them by the power of the spirit. Here the lower perfection will not disappear; it will remain but will be enlarged and transformed by the higher perfection which only the power of the spirit can give. (C13: 521-24)

#### **The Higher and the Lower Perfections and the Integral Realisation**

*Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo speaks of “the higher perfection” and “the lower perfection” . . .*

The higher perfection is the spiritual perfection, integral union with the Divine, identification with the Divine, freedom from all the limitations of the lower world.

That is spiritual perfection, the perfection that comes from yoga — quite independent of the body and the physical world — which, in ancient times, meant first rejecting the body and the physical life so as to have a relation only with the higher world and finally with the Divine. That is the higher perfection.

And the lower perfection is to be able to make the human being in his present form and in his body, in his relation with all terrestrial things, do the utmost he can. This is the case of all great men of genius: artistic genius, literary genius, genius in organisation, the great rulers, those who have carried physical capacities to their maximum perfection, human development to the limit of its possibilities; and, for instance, all those who have complete control over their bodies and succeed in doing miraculous things, as we saw, for example, during the war, with the airmen: they made their bodies do things which at first sight seemed quite impossible, they obtained from them an endurance, a skill, a power which were almost unthinkable. And from every point of view: from the point of view of physical strength, of intellectual realisation, of the physical qualities of energy and courage, of disinterestedness, goodness, charity; all human qualities carried to their utmost limits. That is the lower perfection.

The higher perfection is spiritual and super-human. The lower perfection is human perfection carried to its maximum limits, and this may be quite independent of all spiritual life, all spiritual aspiration. One can be a genius without having any spiritual aspiration. One can have all the most extraordinary moral qualities without having any spiritual life. And even, usually, those who have a very great power of human realisation are satisfied — more or less satisfied — with their condition. They feel they are self-sufficient, that they carry in themselves the source of their realisation and their joy, and it is usually very difficult to make them understand and feel that they are not the creators of their own creations, whatever they may be. Most of them, with very rare exceptions, if they were told, “You are not the originator of this work you are doing, it is a force higher than you and you are only its instrument”, they would dislike it very much — and they will send you about your business! Therefore, these two perfections are really divergent in ordinary life. It was said in the old yoga that the first condition for doing yoga was to be disgusted with life. But those who have realised this human perfection are very rarely disgusted with life, unless they have met with personal difficulties such as the ingratitude of people around them, the lack of understanding of their genius which was not sufficiently appreciated — so all this disgusts them, but otherwise, so long as they are in their period of success and creation, they are perfectly satisfied. So, as they are satisfied — above all, self-satisfied — they don’t need to seek anything else.

It is not essentially true, but this is usually how things happen, and unless there is in this genius a soul which is perfectly conscious of itself and has come to accomplish a specific work on earth, he may very well be born, grow up and die without knowing that there is anything other than this earthly life. And above all it

is this, you see, this feeling of having achieved the utmost realisation which gives a satisfaction that keeps one from needing anything else. . . . If they have a soul that's fully conscious of itself and fully conscious of its purpose in the physical world, there could be a vague feeling that all this is pretty hollow, that all these achievements are a little too superficial and that something is lacking; but that comes only to those who are predestined, and after all, in the mass of humanity, there are not very many of them.

Only those who are predestined can combine these two perfections and realise something integral. . . . This is quite rare. The great spiritual leaders have very rarely been great realisers in the physical world. It has happened, but it is very rare. Only those who are conscious incarnations of the Divine naturally carry in themselves the possibility of the two perfections, but this is exceptional. People who had a spiritual life, a great spiritual realisation, were able at certain exceptional moments to have a capacity for outward realisation; this also was exceptional, but it was intermittent and never had the integrality, the totality, the perfection of those who concentrated on material realisation. And this is why those who live only in the external consciousness, for whom the earthly material life is all that really exists, concrete and tangible, perceptible to all, always feel that spiritual life is something hazy, something almost mediocre from the material point of view.

I have met many people — “many”, well, quite a number — who wanted to demonstrate that spiritual powers gave a great capacity for outer realisation and who tried, in certain exceptional spiritual states or conditions, to paint or to compose music or write poetry; well, everything that they produced was thoroughly second-rate and could not be compared with the works of the great geniuses who had mastered material nature — and this of course gave the materialists a good opening: “You see, your so-called power is nothing at all.” But this was because in their external life they were ordinary men; for the greatest spiritual power, if it enters material that's not educated, will produce a result far superior to what that individual would have been able to achieve in his ordinary state, but far inferior to what a genius who has mastered matter can produce. It is not enough that “the Spirit bloweth”, the instrument must also be capable of manifesting it.

I believe that is one of the things Sri Aurobindo is going to explain: why it is necessary to give to the physical, external being, its full development, the capacity of controlling matter directly; then you put at the disposal of the Spirit an instrument capable of manifesting it, otherwise . . . Yes, I knew several people who in their ordinary state could not write three lines without making a mistake, not only spelling mistakes but mistakes of language, that is, who could not express one thought clearly — well, in their moments of spiritual inspiration, they used to write very beautiful things, but all the same these very beautiful things were not so beautiful as the works of the greatest writers. These things seemed remarkable in comparison with what they could do in their ordinary state; it was true, their present possibilities were

used to the maximum, it was something that gave a value to what otherwise would have had none at all. But supposing you take a real genius — a musician or artist or writer of genius — who has fully mastered his instrument, who can use it to produce works that express the utmost human possibility, if you add to this a spiritual consciousness, the supramental force, then you will have something truly divine.

And this is precisely the key to the effort Sri Aurobindo wanted us to make.

And your body, if you draw from it all the possibilities it holds, if you educate it by the normal, well-known, scientific methods, if you make this instrument into something as perfect as possible, then, when the supramental truth manifests in that body, it will become *immediately* — without centuries of preparation — a marvellous instrument for the expression of the Spirit.

That is why Sri Aurobindo used to repeat and has always said: You must work from both ends, not let go of one for the other. And certainly, if you want to have a divine consciousness, you must not give up spiritual aspiration; but if you want to become an integral divine being on earth, take good care not to let go of the other end, and make your body the best possible instrument.

It is a disease of the ordinary human intellect — which comes, moreover, from separation, division — to make a thing always *either* this *or* that. If you choose this, you turn your back on that; if you choose that, you turn your back on this.

It is an impoverishment. One must know how to take up everything, combine everything, synthesise everything. And then one has an integral realisation.

*(Turning to the children)* Do you have anything to say?

It is much better to do than to say. Now I have given you some encouragement.

(M9: 91-95)

## The Soul of Beauty

And for the same reason, because that which we are seeking through beauty is in the end that which we are seeking through religion, the Absolute, the Divine. The search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and the vital impressions, impulses, desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination. Behind them the soul of beauty in us desires the contact, the revelation, the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things which it feels to be present, but which neither the senses and instincts by themselves can give, though they may be its channels, — for it is suprasensuous, — nor the reason and intelligence, though they too are a channel, — for it is suprarational, supra-intellectual, — but to which through all these veils the soul itself seeks to arrive. When it can get the touch of this universal, absolute beauty, this soul of beauty, this sense of its revelation in any slightest or

greatest thing, the beauty of a flower, a form, the beauty and power of a character, an action, an event, a human life, an idea, a stroke of the brush or the chisel or a scintillation of the mind, the colours of a sunset or the grandeur of the tempest, it is then that the sense of beauty in us is really, powerfully, entirely satisfied. It is in truth seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God. (C25: 144-45)

### **Infrarational, Rational, Suprarational Seeking**

The seeking for God is also, subjectively, the seeking for our highest, truest, fullest, largest self. It is the seeking for a Reality which the appearances of life conceal because they only partially express it or because they express it from behind veils and figures, by oppositions and contraries, often by what seem to be perversions and opposites of the Real. It is the seeking for something whose completeness comes only by a concrete and all-occupying sense of the Infinite and Absolute; it can be established in its integrality only by finding a value of the infinite in all finite things and by the attempt — necessary, inevitable, however impossible or paradoxical it may seem to the normal reason — to raise all relativities to their absolutes and to reconcile their differences, oppositions and contraries by elevation and sublimation to some highest term in which all these are unified. Some perfect highest term there is by which all our imperfect lower terms can be justified and their discords harmonised if once we can induce them to be its conscious expressions, to exist not for themselves but for That, as contributory values of that highest Truth, fractional measures of that highest and largest common measure. A One there is in which all the entangled discords of this multiplicity of separated, conflicting, intertwining, colliding ideas, forces, tendencies, instincts, impulses, aspects, appearances which we call life, can find the unity of their diversity, the harmony of their divergences, the justification of their claims, the correction of their perversions and aberrations, the solution of their problems and disputes. Knowledge seeks for that in order that Life may know its own true meaning and transform itself into the highest and most harmonious possible expression of a divine Reality. All seeks for that, each power feels out for it in its own way: the infrarational gropes for it blindly along the line of

its instincts, needs, impulses; the rational lays for it its trap of logic and order, follows out and gathers together its diversities, analyses them in order to synthesise; the suprarational gets behind and above things and into their inmost parts, there to touch and lay hands on the Reality itself in its core and essence and enlighten all its infinite detail from that secret centre. (C25: 146-47)

### **Art for Art's Sake**

Art for Art's sake? But what after all is meant by this slogan and what is the real issue behind it? Is it meant, as I think it was when the slogan first came into use, that the technique, the artistry is all in all? The contention would then be that it does not matter what you write or paint or sculpt or what music you make or about what you make it so long as it is beautiful writing, competent painting, good sculpture, fine music. It is very evidently true in a certain sense, — in this sense that whatever is perfectly expressed or represented or interpreted under the conditions of a given art proves itself by that very fact to be legitimate material for the artist's labour. But that free admission cannot be confined only to all objects, however common or deemed to be vulgar — an apple, a kitchen pail, a donkey, a dish of carrots, — it can give a right of citizenship in the domain of art to a moral theme or thesis, a philosophic conclusion, a social experiment; even the Five Years' Plan or the proceedings of a District Board or the success of a drainage scheme, an electric factory or a big hotel can be brought, after the most modern or the still more robustious Bolshevik mode, into the artist's province. For, technique being all, the sole question would be whether he as poet, novelist, dramatist, painter or sculptor has been able to triumph over the difficulties and bring out creatively the possibilities of his subject. There is no logical basis here for accepting an apple and rejecting the Apple-Cart. But still you may say that at least the object of the artist must be art only, — even if he treats ethical, social or political questions, he must not make it his main object to wing with the enthusiasm of aesthetic creation a moral, social or political aim. But if in doing it he satisfies the conditions of his art, shows a perfect technique and in it beauty, power, perfection, why not? The moralist, preacher, philosopher, social or political enthusiast is often doubled with an artist — as shining proofs and examples there are Plato and Shelley, to go no farther. Only, you can say of him on the basis of this theory that as a work of art his creation should be judged by its success of craftsmanship and not by its contents; it is not made greater by the value of his ethical ideas, his enthusiasms or his metaphysical seekings.

But then the theory itself is true only up to a certain point. For technique is a means of expression; one does not write merely to use beautiful words or paint for the sole sake of line and colour; there is something that one is trying through these means to express or to discover. What is that something? The first answer would be



— it is the creation, it is the discovery of Beauty. Art is for that alone and can be judged only by its revelation or discovery of Beauty. Whatever is capable of being manifested as Beauty, is the material of the artist. But there is not only physical beauty in the world — there is moral, intellectual, spiritual beauty also. Still one might say that Art for Art's sake means that only what is aesthetically beautiful must be expressed and all that contradicts the aesthetic sense of beauty must be avoided, — Art has nothing to do with Life in itself, things in themselves, Good, Truth or the Divine for their own sake, but only in so far as they appeal to some aesthetic sense of beauty. And that would seem to be a sound basis for excluding the Five Years' Plan, a moral sermon or a philosophical treatise. But here again, what after all is Beauty? How much is it in the thing itself and how much in the consciousness that perceives it? Is not the eye of the artist constantly catching some element of aesthetic value in the plain, the ugly, the sordid, the repellent and triumphantly conveying it through his material, — through the word, through line and colour, through the sculptured shape?

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer simply because they spiritually are — because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds, — of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it — as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that however, — what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there — his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be the something More that it is. And so from this point of view of a realised supreme harmony all is or can be subject-matter for the artist because in all he can discover and reveal the Beauty that is everywhere. Again we land ourselves in a devastating catholicity; for here too one cannot pull up short at any given line. It may be a hard saying that one must or may discover and reveal beauty in a pig or its poke or in a parish pump or an advertisement of somebody's pills, and yet something like that seems to be what modern Art and literature are trying with vigour and a conscientious labour to do. By extension one ought to be able to extract beauty equally well out of morality or social reform or a political caucus or allow at least that all these things can, if he wills, become legitimate subjects for the artist. Here too one cannot say that it is on condition he thinks of beauty only and does not make moralising or social reform or a political idea his main object. For if with that idea foremost in his mind he still produces a great work of art, discovering Beauty as he moves to his aim, proving

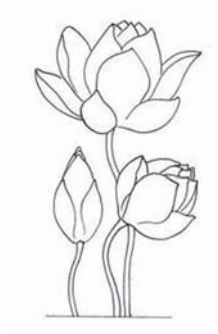
himself in spite of his unaesthetic preoccupations a great artist, it is all we can justly ask from him — whatever his starting point — to be a creator of Beauty. Art is discovery and revelation of Beauty and we can say nothing more by way of prohibition or limiting rule.

But there is one thing more that can be said, and it makes a big difference. In the Yogin’s vision of universal beauty all becomes beautiful, but all is not reduced to a single level. There are gradations, there is a hierarchy in this All-Beauty and we see that it depends on the ascending power (*vibhuti*) of consciousness and Ananda that expresses itself in the object. All is the Divine, but some things are more divine than others. In the artist’s vision too there are or can be gradations, a hierarchy of values. Shakespeare can get dramatic and therefore aesthetic values out of Dogberry and Malvolio, and he is as thorough a creative artist in his treatment of them as in his handling of Macbeth or Lear. But if we had only Dogberry or Malvolio to testify to Shakespeare’s genius, no Macbeth, no Lear, would he be so great a dramatic artist and creator as he now is? It is in the varying possibilities of one subject or another that there lies an immense difference. Apelles’ grapes deceived the birds that came to peck at them, but there was more aesthetic content in the Zeus of Phidias, a greater content of consciousness and therefore of Ananda to express and with it to fill in and intensify the essential principle of Beauty even though the essence of beauty might be realised perhaps with equal aesthetic perfection by either artist and in either theme.

And that is because just as technique is not all, so even Beauty is not all in Art. Art is not only technique or form of Beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty, — it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or to put it otherwise there are not only aesthetic values but life-values, mind-values, soul-values, that enter into Art. The artist puts out into form not only the powers of his own consciousness but the powers of the Consciousness that has made the worlds and their objects. And if that Consciousness according to the Vedantic view is fundamentally equal everywhere, it is still in manifestation not an equal power in all things. There is more of the Divine expression in the *Vibhuti* than in the common man, *prākṛto janaḥ*; in some forms of life there are less potentialities for the self-expression of the Spirit than in others. And there are also gradations of consciousness which make a difference, if not in the aesthetic value or greatness of a work of art, yet in its contents value. Homer makes beauty out of man’s outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step farther and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare. And beyond the Ideals and Idea-Forces even there are other presences, more inner or inmost realities, a soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be the subject-matter of an art still more rich and

deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be. A poet finding these and giving them a voice with a genius equal to that of the poets of the past might not be greater than they in a purely aesthetical valuation, but his art's contents-value, its consciousness-values could be deeper and higher and much fuller than in any achievement before him. There is something here that goes beyond any considerations of Art for Art's sake or Art for Beauty's sake; for while these stress usefully sometimes the indispensable first elements of artistic creation, they would limit too much the creation itself if they stood for the exclusion of the something More that compels Art to change always in its constant seeking for more and more that must be expressed of the concealed or the revealed Divine, of the individual and the universal or the transcendent Spirit.

If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly — Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake, the spirit's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies — widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the Highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour. (C27: 119-23)



## *Section 10*

### **The Artistry of Life**

#### **The Artistry of Life**

The whole world yearns after freedom, yet each creature is in love with his chains; this is the first paradox and inextricable knot of our nature.

Man is in love with the bonds of birth; therefore he is caught in the companion bonds of death. In these chains he aspires after freedom of his being and mastery of his self-fulfilment.

Man is in love with power; therefore he is subjected to weakness. For the world is a sea of waves of force that meet and continually fling themselves on each other; he who would ride on the crest of one wave, must faint under the shock of hundreds.

Man is in love with pleasure; therefore he must undergo the yoke of grief and pain. For unmixed delight is only for the free and passionless soul; but that which pursues after pleasure in man is a suffering and straining energy.

Man hungers after calm, but he thirsts also for the experiences of a restless mind and a troubled heart. Enjoyment is to his mind a fever, calm an inertia and a monotony.

Man is in love with the limitations of his physical being, yet he would have also the freedom of his infinite mind and his immortal soul.

And in these contrasts something in him finds a curious attraction; they constitute for his mental being the artistry of life. It is not only the nectar but the poison also that attracts his taste and his curiosity. (C13: 204-05)

#### **The Sense of Contrast**

*Sweet Mother, what does “artistry” mean?*

What most men call “artistry” is just contrast. Artists say and feel that it is the shadows which make the light, that if there were no contrasts, they would not be able to make a picture. It is the same thing with music: the contrast between “forte” and “piano”

is one of the greatest charms of music.

I knew some poets who used to say, “It is my enemies’ hatred which makes me value the affection of my friends. . . .” And it is the almost inevitable likelihood of misfortune which gives all its savour to happiness, and so on. And they value repose only in contrast with the daily agitation, silence only because of the usual noise, and some of them even tell you, “Oh! it is because there are illnesses that good health is cherished.” It goes so far that a thing is valued only when it is lost. And as Sri Aurobindo says here: When this fever of action, of movement, this agitation of creative thought is not there, one feels one is falling into inertia. Most people fear silence, calm, quietude. They no longer feel alive when they are not agitated.

I have seen many cases in which Sri Aurobindo had given silence to somebody, had made his mind silent, and that person came back to him in a kind of despair, saying: “But I have become stupid!” For his thought was no longer excited.

What he says here is terribly true. Men want freedom but they are in love with their chains, and when one wants to take them away, when one wants to show them the path of true liberation, they are afraid, and often they even protest.

Almost all man’s works of art — literary, poetic, artistic — are based on the violence of contrasts in life. When one tries to pull them out of their daily dramas, they really feel that it is not artistic. If they wanted to write a book or compose a play where there would be no contrasts, where there would be no shadows in the picture, it would probably be something seemingly very dull, very monotonous, lifeless, for what man calls “life” is the drama of life, the anxiety of life, the violence of contrasts. And perhaps if there were no death, they would be terribly tired of living.

(M9: 28-29)

### **Priesthood of Interpretation of the Eternal**

At a certain stage in the Yoga when the mind is sufficiently quieted and no longer supports itself at every step on the sufficiency of its mental certitudes, when the vital has been steadied and subdued and is no longer constantly insistent on its own rash will, demand and desire, when the physical has been sufficiently altered not to bury altogether the inner flame under the mass of its outwardness, obscurity or inertia, an inmost being, long hidden within and felt only in its rare influences, is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the Sadhana. Its character is a one-pointed orientation towards the Divine or the Highest, one-pointed and yet plastic in action and movement; it does not create a rigidity of direction like the one-pointed intellect or a bigotry of the regnant idea or impulse like the one-pointed vital force; it is at every moment and with a supple sureness that it points the way to the Truth, automatically distinguishes the right step from the false, extricates

the divine or Godward movement from the clinging mixture of the undivine. Its action is like a searchlight showing up all that has to be changed in the nature; it has in it a flame of will insistent on perfection, on an alchemic transmutation of all the inner and outer existence. It sees the divine essence everywhere but rejects the mere mask and the disguising figure. It insists on Truth, on will and strength and mastery, on Joy and Love and Beauty, but on a Truth of abiding Knowledge that surpasses the mere practical momentary truth of the Ignorance, on an inward joy and not on mere vital pleasure, — for it prefers rather a purifying suffering and sorrow to degrading satisfactions, — on love winged upward and not tied to the stake of egoistic craving or with its feet sunk in the mire, on beauty restored to its priesthood of interpretation of the Eternal, on strength and will and mastery as instruments not of the ego but of the Spirit. Its will is for the divinisation of life, the expression through it of a higher Truth, its dedication to the Divine and the Eternal.

(C23: 154-55)

### **In the Physical, Beauty Best Expresses the Divine**

I have received three questions . . . One is about a sentence in *The Synthesis of Yoga* where Sri Aurobindo speaks of the psychic being as “insisting” on “beauty restored to its priesthood of interpretation of the Eternal.” I have been asked what this means.

To tell the truth, I don’t know why; I don’t know if it is the old ascetic idea that beauty has no place in yoga, or if it is the word “priesthood” of interpretation of the Eternal, for which an explanation is being asked.

In the first case, I believe I have already said often enough and repeated that in the physical world, of all things it is beauty which best expresses the Divine. The physical world is the world of form, and the perfection of form is beauty. So I think it is not necessary to go over all that again. And once we admit this, that in the physical world beauty is the best and closest expression of the Divine, it is natural to speak of it as a “priestess”, who interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal. Its true role is to put the whole of manifested nature into contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, harmony, and through a sense of the ideal which raises you towards something higher. So I think this justifies the word “priesthood” and explains and answers the question. (M8: 215)

### **Yoga and the Arts**

*In the new creation would there not be great musicians, painters, poets, athletes etc. created from the Ashram?*

All kinds that are needed for the work or the manifestation would, I suppose, come.  
(C27: 733)

### **Painting and Sadhana**

Painting also is sadhana; so it is perfectly possible to make them one. It is a matter of dedicating the painting and feeling the force that makes you paint as the Mother's force.

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Of course everybody is here for Yoga and not for painting. Painting or any other activity has to be made here a part of Yoga and cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it stands insuperably in the way, then it has to be given up; but there is no reason why it should if it be pursued in the proper spirit, as a field or aid for spiritual growth, or as a work done for the Mother.

\*

You have painting and music in you and if you apply yourself they will develop in you. Only it is best to do it as an instrument of the Mother and as an offering to her, and not allow any personal desire for fame or appreciation by others or any personal pride to be the motives — for it is that that gives trouble. All work done as an offering is a great help and does not give trouble. (C27: 733)

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*Is it really possible to get anything simply by faith and surrender? I heard Mother said to X that if one wants to be an artist one must work hard. What is true of art, is true of everything, isn't it?*

For heaven's sake, don't be so universal in your rules. Art means a technique (especially painting, sculpture, etc., music also, poetry less), and technique has to be developed. But that does not mean that there is nothing that can come by simply faith and surrender.

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*Let Thy grace abide with me so that I may keep the right attitude towards Thee at the time of painting. Often I feel a vital atmosphere around me and a sort of vital excitement in me.*

What do you mean by vital excitement? There is an intensity and enthusiasm of the vital without which it would be difficult to do any poem, picture or music of a creative kind. That intensity is not harmful. (C27: 734)

### **Finding Beauty and Delight with the Help of the Spirit**

You can read sacred books and yet be far away from the Divine; and you can read the most stupid productions and be in touch with the Divine. It is not possible to get an idea of what the transformed consciousness and its movements are until you have had a taste of the transformation. There is a way of consciousness in union with the Divine in which you can enjoy all you read, as you can all you observe, even the most indifferent books or the most uninteresting things. You can hear poor music, even music from which one would like to run away, and yet you can, not for its outward self but because of what is behind, enjoy it. You do not lose the distinction between good music and bad music, but you pass through either into that which it expresses. For there is nothing in the world which has not its ultimate truth and support in the Divine. And if you are not stopped by the appearance, physical or moral or aesthetic, but get behind and are in touch with the Spirit, the Divine Soul in things, you can reach beauty and delight even through what affects the ordinary sense only as something poor, painful or discordant. (M3: 27)

### **Not an Easy Realisation**

The state of consciousness of which I speak here is very difficult to attain; it is a discipline which needs years and it is a realisation which is not within everybody's reach. There is, however, an intermediate state through which one has to pass: a state in which one cuts the connection between oneself and all that one does not want to hear or see. (M4: 153)

### **Beauty of the Divine Presence**

. . . he who has mastered himself, who has found his psychic being, who lives constantly in the consciousness of this psychic being, who has established a perfect relation or at least a constant relation with the inner divine Presence is enveloped in an atmosphere of knowledge, light, beauty, purity . . . (M4: 324)



## **Art — the Aspect of Beauty of the Divine**

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters, — although his art did not stop at painting alone. (M3: 110)

## **Spirituality — the Supreme Good Taste**

What is the relation between art and yoga? Can the artist and the yogi have the same source of inspiration? (*Mother turns to a disciple:*) Amrita, will you tell us what relation there is between art and yoga?

*A beautiful relation. . . . Art can be a yoga and yoga is an art.*

That's very fine! I knew someone, an American lady, who said that spirituality was supreme good taste, the best possible good taste. This is quite similar. (M4: 296)

## **Art and Yoga**

*What is the relation of Art to Yoga?*

The two are not so antagonistic as you seem to think. There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga, there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint. It is no longer the one supreme all-engrossing thing for you, no longer an end in itself. Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature.

*But does an artist feel at all any impulse to create once he takes up Yoga?*

Why should he not have the impulse? He can express his relation with the Divine in the way of his art, exactly as he would in any other. If you want art to be the true and highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from Yoga. But most often the artist has only an indefinite feeling, he has not the knowledge. Still, I knew some who had it; they worked consciously at their art with the knowledge. In their creation they did not put forward their personality as the most important factor; they considered their work as an offering to the Divine, they tried to express by it their relation with the Divine.

This was the avowed function of Art in the Middle Ages. The “primitive” painters, the builders of cathedrals in Mediaeval Europe had no other conception of art. In India all her architecture, her sculpture, her painting have proceeded from this source and were inspired by this ideal. The songs of Mirabai and the music of Thyagaraja, the poetic literature built up by her devotees, saints and Rishis rank among the world’s greatest artistic possessions.

*But does the work of an artist improve if he does Yoga?*

The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation? I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had visions and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups and downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go

far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, he began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist. (M3: 104-06)

### **Art — an Expression of the Divine in Life and through Life**

*Have Yogis done greater dramas than Shakespeare?*

Drama is not the highest of the arts. Someone has said that drama is greater than any other art and art is greater than life. But it is not quite like that. The mistake of the artist is to believe that artistic production is something that stands by itself and for itself, independent of the rest of the world. Art as understood by these artists is like a mushroom on the wide soil of life, something casual and external, not something intimate to life; it does not reach and touch the deep and abiding realities, it does not become an intrinsic and inseparable part of existence. True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life. Art was like that in Japan in its best moments; it was like that in all the best moments in the history of art. But most artists are like parasites growing on the margin of life; they do not seem to know that art should be the expression of the Divine in life and through life. In everything, everywhere, in all relations truth must be brought out in its all-embracing rhythm and every movement of life should be an expression of beauty and harmony. Skill is not art, talent is not art. Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.

For, from the supramental point of view beauty and harmony are as important as any other expression of the Divine. But they should not be isolated, set up apart from all other relations, taken out from the ensemble; they should be one with the expression of life as a whole. People have the habit of saying, "Oh, it is an artist!" as if an artist should not be a man among other men but must be an extraordinary being belonging to a class by itself, and his art too something extraordinary and apart, not to be confused with the other ordinary things of the world. The maxim, "Art for art's sake", tries to impress and emphasise as a truth the same error. It is the same mistake as when men place in the middle of their drawing-rooms a framed picture that has nothing to do either with the furniture or the walls, but is put there only because it is an "object of art". (M3: 108-09)

## Realisation and Transformation by Art

*By following the way of music or art or any other thing, why can't one arrive at the divine realisation and the transformation?*

Who has told you that? Do you know all that is happening in you? Don't you think that there are many people who have realised the Divine, who have never said anything about it, known nothing about it? There are people who have spoken about it — philosophers, whose very profession necessarily is to express what happened to them. But there are people who have had experiences but never said anything. And I know there are artists who purely by their art attained the divine realisation.

As for transformation, I would be glad if you could show me an instance; I would be glad to see it. *One* example. Whatever the way one follows, whether it be the religious way, the philosophical way, the yogic ways, the mystic way, no one has realised transformation.

*Since art does not arrive at transformation, it is not of much value!*

But who has ever reached there till now, will you tell me? Neither philosophy, nor religion, nor yoga. If you put the value in realisation and in the transformation of the world, for example one single individual transformation, admitting that it is possible, and I do not believe it, then nothing has any value, because nothing has ever reached there till today. Don't you understand?

*Yes, I understand that.*

Then why do you suddenly say that art has no value? Nothing has any value, because nothing has led to that? But everything helps. The whole universe is helping the transformation.

*But it may happen that the artist after having reached a certain height where he is master of his art, has to stop his work to proceed towards the transformation of his life.*

Why? For the transformation of his life? Who has told you that? If you were doing manual work, there are any number of artisans who have had a wonderful conversion. There is the example of a shoe-maker who became one of the greatest Yogis of the world. It does not depend on what one does, happily! You have to sit in meditation, like that, with an orange robe on, under a tree, to be able to realise the Divine?

So I do not understand anything of what you say.

*There may come a time when one must change one's activity?*

But by any path whatever, if you follow it sincerely enough and fairly constantly you arrive, by any path whatsoever — I tell you, you may make shoes and find the Divine. There are illuminating examples that are indisputable. It matters little what one does. There are numerous examples of people who were doing gardening, or cultivating, and who found the Divine even while they were working physically; they had no need to stop their work to do this. You do not understand? You believe one must have what? — a philosophical knowledge?

*No, it is not that, but I do not know how to express myself. . . .*

No, I understand very well what you mean to say, but, excuse me, it is something foolish. (M5: 82-84)

### **Using Art to Express the Divine**

*When a true artist concentrates and sees the Divine in himself, can he use art to express the Divine?*

And why not? Whom do you call an artist, first of all? A painter, a sculptor — Is that all? What else? What meaning do you give to the word “artist”? Of whom do you think when you speak of an artist? Of a painter or a sculptor?

*Someone who can draw.*

Yes, a painter, someone who can draw, it is the same thing. Of a painter, a sculptor, that's all? Painter and sculptor? Not of a musician or a writer or . . . I am asking you because the answer would be different according to the instances. . . .

*I had thought of someone who can draw.*

For instance, there were in the Middle Ages — there still are today, but they were already there in the Middle Ages — men who made stained-glass windows, designs with pieces of coloured glass and in various forms. In the churches, in cathedrals, there were always stained-glass windows. Instead of ordinary windows, there were these coloured panes which made designs. It is a wonderful material, for there is the sun behind (in any case the full light), and these glasses were transparent; so they gave out a colour which was as though self-luminous, and these men made designs, made pictures with these coloured glasses cut out, you know, in special forms and

painted in different colours. And that indeed was art. In all the cathedrals, the big churches, there were stained-glass windows; some of them were quite marvellous. And they expressed, for instance, the life of a saint or scenes from the life of Christ or . . . all kinds of things like that.

So, what is your question? Put it clearly.

*Whether one can express the Divine himself . . .*

Whether one can express the Divine himself in art? But in what can one express Him? I mean, what exactly do you call “expressing the Divine”? In words? In teachings? In books, finally? Or how else? Who has expressed the Divine completely in the material world? . . . It is only when the material world is transformed that it will be possible to express the Divine in his purity. And I don’t see what difference there can be between art and any other activity. It is something which has the capacity to become fused, but not entirely, and it remains (how to put it?) an instrument for giving a form. And I don’t see what difference this makes, whatever may be the form. If one can express the Divine with words, one can express Him with colours, express Him with sounds, express Him with forms. But in none of these instances is the expression perfect, for the union is not perfect. But when the world is transformed and the Divine is able to manifest Himself without being deformed, the expression will be perfect. But for the moment all expressions are on the same plane. None of them is better than any other. One mode of expression (I mean in itself) is not better than another. There is always *something* of the human personality, the being in form, which is there to give a limitation or deformation to what has to be expressed.

Art is just one activity like all others. Truly speaking, I was too polite to tell that lady this, but I thought: “Why do you make distinctions like that, all this is the same thing.” Do you catch what I mean?

*When one is identified with the Divine, does one see Him in the form one thinks He has?*

Usually. It is very rare — unless one is able to get rid of one’s mental formation completely — it is very rare to see Him quite objectively. Besides, Sri Aurobindo always used to say that the relation with the Divine depended on what one wanted it to be. Everyone aspires for a particular form of relation, and for him the relation takes that form.

*Then, what is it in truth?*

Probably something that escapes form totally — or that can take all forms. There is no limitation to the expression of the Divine. He can express Himself without form

and He can express Himself in all forms. And He expresses Himself in everyone according to each one's need. For even if somebody succeeds in becoming sufficiently impersonal so as to identify himself completely with the Divine, at that moment he will not be able to express it. And as soon as he is in a condition to express it, there will be something of the limited personality intervening and through this the experience has to pass. The moment of the experience is one thing and the expression of this experience is another. It may be simultaneous: there are people who while having the experience express what they feel in some form or other. Then it is simultaneous. But that does not prevent that which has the experience in its purity and that which expresses it from being two fairly different modes of being. And this difference is enough for one to be able to say in truth that it is impossible to know the Divine unless one becomes the Divine.

As for expressing Him, there is always a shifting; it always causes something like this (*gesture of changing levels*), whatever the mode of expression.

There remains only one field in which the experience has not been totally achieved, that is the purely material field. And there, it may be asked if truly, when the divine Consciousness descends into the body, the transformations will not be sufficient for there to be a possibility of integral expression. . . . But that is yet to come; it has not yet been done. And so long as it is not done, one cannot know. For even in the highest mental expression there is something which intervenes, due to the physical body. For the inspiration to come right down to the paper, for instance, well, despite everything, it must pass through very material vibrations which may change it. But if these very vibrations are transformed, then in that case it is possible that the outer expression is absolutely identical with the inner; that is, the corporeal manifestation truly becomes a manifestation of the divine essence. (M5: 320-23)

## **A Home of Beauty**

When the surroundings, circumstances, atmosphere, the way of living and above all the inner attitude are altogether of a low kind, vulgar, gross, egoistic, sordid, love is reluctant to come, that is, it always hesitates to manifest itself and generally does not stay long. A home of beauty must be given for Beauty to stay. I am not speaking of external things — a real house, real furniture and all that — I am speaking of an inner attitude, of something within which is beautiful, noble, harmonious, unselfish. There Love has a chance to come and stay. But when, as soon as it tries to manifest, it is immediately mixed with such low and ugly things, it does not remain, it goes away. This is what Sri Aurobindo says: it is “reluctant to be born” — it could be said that it immediately regrets being born. Men always complain that love does not stay with them but it is entirely their fault. They give this love such a sordid life, mixed with a heap of horrors and such vulgarity, things so base, so selfish, so dirty,

that the poor thing cannot stay. If they don't succeed in killing it altogether, they make it utterly sick. So the only thing it can do is to take flight. People always complain that love is impermanent and passing. To tell the truth, they should be very grateful that it manifested in them in spite of the sordidness of the house they gave it. (M4: 402 )

## Yogis and Great Creations

*. . . if one does Yoga can he rise to such heights as Shakespeare or Shelley? There has been no such instance.*

Why not? The Mahabharata and Ramayana are certainly not inferior to anything created by Shakespeare or any other poet, and they are said to have been the work of men who were Rishis and had done Yogic *tapasyā*. The Gita which, like the Upanishads, ranks at once among the greatest literary and the greatest spiritual works, was not written by one who had no experience of Yoga. And where is the inferiority to your Milton and Shelley in the famous poems written whether in India or Persia or elsewhere by men known to be saints, Sufis, devotees? And, then, do you know all the Yogis and their work? Among the poets and creators can you say who were or who were not in conscious touch with the Divine? There are some who are not officially Yogis, they are not *gurus* and have no disciples; the world does not know what they do; they are not anxious for fame and do not attract to themselves the attention of men; but they have the higher consciousness, are in touch with a Divine Power, and when they create they create from there. The best paintings in India and much of the best statuary and architecture were done by Buddhist monks who passed their lives in spiritual contemplation and practice; they did supreme artistic work, but did not care to leave their names to posterity. The chief reason why Yogis are not usually known by their art is that they do not consider their art-expression as the most important part of their life and do not put so much time and energy into it as a mere artist. And what they do does not always reach the public. How many there are who have done great things and not published them to the world! (M3: 107-08)

## A One-pointed Orientation

At a certain stage in the Yoga when the mind is sufficiently quieted and no longer supports itself at every step on the sufficiency of its mental certitudes, when the vital has been steadied and subdued and is no longer constantly insistent on its own rash will, demand and desire, when the physical has been sufficiently altered not to



bury altogether the inner flame under the mass of its outwardness, obscurity or inertia, an inmost being, long hidden within and felt only in its rare influences, is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the Sadhana. Its character is a one-pointed orientation towards the Divine or the Highest, one-pointed and yet plastic in action and movement; it does not create a rigidity of direction like the one-pointed intellect or a bigotry of the regnant idea or impulse like the one-pointed vital force; it is at every moment and with a supple sureness that it points the way to the Truth, automatically distinguishes the right step from the false, extricates the divine or Godward movement from the clinging mixture of the undivine. Its action is like a searchlight showing up all that has to be changed in the nature; it has in it a flame of will insistent on perfection, on an alchemic transmutation of all the inner and outer existence. It sees the divine essence everywhere but rejects the mere mask and the disguising figure. It insists on Truth, on will and strength and mastery, on Joy and Love and Beauty, but on a Truth of abiding Knowledge that surpasses the mere practical momentary truth of the Ignorance, on an inward joy and not on mere vital pleasure, — for it prefers rather a purifying suffering and sorrow to degrading satisfactions, — on love winged upward and not tied to the stake of egoistic craving or with its feet sunk in the mire, on beauty restored to its priesthood of interpretation of the Eternal, on strength and will and mastery as instruments not of the ego but of the Spirit. Its will is for the divinisation of life, the expression through it of a higher Truth, its dedication to the Divine and the Eternal. (C23: 154-55)

#### **Four Aspects of the Truth We Seek**

When we reach this degree of perfection which is our goal, we shall perceive that the truth we seek is made up of four major aspects: Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. These four attributes of the Truth will spontaneously express themselves in our being. The psychic will be the vehicle of true and pure love, the mind will be the vehicle of infallible knowledge, the vital will manifest an invincible power and strength and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and a perfect harmony. (M12: 8)

