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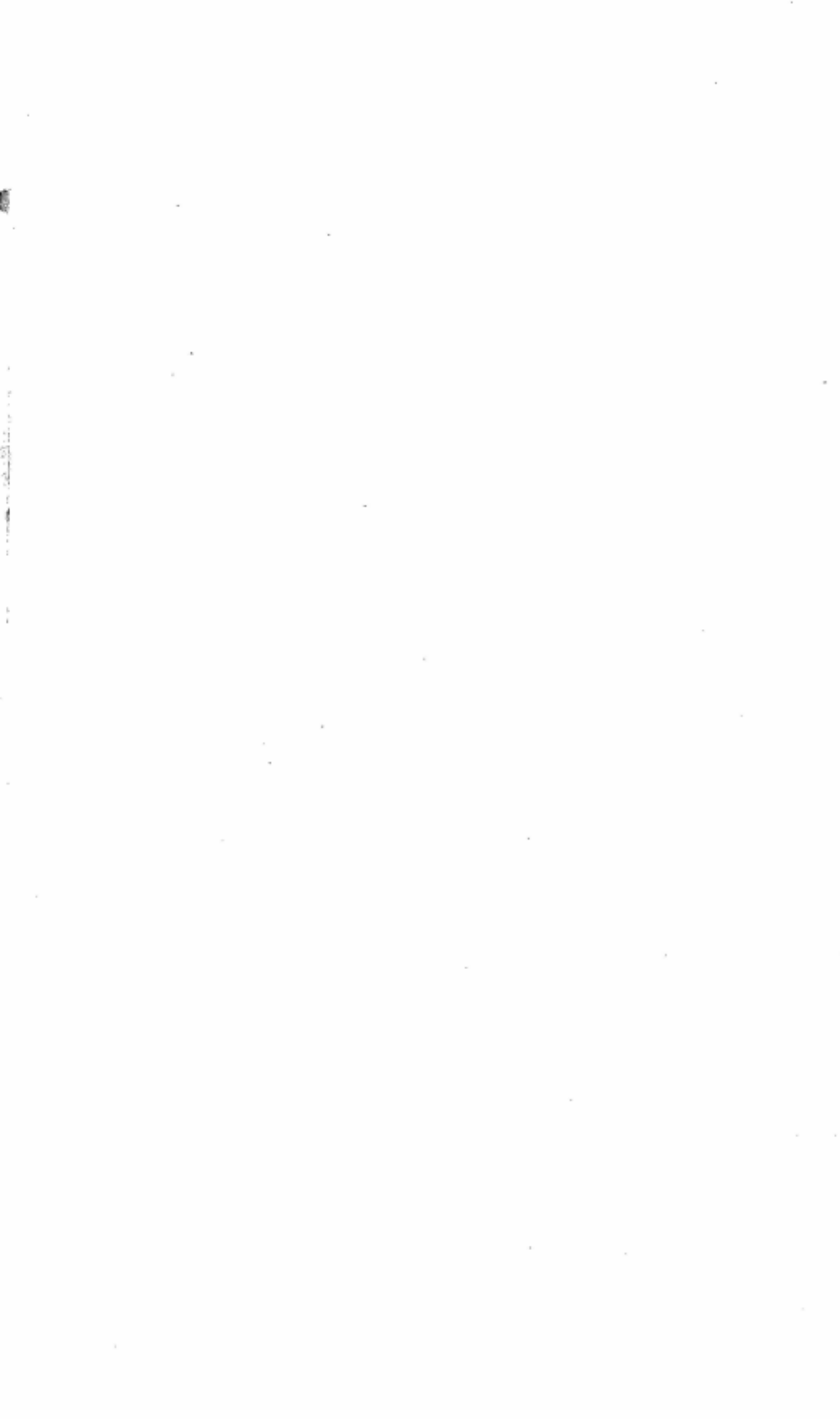
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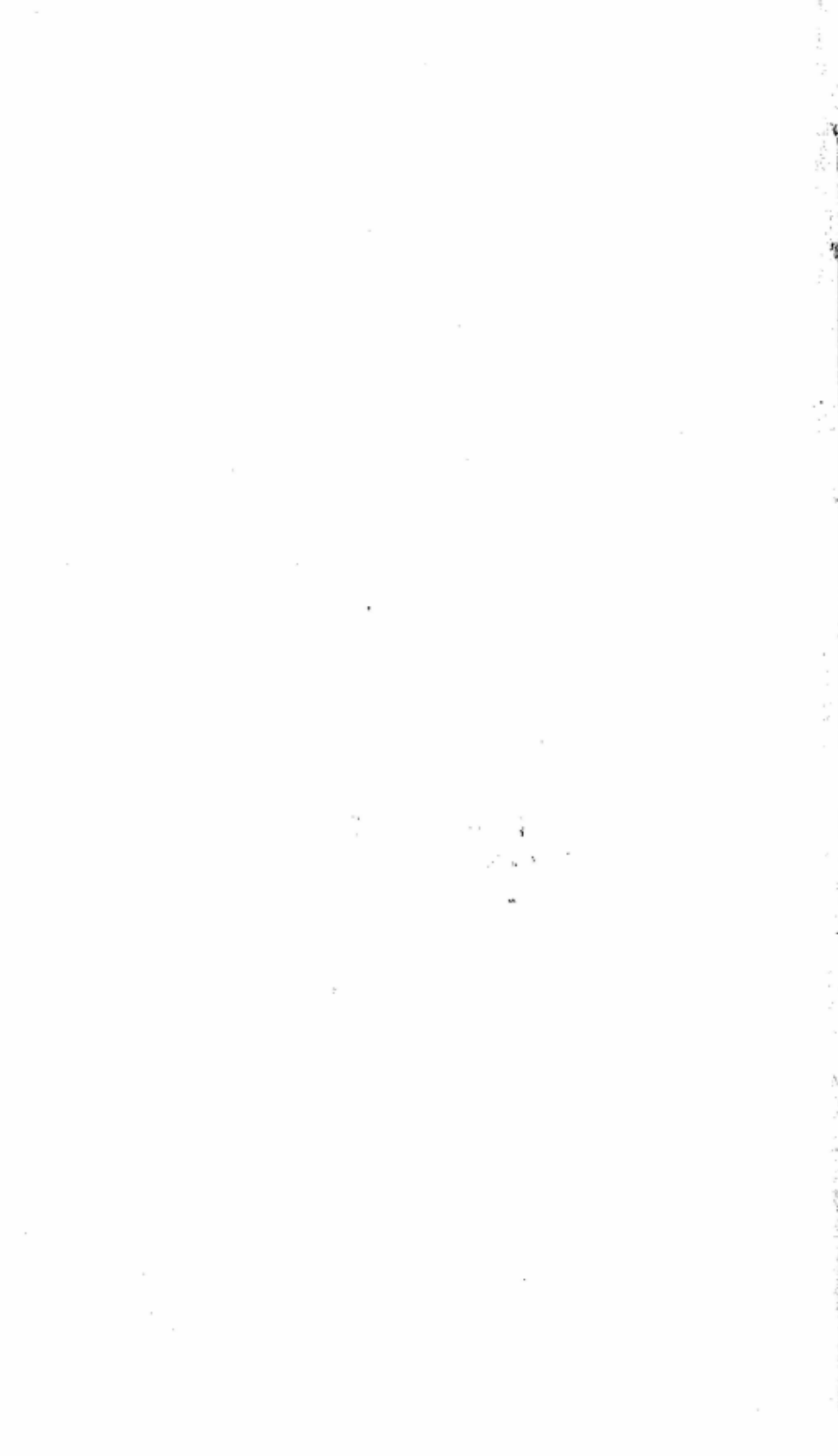




MONOGRAPH 67

BEAUTY, ART AND MAN





# BEAUTY, ART AND MAN

*Studies in Recent Indian Theories of Art*

PABITRAKUMAR ROY



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Roy

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY  
SHIMLA

in association with

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For  
RATNABALI  
CHANDRAKIRTI  
and  
RATNAKIRTI  
who were all with me on Prospect Hill  
looking down the valleys



What from your Fathers' heritage is lent,  
Earn it anew to really possess it.

Gothé, *Faust*



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I have to thank the Administration of the Institute for the hospitality and facilities it granted me, as a Fellow, at the time when I was doing the work of which these essays are the fruit; also the members of the typing pool for bearing with me patiently and cheerfully in respect of my indecision concerning my prose.

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I am happy to put on record my appreciation of Professor D.B. Datta, Vice-Chancellor, University of North Bengal, for his kindness in granting me leave of absence to join the institute. My thanks are also due to my colleagues at the Department of Philosophy for sharing my academic responsibilities during my absence.

Shimla  
November 1, 1987

PABITRAKUMAR ROY





## Foreword

The relationship between nature and art as much as the conception of beauty has evoked serious response from philosophers and artists of all civilized societies. The author of this volume has addressed himself to this problem with special reference to the thought of some eminent Indian writers: Rabindranath Tagore, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, Kalidas Bhattacharya and N.V. Banerjee. What is common to them all is a dynamic conception of man which integrates the natural, the existential and the metaphysical aspects. In this common concern, art is subsumed under man. As a human message art is born out of man's freedom. It is the token of his responsibility for his own realization.

It is a fresh viewpoint that the author presents in this volume, and therein lies its interest.

J.S. GREWAL  
Director



## Preface

Since the publication of *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, edited by Radhakrishnan, followed by two kindred Volumes, edited by Professors Margaret Chatterjee and N.K. Devaraja, the concept of recent Indian thought has become a viable one and worth inquiring into. Attention is drawn to this area for various reasons, for the international character of the Indian philosophers as much as for their search for cultural identity. However, some work has already been done on some of the globally renowned thinkers, Tagore, Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, and that too in respect of their metaphysical views, ontology and epistemology. In most of the cases, the studies have been expository in nature, treating the thinkers as if they were isolated phenomena. Whatever linkages are sought to be established have been in respect either of their anchorage in the classical Indian thinking or their deflections from it. Hardly any attempt has been made to pursue their thought on art and related matters, hence this study.

My approach in this work is frankly philosophical, a search for concepts and ideas, their explication, formulations and inter-relations. The method has been descriptive and analytical, and an attempt is made to put and understand the thinkers in the light of the possible influences on them. It may appear idiosyncratic at places, but perhaps not altogether lacking in conviction and argument.

It was the late Professor Kalidas Bhattacharyya who urged me to look for the Kantian framework in Tagore. A perusal of Eva Shaper's 'Friedrich Schiller: Adventures of a Kantian', and L. Mackey's *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* left me convinced of the legitimacy of my intentions. Above all, Heidegger's writings on Rilke and Holderlin had aroused me from my fashionable slumber: that poetry and philosophy stand forever divorced. And was not it a philosopher, A.N. Whitehead, who said that a line and a half of Euripides contains all the problems of western philosophy? So much for the confessional part of my essay on Tagore.

It will be noticed that our thinkers, who are otherwise as diverse as a Tagore and a Coomaraswamy, a Sri Aurobindo and a K.C. Bhattacharyya or N.V. Banerjee, are linked by a common concern. It is their conscious search for and formulation of a concept of man. All of them have proposed an anthropology with a view to explaining the question: why is art possible? Yet their explanation and formulation of notions of art is as varied as their anthropologies.

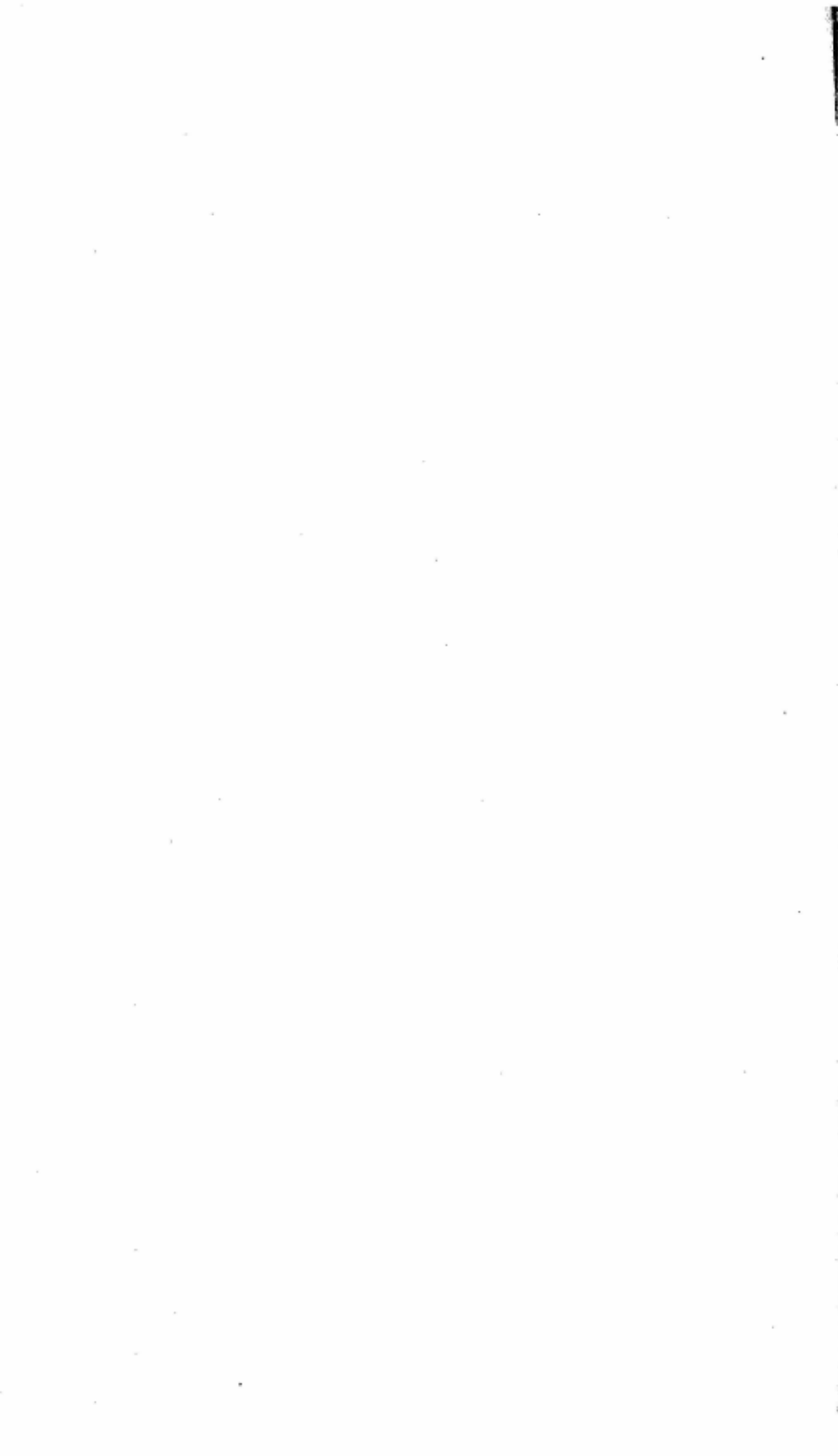
There should be no scepticism concerning the richness of their contribution to the philosophy of art. The freshness and significance of their ideas suggest newer dimensions of the discipline. They may be seen to have taken the notion of the creative self in their stride the idea of art being a reflex of an evolving consciousness along with the concepts of art as freedom through feeling or art as iconography. There is reexamination of a classical critical tool like the *sahydaya*, the possibility of aesthetic communication, and also of our knowledge of the artist's intentions. A broad spectrum indeed!

Since Independence our exposure to the West has widened. But how many of us are capable of moving back and forth between antiquity and modernity as our seniors did? The wisdom of the West does not incarnate itself in technology alone. The equation between 'modern' and 'western' is as confusing as that between 'science' and 'technology'. In point of fact, these elders of ours are modern, for they alone can teach us the art of cultural adjustment and assimilation in a creative way. Neither tradition nor individual talent alone is the secret of creativity, but a dialectic of the two. It finds no better illustration anywhere than in the ideas of the thinkers portrayed and considered in the following essays.

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## CHAPTER I

## Rabindranath Tagore: Art as the Language of Personality

Reality reveals itself in the emotional and imaginative background of our mind. We feel ourselves in a special field of realization. The consciousness of the real within me seeks for its corroboration the touch of the Real outside me. In art we express the delight of this unity by which the world is realised as humanly significant. Where the harmony is not deeply felt, we are aliens and perpetually homesick. By nature man is an artist; he never receives passively a physical representation of things round him. There goes on a continual adaptation, a transformation of his sentiments and imagination.

### *The Religion of Man*

A phenomenon of breathtaking creativity, hardly any other person has done more than Rabindranath Tagore, in recent Indian history, for the aesthetic education of man. A poet's poet that he was, he wished that the cultivation of imagination should be the chief aim of education. In education we have a duty to educate the imagination above all else. For we use imagination in our ordinary perception of the world. It is also necessary if we are to see the world as significant of something unfamiliar. It is significant indeed that Tagore speaks of the 'luminous imagination', and considers it to be the most distinctly human of all our faculties. It is not only that in art imagination is the king, for Tagore it is also an instrument of the Good. It is what constitutes man's ontology as 'the angel of surplus', and also the source of our idea of God. It therefore appears philosophi-



cally respectable to pursue Tagore's ideas on art, man and deity through tracing the thread of imagination. And I propose to do it by bringing Tagore into a framework of professionally philosophical thinking. In course of the essays that follow we shall proceed in the following manner, first, we shall be presenting a case for Tagore's theory of art; to be followed, secondly, by an account of imagination, the role it plays in his philosophy of existence; and lastly, there will be a note on the Schiller-Tagore link in respect of their ideas on art and man.

## A. TAGORE'S THEORY OF ART

### I

The expression 'theory of art' designates a complex meta-disciplinary concept. A theory of art provides, broadly speaking, an analysis of the basic concepts and methods of art, a descriptive account of the types of phenomena involved, an explanation of the relation of art to the fuller context of human life, etc. One could as well talk about the structure of a theory of art, namely, the kinds of problems to which the theory is addressed in its attempt to understand the phenomenon of art.

I should however like to begin by distinguishing between 'theory' and 'art'. The two are distinct notions. One is a species of knowledge or of learning; the other is creative and contains strongly non-rational elements. Hence the problem is one of how, intellectually, to deal with art. It is possible in dealing with art to emulate the general scientific ideals of objectivity, impersonality and certainty? In a famous passage in the third *Critique* Kant has averred that a science, by way of concepts, of the beautiful is not possible. Art, as Tagore says, is a matter of 'taste value'<sup>1</sup> rather than a question of truth value.

Naturally, Tagore was not interested in building up a theory of art. But, on art he did write, and wrote extensively, as he felt, or as his feelings led him to think. He does employ the concept of art and even asks the question 'what is art?'. Yet the thrust of his inquiry is not avowedly conceptual. The *raison d'être* of art, 'the reason' of its existence'<sup>2</sup> is to Tagore a matter

<sup>1</sup> P. Neogy (ed), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*. A Selection of lectures, essays and letters, Orient Longmans, Calcutta 1961, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

of greater concern than its treatment as a problem of knowledge. He declined to reduce art to ideas. The question of primary importance, for him, is somewhat Kantian: 'How is art possible?' In answering this he has recourse to philosophical anthropology.

Apparently, Tagore holds an indefinist thesis, not because he thinks that 'art' is a simple notion but because of the peculiarity of his attitude to art. He uses the term 'art' to include the processes of creativity, communication, appreciation or criticism. Of these the creative process could be considered the necessary condition of the phenomenon of art. A clue to Tagore's conception of the creative process in art may be found in his identification of the creator with either a child or a woman.<sup>3</sup> This identification is not explained in terms of psychology, it is rather a symbolical interpretation of the creative process. Tagore intends thereby to relate creative work to some fundamental human characteristics. Much of his critical writings on art is symbolism, and based upon the primal and elemental experience of human life. His critical concepts such as *personality* and *the surplus in man* map, as it were, the twin domains of art and anthropology. Or, to put the matter differently, the set of statements constituting Tagore's theory of art is a sub-set of the set of statements that go to make his philosophy of man.

Before I proceed further to elucidate Tagore's 'theory of art', I should like to make some clarificatory remarks.

First, about the variety and type of his writings on matters regarding art. Tagore was indeed a practical critic of the arts. His literary criticism and pieces on theory of criticism comprise an important area of study. But he is certainly not a philosopher of art, as Hegel is. Tagore does have significant things to say about literature or poetry in general, about a *genre* of music in the capacity of a composer and, to an extent, about the art of painting. He was dear to their Muses. But he says very little about individual arts as such, and nothing about their historical development of forms.

Second, to the contemporary student of aesthetics reared in the analytical tradition a reading of Tagore's writings on art might prove to be an experience of logical uneasiness. One might say that Tagore does not concentrate on the real differences between actual works of art, on the specific features of the different arts. On the contrary, he operates with the word

'art' and makes irregular assimilations of differences. Tagore often forgets that art is a plurality, and, in many of his moods, he reduces it to imagination and expression. Above all, there is in him a predisposition to essentialism, and he appears to look for the special essence of art, its ultimate nature. Tagore's accents are placed on the general and not on the unique, on what is specific to art. In other words, Tagore's theory of art has an *a priori* character.

Now the charges such as those above are motivated by a passion for clarity. But in philosophy, as elsewhere, this clarity is, more often than not, bought at a price. And it is worth noticing that Tagore, though he is by no means a confused thinker, does not set a high value on clarity. He does not disparage it, but says that 'clearness is not necessarily the only, or the most important, aspect of a truth'.<sup>4</sup> Again, the charges, if levelled against Tagore, would hardly cause any serious damage to him as a thinker on art. This is because aesthetics in the analytical fashion is not the only tradition in philosophy. For Tagore art presupposes man or, as he himself has put it in the form of a counter-factual conditional, had there not been men the Apollo of Belvedere would not be beautiful. This law-like statement should never be overlooked in connexion with evaluating the distinct position Tagore occupies as a thinker. When he says that '...analytical treatment will not help us in discovering what is the vital point in art',<sup>5</sup> he uses the word 'vital' almost literally.

Tagore has a celebrated essay entitled 'What is Art?' Moore has taught us that questions of the form 'what is...?' are either demands for definitions or meanings of terms in question. There have been, in philosophy, two ways of answering such questions. One is Plato's way, i.e. to spell out the essence of a notion. Adoption of this way leads to what is called the essentialist fallacy. This may be true, but the other side of the picture is not happy at all. The logical analyst denies that the 'theory' of art is a matter of completed cognition. But in so denying the logical analyst in fact says that the essence of art is unknowable.

The other is Wittgenstein's way. According to it, instead of asking 'what is art?' one should ask 'what is the concept of 'art'

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 25.

like?'. We are told not to ask for the meaning of the term 'art'; we should, we are told, rather ask for the use of the term. It follows that a theory of art is logically impossible, for art does not and cannot have a system of necessary and sufficient properties. 'Art' is an open concept. This means that it is impossible to identify some necessary properties of 'art', because new art-forms may in the mean time emerge. The conditions of the application of the concept are changeable.

It is obvious that Tagore does not follow Plato's way, though he is not as agnostic as the logical analyst. What would be his reaction of Wittgenstein's prescriptions? I believe, Tagore would object to the linguistic behaviourism presupposed in Wittgenstein's account. It is conceivable that Tagore could argue that to espouse behaviourism would render the theory of art descriptive. In Wittgenstein's manner one could at best have empirical generalisations to the effect that certain types or kinds of works are called 'art' or 'beautiful' in given linguistic groups or human societies. One might examine the works of art so-called, but one could never arrive at the ultimate significance of art. The form of the work of art is never to be confused with its significance which always transcends its modes of expression. This amounts to saying that Tagore's view of art is non-naturalistic. He maintains that it is impossible to derive art from a survey of works of art. Examples in art may suggest to us the possibilities of creative expression. But nothing more than that. Meaning and criteria in art stand asymmetrically related for Tagore. This line of argument is not, of course, his for the first time. It has been made familiar by Kant in connexion with morality. The Kantian character of Tagore's thought is not usually noted.

## II

It is one of the contentions of this essay that what Kant achieved for moral law in the *Groundwork*, and for the aesthetic realm in the *Critique of Judgement*, is what Tagore accomplished in his theory of art. This statement can be vindicated notwithstanding the differences of aptitude and methodology of the two thinkers. Tagore's theory of art is non-hedonistic, non-teleological and based on an argument from freedom.

I shall now address myself to the task of establishing this point, and I propose to do it by considering two of his critical

concepts, namely, *personality* and *the surplus in man*. The two notions are largely inter-definable.

To take the notion of *personality* first. The word 'personality' comes from Latin '*per*', meaning 'through', and '*sono*' meaning 'to speak'. Hence it means 'through which the actor in a drama speaks'. In the Noh-drama of Japan the actor hides himself behind a mask. In Tagore's vocabulary the derivation of 'personality' is taken further back, from the thing spoken through, to the speaker. 'Personality', for Tagore, is an achievement-word, and it is used specifically in the human context. In terms of Tagore's account, man's consciousness gets coloured by emotions as he encounters the world. When his emotions become integrated within himself, they constitute his personality. The act of integration occurs at a higher level of consciousness than that of ordinary experience. The *a priori* character of the notion of personality is evident from Tagore's description of it as 'a self-conscious principle of transcendental unity within man'.<sup>6</sup> Is it very far from Kant's notion of the transcendental unity of apperception?

Tagore distinguishes between experience as such and one's own consciousness of experience. Accordingly, he maintains that in art it is not the experience itself that the artist expresses, but his personality, i.e., his own consciousness of the experience. Tagore could be called an expressionist but with a difference. The word 'expression' has a richer connotation in the context of Tagore's theory. The *telos* of art is to project another order of man's being, man's true world.<sup>7</sup> This world, which transcends the world of facts, is called the 'world of expression',<sup>8</sup> and it is a creation of man's personality. It is significant that for Tagore 'creation' and 'expression' are interchangeable terms, designating, as they do, an unanalysable unity.<sup>9</sup>

One should note Tagore's concept of mind and his view regarding the role of emotions in man's life. Tagore's concept of mind is farthest from that of Locke. It is, he says, an instrument of creation. The logical mind is hardly the whole story about man's mind; there is also man's creative imagination which manifests itself against a background of emotions and this

<sup>6</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1931, 119.

<sup>7</sup> P. Neogy (ed.) *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Tagore considers to be most distinctly human of all our faculties.<sup>10</sup> It should be evident from Tagore's concept of mind that he would not admit any sharp demarcation of experience into subjective and objective compartments. There is a great deal of the play of the subjective even in fields where objectivity is supposed to have sovereignty. The world, says Tagore, takes its form in man's perception, and becomes 'our own' by coming within the range of human emotions.<sup>11</sup>

Further, emotions, for Tagore, are the principal means of man's unification and harmonization with the world; and Tagore insists on their referential or semantic function. Emotions may unite us with the world; they may also alienate us from it or from one or more of its objects. That is, there are positive as well as negative emotions. Through the positive ones, we are told, the 'world becomes a part of our personality'. If this world were taken away, he continues, 'our personality would lose all its content'<sup>12</sup>. It is notable that Tagore's distinction between our experiences as such and our consciousness of these experiences implies that all emotions, positive as well as negative, should enjoy a similar status at the higher order of our consciousness of them. In other words, our consciousness on the level of personality could be disinterested if it were aesthetic in the proper sense of the term. Tagore, however, sets a higher value on the unificatory function of the emotions than on their alienating function. He might say that the role of the negative emotions on the aesthetic level is distinct from that on such levels as the biological or the moral. Hence when the emotions are 'entertained' (to borrow the phrase from C.I. Lewis) from the aesthetic point of view, both positive and negative ones make us realize the world as more fully and richly real than normal experience.

Personality, thus, is both the 'I' and 'Thou' of human existence. Man's conscious life, as Tagore envisages it, implies a conflict, potential or real, between the polarities of man's being. When the conflict is resolved into harmony, through the establishment of a living relationship (which, for Tagore, is the nexus between art and life), something resembling Aristotle's *katharsis* takes place. Again, it is analytic for Tagore to say that man's

<sup>10</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 17-19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

consciousness of unity, or his achievement of personality, *mutatis mutandis*, his success in integrating his emotions, is creative. This implies that a work of art has its genesis in a feeling of unity which is creative, and hence a successful work of art is a creative unity. It seems that the term 'creative' implies an evaluative notion for Tagore, and it is also worth noticing that he holds to the view that such wholes or unities are indefinable. With Moore, he would say that they are so because they are unanalysable, but perhaps not because they are simple. Tagore's account of the creative process does not stop at integration of emotions. He says that human personality can integrate the facts of experience to such a degree that imagination begins to overflow. The overflowing of the integrated personality is the creative process.

It may be understood in the light of what is a matter of common experience in the region of music. The form of a composition may appear to bloom or to radiate beauty if it is adroitly tightened a bit by means of a slight acceleration of its aesthetic pace. The notion of 'overflowing' is easy to ridicule. Modern critics have been harsh about it in connection with Croce's expressionist theory of art. Quite apart from this, the notion is also intelligible—and defensible. However, the notion has enjoyed a respectable frequency among idealist writers on art, and its occurrence in the literature of Romantic literary criticism should hardly go unnoticed.

Tagore almost ontologizes the matter of overflowing of integrated emotions by his notion of *the surplus in man*. The expression, though an idiosyncratic coinage, is one of his most fertile concepts. It is intended to answer the question: 'what kind of energy is it that urges man to express himself in art?' Tagore does not tell us where precisely this surplus comes from, but experience does provide us with the data that could back up the generalization that art originates in the surplus in man. The locus of the surplus lies in man's personality. When man becomes self-expressive he draws upon the surplus in him.

The surplus in man could be interpreted as a distinct plane of human existence. It is free from the pressure of biological impulses and the propensity to apply moral categories. Attitudinally, the surplus level of man's consciousness is 'disinterested' in Kant's sense. In contrast to such planes as the biological and the moral, which are strictly speaking planes of action, the

surplus in man is primarily contemplative or visionary. Kant calls it the aesthetic realm. At other levels of consciousness man is highly pragmatic and governed by the principles of expediency and utility. Tagore believes that by actively modulating his relationships with the world man can advance from quantity to quality, from facts to truth, from necessity to choice, from utility to self-expression. Thus art originates in the surplus in man. All human creativity has its source in the surplus, which he talks about as 'an incessant explosion of freedom'.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that personality, otherwise called 'the personal man'<sup>14</sup> interchangeably with 'the surplus in man', is pure *will*, 'free from all necessity,—above the expedient and useful'. Tagore describes the surplus as 'the inspiration of man's will', and says that 'we can make use of the universe, we know the universe and we also will the universe'.<sup>15</sup> The creative will Tagore is speaking about is as autonomous as Kant's moral will. But there is a difference. Tagore's notion of will is much fuller, it is not atrophied to the point of being merely rational.

### III

Tagore conceives of art as an encounter of the self with its other. 'The world and the personal man are face to face, like friends....'<sup>16</sup> The central theme of Tagore's theory of art, then, is the notion that art is a bridge across the chasm which alienates the individual from the world around. This fact, then, calls for a clearer statement about Tagore's intentions regarding the relationship of the self with the world in the context of art-experience.

It could be best done in terms of a theory from which Tagore's departures are worth noticing.

The theory might be stated as follows. Self-hood is an ontological situation in man apart from the world. From this metaphysical position it follows that aesthetic experience is more often subjective in essence. It is tasting one's state of consciousness charged with delight. This delight is delight in self-expression. Further, aesthetic emotions, being products of imagination, are, as such, non-intentional, and free from the

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 22.



exigencies of action. This fact would entitle one to characterize aesthetic emotions as dispassionate and disinterested. The world, in terms of the non-intentionality of aesthetic experience, is rendered aesthetically non-existent. One of the possible variants of the theory could be the *rasavāda* of Anandavardhana.

To an extent, of course, Tagore shares the point of view stated above, but it is unmistakably true that for him the end of art lies beyond the self. That art is a process of delineation and that the intentionality of human consciousness maps onto a non-solipsistic world are brought out by the following of Tagore's statements. 'The consciousness of the real within me seeks for its own corroboration the touch of the Real outside me. When it fails the self in me is depressed'.<sup>17</sup> The world as revealed to the aesthetic consciousness, as Tagore describes it, is 'man's true world'.<sup>18</sup> He is, in effect, enunciating a critical canon when he is saying that the poet, or for that matter, the artist, must have his audience. Aesthetic consciousness cannot remain contented till communication is achieved. The aesthetic self and the social self, in spite of the uniqueness of the former, intersect. Accordingly, in Tagore's view, aesthetic delight betokens a clarification of self-consciousness simultaneous with a deepening of world-consciousness. The two are co-implicates of each other.

It may be observed that Tagore extends the solipsistic variety of *rasavāda* in a significant direction. And he does it by insisting on outer criteria for inner processes, just as Wittgenstein did in his *Investigations*, though in a different context. Or, shall we say that in so doing Tagore is, in effect, acting from a Kant-like view of the harmony of the faculties of imagination and understanding in respect of the judgement of taste (see *Critique of Judgement*, Analytic of the Beautiful, section 9),<sup>19</sup> even though Kant's emphasis on the subjective side of the aesthetic experience has been a little more marked than on the objective correlate of the aesthetic consciousness.

Another of Tagore's aesthetic doctrines is that art humanizes nature, a view he shares with A.N. Whitehead: 'The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (tr. J.H. Bernard), Hefner Publishing Company, New York and London 1968.

effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of its background. Thus Art heightens the sense of humanity'.<sup>20</sup> It is significant that Tagore talks of the creative process as 'a continual adaption, a transormation of facts into human imagery'.<sup>21</sup>

There are passages in Tagore which might ring as statements of the *Einfühlung* theory of art. The term *anubhūti*, a Sanskrit synonym for the English 'empathy', occurs frequently in Tagore's writings in the context of the self's relationship with nature. With our emotions working upon it, the world, he says, 'becomes a part of our personality'.<sup>22</sup> Now, according to the *Einfühlung* theory, aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. The contemplative (i.e., non-practical) self, it is asserted, by sympathy with another's mental state, is lifted out of itself. And, empathy is a distinct form of pleasure; it is to feel in objects, not about them. According to another version of the theory aesthetic delight is absorption in an object for its own sake. Apparently there are many such words in Tagore. But his divergence from the so-called empathy theory of art should also be carefully noted. For Tagore, aesthetic experience is a projection of the self into, as well as its introjection with nature. It is then possible to say that to the notion of art as an overflowing of the self into the object Tagore has added the notion of art comprehending the object into the self.<sup>23</sup> The point of interest is that Tagore, with the help of his critical notions of *personality* and *the surplus in man*, could entertain, in his theory of art, two diverse contentions, namely, the notion of *Einfühlung* and its contrary. This feature enhances the explanatory power of his theory of art. The notion of *Einfühlung* could be employed in the explanation of our enjoyment of drama, especially tragedy; while its contrary notion might be employed as a presupposition for the fact of our delight in lyric poetry of the romantic sorts in particular.

#### IV

Apropos of my earlier remark that Tagore's theory of art is

<sup>20</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1961, 270.

<sup>21</sup> P. Neogy (ed.) *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> 'I feel that all the stars shine with me. The world breaks into my life like a flood': *Fruit Gathering* IXXX.

subsumed under his philosophical anthropology, I should now like to make a couple of observations about the existential perspective of his theory of art. By the phrase 'existential perspective', in the present context, I mean the assumptions about the world and human nature, image of man, etc., operative in the theory. As I have used it, the term 'existential' refers to a way of viewing existence. In Tagore's theory of art the general concept of existential perspective takes the following special form.

There is some point in saying that Tagore's existential perspective is psychological. That is, the basic elements of his theory are feelings or emotions, introspectively discernible states of consciousness, acts of empathy, etc. But it is nonetheless non-naturalistic in the sense that the aesthetic potential of emotions is disclosed only through the higher-order concepts of *personality* and *the surplus in man*. Art, for Tagore, is not a function of desires or emotions as natural sentiments.

Tagore looked to the notion of the surplus in man to stem the tide of naturalism or, for that matter, hedonism in art. Art is not a function of the biological or utilitarian propensities of man; hence his stress on the element of transcendence in human nature. That man is 'an angel of surplus' is an existence condition for the phenomenon of art, and this whole sentence is no less significant than the remark that aesthetic consciousness presupposes 'the emotional and imaginative background of our mind'.<sup>24</sup> Thus Tagore's existential perspective is large enough to include the natural as well as its transcendence. One could say that Tagore's existential perspective purports to give a picture of aesthetically relevant aspects of the world and man's nature. Accordingly, Tagore would not say that truths of the form 'X is beautiful' are logically independent of any truth about what exists, or of whatever the nature of the world may be. Aesthetic values are values of human reality.

But one might further note that Tagore's existential perspective is not independently established. That is, its sole evidence lies in the phenomenon of which it is the existential perspective. This is a feature Tagore shares with Kant. The supposition that man has a free will is Kant's existence condition for morality; the only evidence for it, according to Kant, is the

<sup>24</sup> P. Neogy (ed.) *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 73.

demand for it implicit in our moral consciousness.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in Tagore's case, the 'evidence' for the surplus in man is to be found in aesthetic phenomena. These perhaps do not constitute evidence, so much as point to Tagore's outlook on matters of art.

## V

Corresponding to his account of the creative process in terms of 'the surplus in man' (used interchangeably with 'personality'), Tagore provides what may be called the unity-definition of beauty.

In Tagore's usage the word 'beauty' has an emotive as well as a cognitive meaning. But I am not sure if he could be called an emotivist, and, for that matter, it may be said that, for him, the emotive meaning is not the determinant for the use of the word. I would rather describe Tagore as an emotionist [to borrow the term from P.S. Årdal as in *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise*. Ch. 9, Edinburgh, 1966]. Emotivism is a doctrine about the function of evaluative language, and Tagore is not primarily concerned with language. He is, however, telling us that to say that something is beautiful is to feel about it in a certain way. In a sense, the term 'beauty' is an emotion-word, and the emotion with which it is connected is, of course, the aesthetic emotion.

How does Tagore elicit cognitive meaning from the word 'beauty'? The function of art, according to Tagore, is to heighten our consciousness of reality. And, 'it is', he says, 'what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express'.<sup>26</sup> Since 'Reality is human', and art objectively embodies our 'intimate feeling of reality',<sup>27</sup> the aesthetic substantive, 'beauty' denotes human truth, just as the adjectival 'beautiful' is descriptive of it.

It is worth noticing that Tagore never recoils from saying that

<sup>25</sup> Tagore's critique of hedonism and utilitarianism is specifically Kantian. Of special interest is Tagore's view that 'goodness is for the sake of goodness'. This is Kant's doctrine of the absolute worth of the good will, expressed in Tagore's style. In the case of Tagore too the evidence for his existential perspective, i.e. the surplus in man, lies in a life of goodness alone. See *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5-6 and 15.

<sup>26</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1931, 134.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

art is no phantasy because it renders truth (or otherwise impersonal and isolated facts) humanly significant. To humanize facts is to subsume them under a unity or harmony by touching them, as it were, with emotions and creative imagination. Hence Tagore's notion of harmony has a felt quality about it; it is not a pre-established harmony, it is generative. Aesthetic harmony is an achievement on the part of human will by acts of transcendence. By 'relating truth to the person' or, in other words 'actively modulating its inter-relations',<sup>28</sup> there occurs the disclosure of reality which, Tagore says, is human. In terms of the foregoing account, Tagore's notions of 'art' and 'reality' are cognates and belong to the family of the concept of harmony.

That beauty pleases us by virtue of its non-practical character is an accredited thesis. But Tagore's version of the matter is interesting for its deeper anthropological import.

It was also Kant's point that the aesthetic activity is becoming aware of our own inner nature and processes. He talked as well about the lightening of our darkness as a harmony of our faculties, as Tagore does. But Kant's notion of harmony does not extend to comprehend the nature of the object. But in Tagore's case, 'the deeper relatedness'<sup>29</sup> of harmony is of the nature of love, wherein 'we realize ourselves in others'.<sup>30</sup> The point Tagore thus seeks to establish is that aesthetic harmony is trans-subjective in character; and it should be considered as something distinct from the Kantian harmony of the object with man's cognitive faculties as they come into play in reflective judging of it. The point about trans-subjectivity may be said to have been implicitly acknowledged by Kant, but it is no less true to say that he was precluded from an explicit formulation of it on account of his theory of knowledge. Kant's emphasis on the *form* of the object is the sole universal element in aesthetic perception of any rational imagination. For Tagore, on the other hand, the intuition of an individual as it is in itself is the mark of art-experience. There are two elements, rather a unity of the two poles of existence, namely, that the individual is seen afresh and recognized as real, and that the perception 'compels us to say, "I see"'.<sup>31</sup> Kant is certainly right in saying that the aesthetic judgement is always a singular dealing, though he recoils from

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 136-37.

putting the matter in terms of the intuition of the individual. Tagore's affiliation to and his deflection from the Kantian position find a clear expression in the following statement: 'We know a thing because it belongs to a class; we see a thing because it belongs to itself'.<sup>32</sup>

That beauty lies in harmony is another point worthwhile observing in respect of Tagore's Kantian position. Kant maintains that the harmony of the form of the object with our faculties pleases us. And when the relation emphasized is the adaptation of the object to our faculties it is called beautiful. We think of it as designed not for any particular end but just for human perception. This is Kant's celebrated notion of subjective purposiveness. Now the point about teleology is not merely that it is regulative in Tagore's case, as it is with Kant. As Tagore has conceived the notion of harmony, it is constitutive, of creative experience. Further, one might wonder if Tagore would ever share Kant's anxiety<sup>33</sup> for the truth of teleological judgements—at least in identical terms. Harmony, for Tagore, is a human truth, and, in point of fact, he repudiates the charge of subjectivism with the remark that 'the concrete objectiveness of this living truth cannot be proved to its units. They can never see its entirety from outside; for they are one with it'.<sup>34</sup> Human ontology comprises both the self and its other; 'the reality of existence . . . is in harmony with the real within us. Where this harmony is not deeply felt, there we are aliens and perpetually home sick'.<sup>35</sup>

Kant's doubt about the purposiveness of nature might be taken as anticipating a number of contemporary moods in philosophy: the existentialist's view that nature does not vouchsafe any value, or Wittgenstein's proposition<sup>36</sup> that no values exist in the world. Does Tagore ever have to struggle with such darknesses? Answers to this question are not easy and require a different set of philosophical presuppositions than that of the

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>33</sup> See *Critique of Judgement*, Part II, Section 61. It is, of course, another story that Tagore in his later poems came to doubt the concept of purposiveness in nature. No less interesting is the point that Kant in his *Groundwork of Morals*, First Section, 14, takes the purposiveness of nature for granted. This ambivalence, if it should be so called, is noticeable in Tagore's poetic career as well.

<sup>34</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 132-33.

<sup>36</sup> Ludwig, Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.41.

present essay.

Tagore distinguishes between art and nature, the personal man<sup>37</sup> and the natural man, or, to borrow an image from one of his own poems: 'Man alone sings, while the bird goes on repeating its wood notes wild'. Kant described art as 'production through freedom' (C.J. Section 43) and as 'a work of man'. It is interesting to note that Tagore's example of the beehive as an instance of instinctive efficiency, in contrast to human freedom<sup>38</sup> and the case of the song of birds and that of human beings are to be found in the *Critique of Judgement* (see Sections 22 and 43). Now, it should be arguable that the distinction between art and nature implies the position Kant maintains about the purposiveness of nature, viz. idealism. According to the principle of ideality, the purposiveness of the beauty of nature is aesthetic. As Kant has put the matter: 'Our aesthetical judgement is itself legislative in respect of the judgement whether anything is beautiful or not' (C.J., Section 58, p. 195). The position of idealism is contrasted with that of realism which judges the purposiveness of nature teleologically. The crucial point with Kant is whether it is we who receive nature with favour, or nature shows us favour. In so far as judging the beautiful in nature and art is concerned Kant's emphasis is on autonomy. His intention is to show that in judging the beautiful we 'seek its gauge in ourselves *a priori*', and as such the purposiveness is subjective, i.e., to be explained on supersensible grounds as necessary and universal.

Kant's worry about the logical status of aesthetical judgements has not been Tagore's but he too is concerned with explaining our delight in the experience of the beautiful in nature and art. Let us consider two passages from Tagore with a view to ascertaining that his intentions are Kantian.

He maintains that somewhere 'in the arrangement of [the] world there seems to be a great concern about giving us delight'.<sup>39</sup> Could we take the passage as an instance of what Kant called the realism of the purposiveness of the beauty of nature? Only a negative answer would be apposite. Tagore's concept of nature, in so far as it bears aesthetic significance, is comprehended within 'Reality' or 'the truth of Man'.<sup>40</sup> As an object

<sup>37</sup> P. Neogy (ed.) *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

of aesthetic consciousness, nature cannot but be in harmony with our personal self which may be taken as Tagore's equivalent for Kant's 'supersensible substrata of humanity'. To be in harmony is to have undergone a transformation into human imagery. In Tagore's terms, nature viewed aesthetically is 'the geography of [man's] personal self';<sup>41</sup> it is not merely physical.

Elsewhere Tagore says that not only 'art is *māyā*' but that the world as a whole could be looked upon as a work of art, for art is essentially image-making.<sup>42</sup> The remark that 'art is *māyā*' is variously significant. It gives a new interpretation of the notion of *māyā*. But that is a different story. The term *māyā* in the sense of 'image-making' is of ancient usage and occurs in that sense in the *Rgveda* (54.2), though its aesthetic employment is Tagore's. It is important to notice in this connexion that his expression 'image-making' drives home the truth that imagination has something to do with images. Now, the said faculty, in its freedom, as Kant demands, fashions forth an image of nature for itself. And thus fashioned, nature is a human reality—in other words, a product of freedom. That something is a product of freedom is as much for Tagore as for Kant, the *sine qua non* of that object's being a work of art. Hence if nature could be apperceived as aesthetically significant, then any talk of its beauty or its purposiveness should only be without purpose. This is what Tagore describes as 'the eternal secret of appearance'.<sup>43</sup> Or, as he has said elsewhere, there can be no mapping of beauty: it is not a mere fact, it is rather an expression. It should be observed that the word 'expression', in Tagore's usage, is a value-term, and it is employed with a transfactual connotation. However, Tagore's intention seems to be that our conceptual apparatus could only profane aesthetic experience by producing any causal account of such experience. Beauty is indefinable in the sense that causal explanations are inappropriate outside the context of scientific reality. The beautiful or, for that matter, human value is a reality of a distinct order, and one cannot hope to elicit it by invoking a hypothetico-deductive model. As a matter of fact, Tagore provides, through his anthropology, a hermeneutics of art. The value of his theory of art lies chiefly in that direction.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>42</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 48-9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 48.



## VI

Tagore seeks to maintain a definitional link between the notions of beauty and goodness. Freedom from necessity, i.e., the surplus in man beyond the bounds of vital urgency and utility, is a pre-condition of value or worth, be it for feeling or action. It is worthwhile to mention here two of his decisive remarks (i) 'Complete understanding of goodness', says Tagore, 'is not possible in the realm of nature'.<sup>44</sup> And (ii) 'Beauty transcends necessity'.<sup>45</sup> Both beauty and goodness have their origin outside nature's domain, i.e., in freedom. Now, given the basic duality in man's being—the 'continual tension between man's natural condition and his true character'<sup>46</sup> what is called for is an autonomous will, which would exert itself in realizing the human values. Such a will as this could only be produced by the surplus in man.<sup>47</sup> The domains of the moral and of art lie, for Tagore, necessarily beyond 'the shadow of self-interest',<sup>48</sup> in the surplus which, he says, is man's greater self.

There is much in the foregoing account that chimes in with Kant. Apart from considering the logic of the predicate 'beautiful', Kant has also made the significant suggestion that the beautiful and the morally good stand in a special relation. He sums up his view with the pronouncement that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good. This is also a statement concerning the relation between our aesthetic and moral experiences.

The upshot of Kant's treatment of the beautiful in the Analytic part of the *Critique of Judgement* may be summarily stated as follows:

Our feeling for the beautiful is reflexive. In contemplating the beautiful the mind returns upon itself and enjoys its subjective unity. The existential status of the object of aesthetic experience undergoes a change owing to the disinterestedness that marks the experience. Or, we may say that in the context of aesthetic judgement the predicate usurps the subject. The existence of the object of aesthetic delight is left undetermined by any concep-

<sup>44</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Man*, Kitabistan, Allahabad 1946, 28-9.

<sup>45</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5. (See also Rabindranath Tagore, *Man*, 47-8).

<sup>46</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Man*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 83. Also Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 45.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

tion. It has its dependency and modality erased, as it were.

In all this there is little to object to, given the premises for Kant's thesis about the subjectivity of the beautiful. But, coming to the Dialectic, he describes the beautiful as an aesthetic idea which he says, is a counter-part of what he calls an Idea of Reason. Kant is, in point of fact, distinguishing between two types of general notions and their relation to sense-experience. By the expression 'aesthetic idea' he means a perception of imagination for which no adequate concept can ever be found. Beauty is essentially indefinable. Kant is obviously right in saying that objects are beautiful only in so far as they have something that can never be defined at all, i.e. reduced under a definite conception of the understanding.

The concepts of the understanding are the concepts of the possibility of experience. These can be, as Kant has phrased it, schematized, i.e., given adequate sensible envisagement, and thereby become cognitions. But no such device is available, according to Kant, for the class of general notions that go beyond the possibility of experience. Kant designates them as Ideas of Reason.

It is no part of my intention here to recapture the richness and profundity of Kant's theory of Ideas.<sup>49</sup> Let me offer only a few explanatory remarks with a view to getting at the significance of Kant's view about the relation of the beautiful to the morally good, which, he says, is an Idea of Reason.

The Ideas of Reason are *a priori* notions which are neither abstracted from nor applicable to experience. The concepts of the understanding assert the minimum of unity necessary for experience and therefore can be proved theoretically; the Ideas assert more and therefore cannot be so proved. As Ideas of the supersensible, they are metaphysical concepts to which no corresponding object can be given. These ideas are conceived as arising out of the unity of self-consciousness in its contrast with the consciousness of objects. They can be thought without ever becoming objects of knowledge. Transcending, as they do, all possible experience, the ideas are transcendent, i.e., not immediately related to perceptions. Reason, the faculty for the highest synthesis of our cognitions, is, according to Kant, the source of the Ideas. And one such idea is freedom.

<sup>49</sup> The account of these is to be found in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Now what could Kant mean by saying that the morally good is an Idea of Reason? Determination of the Good Will is the only thing properly to be called good. The Good Will alone is free, and freedom, for Kant, means that what determines is one with what is determined. Now Reason, when it manifests itself in moral consciousness, can have only itself for its object, or the (moral) law, which mirrors its universal nature. The self under the moral law, then, is alone the morally good. The idea of the morally good is the consciousness of the realization of the self in the object.

The moral law is the law of freedom, and to realize the moral law is to realize an idea of reason that is bound up with self-consciousness. Hence the morally good cannot be known as objectively good. The outward effect of our action in the objective world (which is under the law of necessity) can never be recognized as good, i.e., as realization of freedom. It only typifies the realized good. The type is to be taken as giving objective meaning to the idea of its end, and idea for which we can never find an adequate object.

The existence of an object as the objective realization of the morally good interests us because we will it. This may be taken as the creative element in Kant's account of moral consciousness, since the morally good is the objective obverse of freedom, and the interest is an interest of freedom. The relation between the self under its own law and the object (in which it finds a symbolic [or typic] body of its realization) is not a free one as that which marks the contemplation of the beautiful in the Analytic. But the description of the beautiful as an aesthetic idea renders the reflexivity of the aesthetic consciousness transitive. The object is rescued from its alleged illusoriness and restored to a value-like<sup>50</sup> mode of being. As a result of assimilating the beautiful to ideas its subjectivity stands altered. It is now far removed from a 'subjectivism' in which there is no reference to an object. The subjectivity of the Dialectic account of the beautiful is a subjectivity which is creatively and dynamically seeking 'objectivity'. Neither the aesthetic nor the moral values can be said to be objective in the sense of subsisting independently of human agents. Nor could it be Kant's intention. In

<sup>50</sup> 'In Kantian ethics at any rate, there is no moral value . . . no self-subsistent value which the will is to realise' Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Calcutta 1958, Vol. II, 332.

his view, the objectivity of values, moral as well as aesthetic, is created and made known to the agent through his actions and self-consciousness.

We are now in a position to appreciate Kant's remark concerning the symbolic character of the beautiful in the light of his doctrine of concepts and ideas. The view that the aesthetic idea is the counterpart of the idea of reason is explained by Kant with the help of a doctrine of symbolism. An idea of reason is not capable of being adequately schematized. But it could be symbolized, i.e., brought under an image which may not be adequate to it, though its relation to the conception under which it falls could be analogically used to give reality to the idea. In short, a symbol is an analogy. In the *Prolegomena* Kant uses 'analogy' to mean 'a perfect likeness of two relations which hold between quite unlike things' (see section 57). A symbol, then, is a perception which represents a conception indirectly, though appropriately, through a similarity between the rules which govern our reflection in the symbol and in the thing symbolized. In this sense of symbolism the beautiful is the<sup>51</sup> symbol of the morally good. It should mean, among others, that the sensible (the beautiful) and the supersensible (the morally good) are in harmony. The value of the beautiful lies in its appeal to the whole man, since it moves the double nature of man. In saying this I should not be taken to read Tagore in Kant. In fact this is suggested by Caird<sup>52</sup> himself. There is, in Kant, undoubtedly a recognition, though hesitant owing to his formal datum, of the fact that the beautiful bears 'an everlasting meaning of reality'. These are Tagore's words, but could as well be Kant's in so far as he recognized the true rank of the beautiful to be the expression of reason in sensuous form.

On the point of uniting moral expressiveness with beauty, Tagore's position would remind one of the leading thought of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and it could be looked upon as an extension of Kant's doctrines in the *Analytic* and the *Dialectic* parts of the *Critique of Judgement*. His point seems to be that the idea of beauty and the character of goodness

<sup>51</sup> Can there be more than one symbol of the good? The Bernard translation of the *Critique of Judgement* has 'the' and this seems to be in order. Bosanquet (*A History of Aesthetics*, 274) and Korner (*Kant*, 193) have 'a' as they state Kant's view. *The Critical Philosophy of Kant*, Vol. II, 449), of course, retains 'the' in the context

<sup>52</sup> *The Critical Philosophy of Kant*, Vol. II, 465, 475.

are different forms of one consciousness. Kant is limited in his recognition of this matter by his theoretical distinctions between knowing, thinking and feeling on the one hand, and between nature and freedom on the other. Tagore, on the contrary, is not as theory-bound as Kant, and, with an artistic nature both more impressionable and more cultivated, he can seek to find a harmony between the spheres which Kant, in spite of his intentions, ultimately held apart.

The subjectivity of the consciousness of the beautiful is, of course, there in Tagore. The harmony or unity which, according to him, is the true principle of art—and, hence, of beauty—is the property of the surplus self and not of things. Accordingly, the aesthetic delight is self-referential: it arouses, he says, 'our own self-feeling'. In contemplation of the beautiful, to borrow Tagore's expression, we touch the object with our emotions, and 'our touch comes back to us . . . and our consciousness is intensified'.<sup>53</sup> Similar also is the point of *rasavāda*, and Kant in his *Analytic* holds that in the aesthetic consciousness the mind is conscious of unity with its immediate self.

But, with Tagore, self-consciousness is always relative to a consciousness of objects. It deepens with a deepening awareness of the world. The anxiety of self-consciousness—in other words, of personality—is sought to be creatively realized outside itself. 'The revelation of unity . . . which we find in nature, is beauty'. Or, 'Beauty is the harmony realised in things which are bound by law'.<sup>54</sup> There is an echo of Kant in these statements. The harmony of nature and freedom which was only hinted at by him finds in Tagore a very clear elaboration. Aesthetic consciousness is bipolar, and since truth lies in the unity of the self with its object, both of them partake of reality.

In Kant's account of the beautiful, the will does not come into play at all. But Tagore's surplus self, which realizes the beautiful, is conative. This has been referred to earlier. And this should explain why Tagore envisages the function of art in terms of conation, e.g., 'the building of man's true world'<sup>55</sup> or 'a continual adaptation, a transformation of facts into human imagery'.<sup>56</sup> The very suggestive statement 'creation is freedom'<sup>57</sup> is

<sup>53</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, Macmillan and Co., London 1965, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 89.

equally true, in Tagore's context, for the realization of beauty as well as goodness.

Both the beautiful and the morally good are, in Tagore's terminology, 'infinite ideas'.<sup>58</sup> Now, this expression is significant in the present context and could be taken as corresponding roughly to Kant's theory of the ideals (Kant speaks of 'ideals' of reason as well as of ideas) that are universal and regulative in their function. These ideas of 'the limitless unattained' are said to give character to what is attained.<sup>59</sup> Functionally, then, Tagore's ideas are related to man's creative activities just as the Kantian Reason is to the understanding. Kant says that there would be no coherent use of the understanding without reason.

The infinite ideas are visions of wholeness<sup>60</sup> and are revealed in the self-consciousness of the surplus self which is man's creative imagination.<sup>61</sup> Further, the infinite ideas presuppose freedom which, as Tagore conceives, is the 'extra-natural'<sup>62</sup> dimension of man.

According to Tagore, the infinite ideas cannot be adequately expressed, because the forms of their expression are finite. Hence the expressions of the infinite are indefinite. Forms alone can be definite. So, Tagore goes no farther with Kant than distinguishing between the concepts of the understanding and the ideas of reason. He does not distinguish the aesthetic ideas from the rational. This, of course, is in keeping with his theory of knowledge, in terms of which it is possible to have a perception or intuition of an individual that is yet universal.<sup>63</sup> The possibility of such a perceptive understanding is specifically rejected by Kant in his first *Critique*. In the *Critique of Judgement* he does reopen the issue by speaking of the harmonious working of the faculties of imagination and understanding, but the appearance of the division between them is still kept up. The harmony is only felt, rather than achieved.

When Kant says that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good he also insists on the point that the symbolical is a mode of the intuitive. How does this point bear upon Tagore's view

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 54-5.

<sup>62</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 81.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 58.

that the expressions of the infinite ideas are necessarily inadequate? How does an infinite idea stand related to its expression? Tagore conceives 'expression' as a process of approximation, a progressive realisation of the ideal. This is also the manner in which he conceives human creativity of freedom.<sup>64</sup> The meaning of the finite forms as expressions of the infinite is more than what they can contain.<sup>65</sup> These may be incomplete but not imperfect.<sup>66</sup> Human creativity engages itself to make the 'manifestation' of the infinite ideas 'more and more clear'. There goes on, in short, a continual but never completed verification of the ideas.

With this is closely connected Kant's view of genius as a faculty for the expression of aesthetical ideas. It produces imaginative forms which give us more to think than can be gathered into one conception and which, therefore, can only be taken as the embodiments of the ideas of reason. Through human creativity, one might say (to borrow Kant's language) reason shows itself in the form of sense. And much of it is what Tagore means by saying: 'That which is eternal is realising itself in history through the obstructions of limits'.<sup>67</sup>

Tagore's conception of the morally good is by far Kantian. I should like to quote two passages to illustrate the point. Tagore says, 'In [man's] moral life he has the sense of his obligation and his freedom at the same time, and this is goodness'.<sup>68</sup> Again, 'The will which is free, must seek for the realization of its harmony other wills which are also free, and in this is the significance of spiritual life'.<sup>69</sup> The passages are close parallels of Kant's formulas of autonomy and the kingdom of ends (*Groundwork*, 101 and 106). The purity of moral motives and the centrality of the freedom of the will are basic to Tagore's view of moral life. For him, the property of being moral is interchangeable with the property of being human. To be human is to be a member of 'the extra-natural world'. Man's true life is in 'the region of what ought to be'.<sup>70</sup> And the membership consists in turning our 'passions and desires from tyranny into obedience'.<sup>71</sup> In

<sup>64</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 60.

<sup>66</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 59.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 101.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

brief, what 'the intellect is in the world of Nature will is in the moral world'.<sup>72</sup>

What is remarkable is the fact that the above characterizations of moral life or consciousness are, for Tagore, equally applicable for the office of art. Beauty, no less than the good, is a liberating power: it liberates us from the domain of instinctive urges or natural inclinations.<sup>73</sup>

Does Tagore deny the metaethical point that the logic of 'good' is different from that of 'beautiful'? His point rather is that virtues satisfy us just as beauty does. Hence, there can be certain judgements, such as 'pity is beautiful', that may be of mixed import—moral as well as aesthetic. In the third *Critique* Kant appears to suggest that certain descriptions of aesthetic import seem to be based on a moral appreciation of aesthetic features. Many instances of aesthetic response are analogous, says Kant, to the consciousness or the state of mind brought about by moral judgements.

But would Kant say that the analogy could also hold in the reverse direction? Could we talk about the aesthetic significance of our moral experiences? It cannot perhaps be denied that the contemplation of virtuous life yields us certain aesthetic satisfaction. And if, as Tagore has argued, beauty makes for restraint,<sup>74</sup> then the choice of the beautiful and the effort to bring it about would be attended by goodness. The notion of the complete good should, of course, include such choices and efforts. The Greeks used the same term *kalos* indifferently to express beauty and moral nobility. In Sanskrit the word for the beautiful, e.g., *śobhana* is derived from the word for the good, i.e., *śubha*. According to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (1-10) the names of the stages of a Bodhisattva's moral consciousness are connotative of aesthetic excellence.<sup>75</sup>

Tagore has expressed his position in the remark: 'Beauty is Good in its fullness as fullness of Beauty is Good incarnate'.<sup>76</sup> It should be noted that Tagore's statement is made with reference to the notion of 'fullness'. It has not been Tagore's intention to show that the beautiful and the morally good are logically compatible.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>73</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 3, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>75</sup> At least the first four are aesthetics predicates, viz. *Pramuditā*, *Vimalā*, *Prabhākārī*, *Arcismatic*.

<sup>76</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5.



That is not enough. There must be some connexion between the two. He says that the connexion is of the nature of mysterious union. The word 'mystery'<sup>77</sup> simply serves to indicate that the connexion cannot be grasped by taking the concepts in their simple significance.

What does Tagore mean by 'fullness'? The question is important, because it is only in their fullness that the two notions (or ideas) have their domains interrelated. Tagore, initially, lays down a set of necessary conditions for 'fullness' namely, going beyond self-interest, being viewed apart from sensual desires, being entertained or chosen by a non-heteronomous will, etc. All these are renunciative properties connoting the non-natural character of the beautiful and the morally good. But, because they are infinite ideas, something more is needed for their fullness, and this is their being in accord with Truth. Obviously, Tagore's notion of truth is non-propositional; it is rather metaphysical.<sup>78</sup> In the context in question 'truth' means being 'in consonance with creation as a whole and therefore also with the world of men'.<sup>79</sup> In short, truth is harmony. Elsewhere Tagore says that truth is Man or, to have it better expressed, 'the manifestation of Man'.<sup>80</sup> It follows that in so far as the beautiful and the morally good are revealed in the surplus self—in other words, as the notions are subsumed under anthropology (not, of course, in Kant's sense of the term)—they show a connexion beyond their logical compatibility. They become the values of human reality. Neither of them, in alienation from the human reality, would possess any creative worth; beauty would degenerate into a matter of charm, and the good into either prudence or hedonism. Again, neither of them has any alleged primacy. Their subsumption under an anthropology of a creative surplus self relates them to each other. In his theory of art, rather in his account of the relation between the beautiful and the morally good, Tagore seeks to avoid the two extremes of 'intemperance of imagination' as well as 'intolerant arrogance of goodness'.<sup>81</sup> According to him, neither

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>78</sup> See Concluding Remarks, II, for a fuller discussion of Tagore's Concept of Truth.

<sup>79</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 69.

autonomism nor moralism is the truth of art; it lies in intensifying our sense of reality.

## VII

In the foregoing account of Tagore's theory of art there is no pretence of gathering the full harvest of his immense activity. My effort has been to insist upon some dominant convictions the importance of which is avouched by almost the whole course of Tagore's ideas concerning art and beauty. I have intended the account as a study in the history of ideas based on a striking family resemblance between kindred notions in Kant and Tagore.

The problem of the 'Kantian' Tagore is interesting for Tagore's view of art, in spite of its Kantian affinity, is not the same as Kant's. He seeks unity where Kant sought for difference. For Kant there are *a priori* principles of taste, as there are *a priori* principles of theoretical knowledge. Nevertheless, nature and art, truth and beauty, remain generally divorced. For Tagore, on the other hand, the division between the two domains is not as sharp as it is in Kant. Tagore would have said with Shaftesbury, 'All Beauty is Truth'. His path, then, was different. He developed, as we have seen, his aesthetic theory out of the Kantian-looking concept of freedom which he called 'the surplus in man'. He designated art as *māyā*; and it should follow from this that beauty means for him freedom in appearances. The truth of the view could be traced back to Kant's distinction between beauty, knowledge and practice. It is there in Tagore too, but he goes beyond Kant by correlating 'freedom' to 'necessity'. According to Kant, such a correlation is revealed in the moral realm where ethical freedom is identical with 'autonomy'. Tagore carries this view into art.

I am uncertain how much Tagore knew of Kant's philosophical ideas. But there are passages in *The Religion of Man*, *Personality* and elsewhere that have a Kantian ring about them. Kant's ideas might have reached Tagore through diverse literary sources. He knew Goethe and Coleridge. Caird's great work on Kant was also known to him. But did he know Schiller? There is no evidence of this and yet in many ways the Kantian character of their thought is comparable. In both of them there occurs a rhetorical development of the meant or implicit content of Kant's aesthetic doctrines; though Tagore stands to Kant in

a freer relation than Schiller. Neither of them shares the tensions of Kant's epistemology. What is more important is Schiller's ideas of aesthetic semblance, of the play-impulse (which anticipated Herbert Spencer's view on the matter) for there is indirect evidence that Tagore had studied it. One of his essays on the nature of music is based avowedly on Spencer's thesis, his notion of the objectivity of the beautiful, its metaphysical import, and its worth as a real expression of man's being. He holds, as Schiller did, that human freedom is attested no less by aesthetic experience than by the moral. Man's sensuous nature and its obverse are compatible when they are brought under aesthetic unity. Hence the realization of the infinite in the finite is a possibility which both admit. Conceptually, Schiller could be a link between Kant and Tagore. In historical actuality he was a link between Kant and Goethe.

Tagore might not have been a Kantian in the strict sense of the word. But we need not on that account reject the Kantian character of his aesthetic convictions. Another great artist, Goethe besides, Beethoven was also carried away by Kant. Kant stimulated in them different productive directions. Tagore might not have remained wholly untouched by Kantian ideas, however indirect the sources were. Tagore's Kantianism interests us because it shows how profound philosophical ideas work not only in their own circle but even amongst non-professionals. His Kantianism is a strange analogue of the Kantian position in the third *Critique*. Much of it is peculiar to himself. But in its uniqueness it is significant and illuminating. One who is philosophically sensitive cannot but feel the lure, and encounter the challenge of the viability of Tagore's theory of art.

### VIII

Some of the implications of Tagore's theory of art may now be briefly stated.

(a) If the pursuit of art is the same as the pursuit of life, how should we, in Tagore's terms, distinguish between our consciousness of harmonious relationships and works of art? Tagore might come forward with the word 'technique' meaning that by which we actually modify our living relationships. By modification of relationships is meant conceptualization of relationship in poetry, music, painting, etc. Creativity is the continuum between a harmonious consciousness and its

expressive embodiment with the help of technique and media. These are not extra-aesthetic in Tagore's case as they are in Croce.

(b) Since Tagore entertains the thesis that art is autonomous, he would (and in fact does) reject all teleological explanation of art, its social function in particular. The implication of the thesis can be only dubitably generalized. The art of architecture has always had a social function. It is inconceivable that architecture would have ever developed in the absence of any teleological motivation. Tagore's account partially explains such styles of architecture as the Gothic or the Baroque. But the notion of functionality in modern architecture does present a problem. So would the art of pottery. Tagore mentions, in support of his own position, the ancient Hindu view that the aesthetic delight is disinterested and non-teleological. Ananda Coomaraswamy for one would not accept this opinion about the art of the ancient Hindus, be it iconography or architecture. Tagore's argument for the autonomy of art is essentially modern.

(c) At another level Tagore's argument for the autonomous nature of art does not hold. The function of art, as he himself says, is to remove the shadows that obscure the image of man in the world. This may indeed be conceived as the end of art. Hence Tagore's argument that art is autonomous is not impervious to a teleological restatement, in the broader perspective of his own theory. In this respect he shares a common fate with Kant. The latter's deontological account of ethics can as well be interpreted as teleological in respect of the notion of human dignity which must be taken care of by any right action. In his own formulations of the principle of morality Kant leaves this possibility open.

(d) Tagore writes that he came upon the notion of 'the surplus in man' in the Vedic commentary literature.<sup>82</sup> There is no doubt that he develops it in an original fashion. He often alludes to the metaphor of the twin birds<sup>83</sup> of the *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad* (4/6), or to the passage in *Bṛhadarāṇyaka* which says that everything has value for the sake of the Self.<sup>84</sup> But it may be a point of scholarship to argue that in the cases cited above Tagore is persuasively defining the notion involved: he is changing their

<sup>82</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 45.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

descriptive content, leaving their evaluative meaning unaltered. The terms 'truth', 'reality', etc., also receive similar treatment in his writings.<sup>85</sup> The point is that his argument for the autonomy of art is derived in general from the post-Renaissance European humanism and can stand independently of the sources he himself mentions.

## B. IMAGINATION

### As the Eye—Such the Object

*The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*

ed. David Erdman, 1970, p. 634

#### I

Tagore is a continuator and enhancer of the aesthetics of Romanticism. He develops a theory of imagination that accounts equally for the production of art and also for human perception. His philosophical ideas were part of a comprehensive intellectual tendency which manifested itself in philosophy as well as in poetry. His theory of art involves a philosophy of mind. In point of fact the philosophical interest of the aesthetics of Romanticism lies in the ontological and the epistemological issues it raises.

As a romantic thinker, Tagore's philosophical ideas evince an increased regard for man's creative capacities, in particular, and a new concept of the human imagination as leading to an autonomous realm of transcendent value. A consequence of Tagore's increased regard for the imagination is a growing subjectivity in art, an increasingly deliberate turn within the mind of man.

Romanticism set a high value on imaginative power, imagination or creative imagination came to be almost synonymous with artistic power. It was, for the romantics, the means of transcending the limitations of individual experience. From Blake to Baudelaire, and from Ruskin to Walter Pater, imagination was the first emanation of divinity. It conveyed the most tremendous insights into the human condition. It is where reason falls short of imagination and the poetic which is a form of imagination, provide an intimation of truths. As a

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 76.

Shakespeare character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* puts the case: 'imagination bodies forth. The form of things unknown'.

It has already been shown that it should be possible to systematize Tagore's philosophical ideas in terms of a philosophical existence woven round the concept of man as an angel of surplus. Tagore's anthropology is a search and a discovery of man's creative self. This notion of self may be assessed in the following manner.

(a) No predicate or a set of predicates can exhaust the descriptive content of the human self or person. A phenomenological confirmation of this matter can be had in our constant refusal to be identified with the import of any statement that may be true of ourselves. There is always a residue, something left over by whatever might have been spoken of the self. Man accepts a set of predicates, descriptively true of him, and yet he refuses to take the set of the descriptive statements as constituting his identity. There is a feeling of mystery of existence, an awareness of the finite man's unboundedness, almost a rebellious conviction that the human person cannot be adequately described. Man, rather each man, is unique, hence indescribable.

Tagore's idea of uniqueness of the human person corresponds to the romantic's notion of intensity by way of emphasizing personal feeling. 'In arts that which is common to a group is not important'.<sup>86</sup> Primacy of the person is one of Tagore's aesthetic faiths.

(b) Transcending descriptions, man enters the zone of freedom. The free self alone is the creative self. Herein lies the ontology of human aspirations and possibilities. And if Tagore regards the surplus in man as the place of nascent meanings and categories, then it is none other than man's imagination. It is for him the spring of thoughts and actions, of all the projective functions of the mind.

(c) The anthropological character of Tagore's ontology becomes evident when he says that the imagination is not only luminous and creative<sup>87</sup> but something special to man. It also offers him the vision of wholeness, the might be's and may be's of man's entry into the infinite. Shelley wrote translating Spinoza's tract *On Prophecy*, 'none ever apprehended the

<sup>86</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 68.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 11-15.

revelations of God without the assistance of imagination, that is, of words or forms imaged forth in the mind . . .'. The point is that imagination, for Tagore too, is the source of our idea of God.

## II

Tagore's thesis that human ontology is imaginative is part of a non-reductionist, non-utilitarian theory of man. And in propounding the thesis he could be said to have aligned himself with a respectable tradition of thought in which imagination had been the organ or tool of philosophy. In the *Ion*, *Apology* and *Meno*, Plato hinted at a faculty in men which could not be reduced to rule and measure, something which could be called inspiration, imagination or even aspiration.

The philosophers of Kashmir Saivism considered *pratibhā* as legitimate a method as reason. Anandavardhana assimilated imagination to philosophical intellect. It was acclaimed as a *dr̥ṣṭi*, a way of looking at the universe so far as the interpretation of life's experiences was concerned. Even Mahima Bhatta, a *Nyāya* thinker concurred, on this issue with Anandavardhana and his commentator, Abhinavagupta. The term *pratibhā*, which I propose to take as the Sanskrit synonym for the English *imagination*, occurs in Indian philosophical literature to stand for immediacy and freshness of vision, the properties of experience which were dear to the romantics. Aesthetic perception, for Tagore, liberates us from modes of habit and considerations of utility, and thereby makes us look at the world *yathābhūta*, as it were. Imagination redeems the human mind. One may venture also to suggest that Tagore's idea of aesthetic perception is a creative analogue of the Buddhist notion of *pratyakṣa* as apprehension of a *svalakṣaṇa*. Art experience was likened by Coomaraswamy to *samvega* or emotional shock involving an artistic reorganisation of the everyday environment with repudiation of the usual and the commonplace. Imagination renovates forms of thought and experience through the transformation of perception. In Tagore's significant language, this is what he calls the 'transformation of facts into human imagery'.<sup>88</sup>

## III

'We must realize not only the reasoning mind, but also the

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 83.

creative imagination'.<sup>89</sup> In saying this Tagore's intention appears to be similar to that of Kierkegaard, that is, not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity. In other words, Tagore is seeking an epistemological unity of thought and imagination. All this may sound Kantian, and one may be reminded of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant in this context: that imagination is more than the root of intuition and theoretical reason, and that it is the root of man's freedom as well. It is the latter that Tagore emphasizes most. The freedom of imagination is crucial, its freedom from the slavery to concepts of the understanding.

Tagore's notion of 'creative unity' may help us to understand his ideas concerning the role of imagination in its aesthetic role. Imagination is a shaping power (*Einbildungskraft*), the power that forms the many into one. Coleridge was impressed by the word used for imagination by Kant, and coined the word 'esemplastic' to which he ascribed the meaning 'shaping into one'. Now the shaping power of imagination has the function of reducing the chaos of sensation to order. In music, says Tagore, is man revealed, not in noise. This is the miracle of creation.

The poet, Kant says, 'transgressing the limits of experience, attempts with the aid of imagination to body forth the rational ideas to sense, with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel (*Critique of Judgement*, 53). The point of significance in the passage is that an aesthetic idea is a counterpart of an Idea of Reason. Ideas of Reason stand as limits to human thought. They are regulative Ideas. An aesthetic idea is expressed for us by imagination in creative art. Language is inadequate to express rational Ideas. But imagination, in its aesthetic function, can present it to us in symbolic form. The sense of the infinite, the feeling that man is truly represented in that which exceeds him is freedom through imagination. It may be called the depth-producing function of imagination, we catch glimpses of truth by means of imagination. But the truths which we glimpse are not truths *about* the world. If they can be said to be about anything, Tagore says, it must be about ourselves. This means that there are general truths which are not scientific, and that imagination alone can have privileged access to them. It will also be seen that from an account of creative imagination Tagore goes on to

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 11.



formulate a philosophy of life. And his account of imagination may be taken to connect three points: that this faculty (a) conjures up an image of man's as yet unrealised possibilities, or his infinite perspective; (b) makes us see the image as universally significant; and (c) induces in us deep feelings in the presence of the image. Imagination is the means of man's self-exceeding.

## IV

The image conjured up by imagination, touched as it is with emotion, is the reality. 'Reality', says Tagore, 'reveals itself in the emotional and imaginative background of our mind'.<sup>90</sup> This notion of *reality* has a special significance for art, and Tagore uses it to answer such questions as 'what is art?' by saying that 'it is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real'.<sup>91</sup> What he means is that creative expressions are attained by modulating emotions. Imagination relates widely to all that stands on one's conscious horizon.

Tagore's understanding of the comprehensiveness of emotions is based on an imaginative system of relations. In such a system there obtains a depersonalized condition of the self, a modality of consciousness so that an inversion or a universalization of emotion occurs. This possibility could be taken as Tagore's account of the emergence of the phenomenon of *rasa*. For him, *rasa* is a principle of aesthetic organisation beyond particularity, a consciousness liberated from the bounds of individual separateness. Such an experience is at once moral and aesthetic. Imagination is an instrument of the good as well. It extends the self, transcends it, and possibly envisions a new self.

It may be recalled that both Hume and Kant had maintained that there was a close connexion between our imagination and our feelings. For Hume the connexion rested on his view that imagination converts an idea to an impression. And passions, that is, the entire domain of emotional states, are impressions. In short, it is an idea which gives rise to a passion or emotion.<sup>92</sup> Kant appears to suggest that our pleasure in beauty is a pleasure in order, a satisfaction in our power to regulate chaos. This may be one of the senses of his concept of *finality*. At another stage

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>92</sup> See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human nature*, ed. L.A. Selby Biggs, Part III, Section 6 of Book II, 61.

of the development of his thesis Kant says that aesthetic judgments arise out of, and express, a particular kind of pleasure. We expect, and to some extent demand, that if we judge an object to be beautiful, other people should agree with us. There is a kind of universalisation, or objectivity, implied in our use of the word 'beautiful', which evidences the occurrence of pleasure within us.

In Tagore's case emotions are responsive correlations with phenomena. Emotion is *anubhūti*. An expansion of the self comes about in aesthetic experience and it is this that accounts for pleasure. We may say that pleasure, to Tagore, is ontologically oriented, an inversion of what Sri Aurobindo calls 'the delight of being' reflected on the aesthetic plane. To be more precise, aesthetic delight, for Tagore, arises on the encounter of the real in art experience. Tagore's term for it is *ānanda*, and it is comprehensive enough to encompass deeply felt pain as well. *Ānanda* is the name of the feeling-tone of the emotions savoured in art experience in a depersonalised mode. Tagore would agree to the romantic's dictum that art is a language of emotion, but the subtle senses of difference between them are worth noticing and should not be ignored.

## V

The work of the imagination is carried on below the level of consciousness. Kant spoke of it as 'the art concealed in the depths of the human soul'.<sup>93</sup> The poet's unique point of departure is the unconscious, wrote Schiller in a letter to Goethe (of 27th March, 1801, quoted by Herbert Read in his essay, 'Coleridge as critic' in the *True Voice of Feeling*). If it be true that Kant was not very far from the notion of the working together of the conscious and unconscious mind, we are to note a new dimension given to the function of imagination.

It should be noted that the word 'unconscious' was used by the romantics before it entered into formal psychology. It was used by Wordsworth. Carlyle, distinguishing between artificial and natural, or inspired, poetry, said that the artificial is the conscious. The mechanical, the natural is unconscious and dynamic. The emphasis set on creative imagination by the romantics tended to go along with a stress on inspiration in the

<sup>93</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (tr. Norman Kemp-Smith), Macmillan, London 1958. A 141.

artist's own unconscious mind.

Tagore admits that the mind has many levels, and that the field of vision becomes widened when emotions are brought into play. The principal creative forces, which transmute things into our living structures, are 'emotional forces'.<sup>94</sup> Here we have the basis of Tagore's version of expressionism. In art, man reveals himself; the efflux of the consciousness of his personality, Tagore goes on to say, requires an outlet of expression. By expressing himself, he creates himself. Aesthetic emotions arouse our 'self-feeling', and, as Tagore has put it, thereby 'our consciousness is intensified'.<sup>95</sup>

When imagination draws upon the conscious as well as the unconscious mind, the whole of the mental or noetic endowments of man is called into operation. It does not remain merely expressive, rather it becomes constitutive of the aesthetic reality. Imagination in its *expressive operation* extends the self, and possibly envisions a new self. Through it one may achieve an expression which cannot be reduced to the literal. But it could be said to be limited in the sense that it lacks sustained perception, and hence remains unable to reconstitute reality.

In the case of imagination in its *constitutive operation* there occurs an ingathering of the whole range of emotions, positive as well as negative ones. This implies a new process of aesthetic perception. In connexion with explaining the notion of inspiration Tagore has noted (much in the manner of Plato in *Ion*, 533f: poets 'utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness') that it is an enchanted state when a subliminal power helps man to get over the artificiality of the phenomenal world and stand before his noumenal substrate. What Nietzsche had spoken of in the context of the origin of tragedy (and for that matter, of all that is creative) as the phenomenon of the slave emerging as a free man or of rending the veil of *māyā*, could also be said of the operations of imagination in its constitutive mode. The unconscious becomes a positive creative force. Art, says Tagore, has impulse 'in the subsoil of consciousness where things that are of life are nourished in the dark'.<sup>96</sup> That is, the unconscious possesses a direction of its own, it tends toward the human truth.

Creative life is marked by the attempt to transcend the

<sup>94</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

alienated self. The human person is disclosed in creativity in so far as the alienated self is transcended in the aesthetic comprehension of the unity and fullness of existence. For Tagore alienation is the fundamental human predicament, and only the aesthetic process can resolve this condition. Self-transcendence and integration reach fullness when imagination begins to draw both on the conscious and the unconscious. Ordinarily, imaginative experience involves a triadic relation: the subject, the perceived object, which in its turn becomes the medium for imagination to construct a new object. But when the subconscious world is brought obliquely to consciousness, perception is constituted by the work of imagination itself. Tagore implies that truth is established in the creative and transformative work of imagination. In poetry, for instance, being is established by images and words.

In this bright song  
Alone, alone in the fire  
I go on creating my world of dreams

In this sense, imagination is constitutive of the true, the real, Tagore points out that reality is not merely what we are conscious of, or that by which we are affected, but more importantly, it is what we express. In expressing the real, man creates himself in the image of his truth. Imagination at this level expresses purpose more than enjoyment. Truth now stands revealed with none of its masks on its face. 'Hard is truth' and so is its beauty 'terrible'. Or, 'In words writ in blood I saw my being manifest'.<sup>97</sup> Imaginative experience of the constitutive sort has a self-authenticating character. It transforms personality in so basic a fashion that it validates itself. A constitutive *mysterium* becomes the source of both perception and expression.

The delineation of two levels of imagination made above is meant to be heuristic. They need not be looked upon as discrete and separable operations. They are operationally complementary and holistic. It should be observed further that at both levels imagination is at once aesthetic and religious. Tagore uses 'aesthetic' and 'religious' as interchangeable terms. For him the experience which transcends self and brings to life a new dimension of self is both religious and aesthetic. Hence judged

<sup>97</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Poems*, (No. 126).

in terms of the experience self-transcendence religious and aesthetic imagination may be understood as the same. This may be called visionary aesthetics. In perceiving and expressing a new vision of the object imagination reaches beyond the limitations of the self and objective forms. Tagore claims that this results in a knowledge which is constitutive of reality.

### C. THE SCHILLER-TAGORE LINK

... art is *māyā*, it has no other explanation but that it seems to be what it is.\*

In one of his later poems (*Janmadine*, No. 28) Tagore has imaged his own literary career in terms of a river fed by diverse streams of influence. The basic metaphor of the poem is extended to include also the assertion that his dreams, as well as waking consciousness, are interwoven with many a melody of the East and the West. The confessional part of the poem should be of value to us in deciphering significant likenesses between Tagore's thought and kindred western thinkers. A major reference has already been made to Kant. In this section we propose to consider a number of striking resemblances between the ideas of Friedrich Schiller and Tagore. The consideration will be based on Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.<sup>98</sup>

The full extent of Schiller's significance in the history of ideas has never been adequately recognized. He is placed in the tradition of idealist philosophy of art which runs from Kant through Schelling and Hegel down to Croce.<sup>99</sup> But this placement hardly brings out Schiller's importance in aesthetic thought. We may indicate some of Schiller's ideas that have exercised considerable influence upon a generation of thinkers.

Oscar Wilde had pointed out that one of Schiller's major achievements lay in the direction of the adjustment of the balance between form and feeling.<sup>100</sup> And Susanne Langer in her book

\*Tagore: *The Religion of an Artist*.

<sup>98</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (tr. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby), Oxford 1967. Henceforth A.E.

<sup>99</sup> Herbert Read, *Art Now*, London 1933, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The English Renaissance of Art' in *Essays and Lectures*, 126.

*Feeling and Form* takes Schiller's concept of aesthetic semblance (*Schein*) as the starting-point for a modern theory of art. And Nietzsche made no secret of the fact that his own doctrine of the Apollonian principle in art was rooted in the concept of *Schein*.

In Schiller's account of the creative process the dominant idea is psychical distance: 'the unfailing effect of beauty is freedom from passion'.<sup>101</sup> In this respect Edward Bullough's classic article on 'Psychical Distance' as a factor in Art and an 'Aesthetic Principle' owes a great deal to Schiller. In Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* the notion of psychical distance came to the fore. Coleridge formulated it in term of the *alienation* within the creative psyche, 'the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst'.<sup>102</sup>

Schiller is claimed as an ancestor by the high priests of 'art for art's sake'. The principle of autonomy of art means something different for him. Schiller would have been at one with Baudelaire or Poe, Walter Pater or Oscar Wilde in maintaining that art is autonomous in the sense of not being subservient to alien ends, whether political or social, ethical or intellectual. But he was aware that since a good deal of literature treats of moral choices and hence of moral values, it cannot possibly be morally neutral in effect. In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Chapter XV he distinguishes between *form* and *function* of art. The self-sufficiency of *form* does not imply, for Schiller, that it does not have a function. It is not the end of poetry to turn back upon itself in self-stultifying sterility. Not form for form's sake, then; nor even art for art's sake, but art for life's sake, and for the sake of 'the even more difficult art of life'<sup>103</sup> has been Schiller's concern.

Two related concepts have occupied the key position in Schiller's theory: semblance and play. He applies the concept of *Schein* or semblance to mark off the domain of art. It is the characteristic of all phenomena when viewed under their aesthetic aspect. *Schein* has its being in the world of forms or Ideas. Aesthetic semblance is the work of man, and it is to be treated as something autonomous; it 'neither seeks to represent reality nor needs to be represented by it'.<sup>104</sup> Reality, for Schiller, is the

<sup>101</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, XXII (trs. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby), Oxford 1967.

<sup>102</sup> Chapter XV, Compare A.E. XXII.

<sup>103</sup> A.E., XV, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, XXVI, 13.

mark of things themselves. In point of fact, this is the distinction between art and nature, Semblance is expressive of felt life.<sup>105</sup> Schiller argues that nature provides the sub-structure on which the superstructure of art is erected. Freedom is our sense of shaping consciousness, which transposes the brute contingency of a physical medium, the involuntary play of associations and the resources of cultural material into a semblance. This is the process which Schiller has described as form consuming material. It is only by imparting form to matter that human freedom is evidenced. The aesthetic modulation of the psyche is what Schiller aimed at. Freedom or creativity is free determinability. Selfhood or personality is an achievement of the aesthetic mode. Man's physical state is determined, marked by self-seeking, and yet without a Self.<sup>106</sup> Aesthetic modulation or transposition of the opening elements of life is paradigmatically illustrated by Schiller in terms of the transformation of lust into love in the beloved.<sup>107</sup> It should be obvious that Schiller's notion of creativity is that of freedom through imagination. It liberates man from the narrow confines of the present and urges him to strive towards an endless future.<sup>108</sup> The practicability of the infinite being realized in the finite lies in the aesthetic unity of matter and form,<sup>109</sup> and the essence of creativity lies in making a transition from 'life-serving feelings' to 'feelings of beauty'.<sup>110</sup>

Schiller calls for a complete revolution in our whole way of feeling, a disinterested appreciation of pure semblance, an enjoyment beyond the satisfaction of immediate needs. Acting and drawing upon 'an aesthetic surplus'<sup>111</sup> man enjoys his self beyond the fetters of ends and purposes. It is 'the prerogative of man alone'<sup>112</sup> to have the faculty of ideas called imagination. When freed from alien laws, it becomes autonomous. Its autonomy is its aesthetic play (*aesthetischen Spiele*).

Let us now turn to Tagore. It will at once be admitted that there are a good many of his ideas that might be taken as corresponding to those of Schiller's. In particular, Tagore's notion of the *surplus in man* is strikingly similar to Schiller's *aesthetische*

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, XXVII, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, XXIII, XXIV.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, XXVII, 7.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, XXIV, 5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, XXV, 6.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, XXV, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, XXVII, 2.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, XXVII, 4.

*Zugabe*. For both of them their respective ideas connote the infinite perspective of man, or his aesthetic ontology.

Tagore's notion of the surplus in man implies, as it does in Schiller's case, 'detachment from the compelling claim of physical need'.<sup>113</sup> In virtue of the surplus, freed from his original serfdom as a creature, man takes his right seat as a creator, says Tagore. This could have been said by Schiller as well.

The primacy of imagination in transposing matter into form is worth noticing in Schiller as well as in Tagore. The notion of transposition pervades the whole of Schiller's *Letters*. Here is Tagore's version of the matter. 'The animal in the savage has been transformed into higher stages in the civilized man . . . not through any elimination of the original materials, but through a magical grouping of them, through the severe discipline of art . . .'.<sup>114</sup>

There is in Tagore a notion of appearance which bears comparison to Schiller's idea of semblance. He was helped in formulating his idea of art as *māyā* by the Vedic notion of *Indra as māyāvī*, the projector of semblances. For art, it is the appearance that matters, 'the knowledge of the ultimate state of the atom is of no use to an artist who deals in images in which atoms have taken form'.<sup>115</sup> In course of an essay, 'The World of Personality', Tagore brings out his notion of appearance more convincingly. The world of art belongs to the world of appearances; it is not a 'world of acts'. With this Tagore's point touches the ontological issue, the status of an art object. It is and *is not*, an image-likeness which defies description. It is, Tagore says, an *expression*.

It is also significant that both Schiller and Tagore use the concept of personality for the creative self of man, and relate *freedom* to the imagination. For both of them the transcendence of the given becomes possible through the shaping consciousness in man.

Tagore believes in the principle of autonomy of art. This autonomy is derived from the surplus where art takes its birth. 'The idea of "Art for Art's sake" . . . has its origin in [the] region of the superfluous'.<sup>116</sup> But Tagore, like Schiller, is a qualified votary of the principle. He does say that if beauty is to be

<sup>113</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 27.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>116</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 15.



enjoyed to the uttermost, restraint is essential. 'The fire must be kept in check so that it may illumine'.<sup>117</sup> This is how Tagore puts Schiller's idea of 'freedom from passion'.<sup>118</sup> Just as Schiller said that art, by giving form to outer life, opens up the inner, Tagore speaks of the mysterious union of the beautiful and the good. 'Beauty can never be truly realized in all its purity unless it is viewed apart from our sensual desires'; and hence in 'the union of the Good and the Beautiful, of Vishnu and Laksmi, is true perfection'.<sup>119</sup>

Schiller knew very well that truth *can* be viewed as beauty. He makes it clear that beauty can prepare the way for truth precisely because truth is implicit within it.<sup>120</sup> Tagore, by way of commenting upon the *Taittirīya* passage on *rasa*, says that wherever the true is fully revealed to us, there is joy, and that joy is the quintessence of beauty. 'Art and Literature bring home to us that what is true is joy ...'.<sup>121</sup>

The point about the Schiller-Tagore link has been to point up the close connection between romanticism and German idealism. Tagore's romantic inheritance is often spoken of. But equally, and perhaps more importantly, his affiliation to German idealism is significant for his thoughts on art and related matters. There is, of course, no evidence that Tagore knew his Schiller. Carlyle's essay on Schiller could have been one of Tagore's sources. De Quincey's article might have been another. The works of Carlyle and De Quincey were known to Tagore. In an autobiographical piece he reports that he picked up enough German to venture to go through the *Faust*. One of his earliest essays was on Goethe. It is possible that he might have turned his attention to Goethe's friend too. But whatever might have been the case, this is an intriguing matter for those interested in the history of ideas.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, XXII, 5.

<sup>119</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, IX, 4.

<sup>121</sup> P. Neogy (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 10.

## CHAPTER II

### A Return to Rhetoric: Ananda Coomaraswamy's Philosophy of Art

The aim of this chapter is to give a philosophical account of Ananda Coomaraswamy's views on art and related matters. One of my concerns will be with the theoretical nature of the positions he has sought to establish. The interrelations of these will be examined in terms of some general considerations. Some of the key notions or concepts involved in the context or implied by Coomaraswamy will be taken note of and formulated.

#### I

Coomaraswamy's writings on art are of diverse sorts, theories of art and beauty, criticism of rival notions of art, metacriticism and appreciation. Some of these are concerned with deeper philosophical issues like the theory of meaning, the nature of symbolic reference, the concept of man, cultural anthropology, and theory of knowledge. He writes with conviction and enormous erudition on the subjects he talks about. His conclusions are nearly always those of a scholar of magnificent talent and of incredible industry.

Most of his writings produce the enlivening shock of a multi-dimensional metaphor as he leaps from language to language. Partly for this reason, perhaps, his notions are seldom worked into their new relations when they arrive at a new context. The word 'aesthetics' for example, retained for him its original association with sensuousness and he hardly ever took into account the eighteenth century thinkers. His theory of passions was naive and unexamined. The notions of 'sensibility' and 'pleasure' had a fixity of meaning for him, and always pejorative. He seems not to have thought through Kant's criticism of aesthetic judgment. He always referred to Kant's

notion of disinterested delight or pleasure as pure nonsense.

Coomaraswamy's theory of art may be not inaptly described as an immediate deduction from his general philosophical outlook. Art for him was a kind of metaphysical statement. Truth is eternal, not progressive or conditioned. Art being the symbolic communication of truth is essentially identical from age to age. The graphic character of art is but a reminder of final things. All this need not give us pause. But since he has to be understood against the climate of the 'national idealism' of India, many of his views sound like those of an advocate. He was right in deflating the myth of progress, yet one cannot always help feeling, that he was evoking an idealised mediaeval India that never existed. As a historian, in most of his moods he was an irrealist, his ideology was romantic-archaic. The cultural struggle, together with its ambivalences he lived through, was responsible for much of this. Yet the fact remains that Coomaraswamy is one of our modern masters, and our schooling with him is not yet over.

## II

The proposed philosophical account of Coomaraswamy's views on art and related matters will be based on the following of his works: *Essays in National Idealism* (Colombo, 1909); *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (Luzac & Co., London, 1946); *The Transformation of Nature in Art*; *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (both Dover Publications, New York, 1956) and *The Dance of Shiva* (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1948).

Is art aesthetic? Coomaraswamy repudiates this. He calls it the 'collegiate point of view'<sup>1</sup> and in contrast he calls his own view 'normal'. But what does he mean by this.

The term 'normal', as Coomaraswamy uses it, is evaluative, that is, it is descriptive as well as prescriptive. As a descriptive term, the term 'normal' could refer to some actual human societies where a particular view of art had been held. As having got prescriptive force, the term would be expected to point to a view of art that might be adopted in some possible society. The prescriptive meaning of 'normal' is primary, or else it (the normal view of art) would be rendered sociologically archaic. The set of synonyms for 'normal' are 'traditional', 'historical',

<sup>1</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, Luzac & Co., London, 1946, 247.

etc., in the sense of 'historic continuity'.<sup>2</sup> The view is in this sense to be distinguished from 'conventional'. A convention is a manner of artistic presentation. Coomaraswamy conceives 'tradition' as a language of communication spoken directly without any loss of intelligibility. The normal view is also called 'humane', since it is never eccentric or irresponsible. It takes proper care of the audience or consumer. However, the evaluative character of this view is brought out clearly when Coomaraswamy says that this theory is 'not merely hitherto and elsewhere universally accepted as basic to the structure of society, but also a correct or upright doctrine of art'.<sup>3</sup>

The 'normal' view, hence, cannot be an empirical generalization, for in that case the view would lose much of its point and at best be an attested historical truth. But from a logically precarious or merely contingent assertion, as any empirical generalization can only be, one cannot derive prescriptions. This is a point of logic, unless of course the generalization conceals value terms of general import. If the 'normal' view is not a socio-logical archaism, it should oblige us to accept it. It should have an imperative force. But there are many strings attached to the 'normal' view. It rests on certain pre-suppositions, a theory of meaning, of symbolic reference or 'linguistic of metaphysic',<sup>4</sup> a concept of man, and, not the least, a social philosophy. In order to spell out the 'normal' view of art many of its grounds or conditions will have to be taken into account.

How does the 'normal' view oblige us? It should be worth mentioning that Coomaraswamy's has been a search for authenticity, meaningful living, spontaneous, homogeneous and traditional. He finds man in estrangement from the Spirit and from perfection, an outsider alienated from tradition. This is frankly a meta-physical opinion. The 'normal' view of art relates to the 'whole man'<sup>5</sup> and in this sense it is pregnant with the burden of human destiny. The modern man's malady is his aesthetic demoralisation. Suffering as he does from 'schizophrenia'<sup>6</sup> a 're-formation'<sup>7</sup> is indicated. Coomaraswamy's philosophical

<sup>2</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism*, Colombo, 1909, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Anand Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, 66.

<sup>4</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 223.

<sup>5</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 249.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

anthropology is not merely descriptive, it is also revisionary. The human situation as we find it, is not desirable, and this implies that a transcendence is possible. Whatever takes us across is a valuable vehicle. Art is one such. A drastic transvaluation of our fashionable values is then called for.

What is the nature of the 'whole man' that art is said to relate to? Coomaraswamy appears to take the distinction between 'the sentimental self' and 'the intellectual-self' for granted. Maybe he is looking back to Plato, or even to the Vedānta equation of *ādhyatmā* with *mānuṣa* or the 'human'. He states the nature and function of the two selves in the following manner. 'The soulful or sentimental self enjoys itself in the aesthetic surfaces of natural and artificial things, to which it is akin; the intellectual or spiritual self enjoys their order and is nourished by what in them is akin to it. The spirit is much rather fastidious than a sensitive entity'.<sup>8</sup> The 'whole man', which comprehends the two selves, then 'does not merely feel but also understands'.<sup>9</sup> The two selves are 'simultaneous', our aesthetic and cognitive experiences are only distinguishable in logic. In respect of the simultaneity of the sensitive and intellectual selves of man Coomaraswamy is not always univocal. In some moods he appears to disallow the application of term 'human' to the sensitive self, "sensation" is an animal property, and knowledge distinctly human'.<sup>10</sup> It is one thing to say that the two selves are not of equal representative worth. But it is quite another thing to say that the sensitive self is not human. If the two selves make the 'whole man', each of them is entitled to being called 'human'. If of the two selves, the intellectual alone is 'distinctly human', the 'whole man' would suffer from atrophy. In another passage the sensitive self or a life of sentiments or emotions is reckoned as 'sub-human'. Only a life active in contemplating forms is human. To identify man with his sentimental self is to commit the 'pathetic fallacy'.<sup>11</sup> If it be a fallacy of metaphor only, then it is perhaps harmless. But if it should be a fallacy of logic, then to identify man with his intellectual self would be incorrect. Coomaraswamy seems indecisive in respect of the descriptive and evaluative import of his expression, and this is philosophically disquieting. Is 'man' an exact concept like the mathematical

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 74.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 16.

ones or inexact as any empirical notion is? Overlooking the nature of the concept let us suppose that 'man' is definable. Since a definition determines the nature of the term or notion defined, one will have to admit that 'man' is identical with the 'intellectual self', which in turn is determined by its active contemplation of forms. Coomaraswamy would accept this position, since he has said clearly that the intellectual operation involved in contemplating forms is free. One is free when one is contemplative. 'The man is passive only when he identifies himself with the psychological ego ... in fact he directs it'.<sup>12</sup> This is a rationalist's statement, reminiscent not only of Leibniz and Kant, but also of Plato's image of the charioteer and wild horses. The rational alone is free, and hence the sentimental self, the psychological ego or the sense of individuality, is determinable by the intellectual, 'supra-individual' self.

However familiar these notions may be, they are highly troublesome philosophically. Specific mention should be made of the vexed problem of freedom and determinism implied by Coomaraswamy's assertions. The rationalistic or the Platonic, and the Vedanta notions of self are not congruent. Their implications and presuppositions are diverse. Saṅkara's distinction between the real and the apparent man hardly corresponds to Coomaraswamy's approvingly adapted notions of the intellectual and the sentimental selves.

He deplores that 'we have forgotten what *we are*'.<sup>13</sup> 'The whole man', he says, 'is naturally a metaphysician'.<sup>14</sup> The adverb 'naturally' reads like a near synonym of 'essentially'. Does he mean 'what we ideally are' i.e., 'what we ought to be like'? The Mimamsaka would say that such statements are merely honorific; they do not commit us to a specific ontology. Now, if Coomaraswamy were stating something about man's nature, or what man is in essence, he would be making a descriptive (ontological) claim. If, on the contrary, his statements about the 'whole man' are *arthavāda*, they would then be regulative ideas presupposed in order to explain human actions in the domain of man's value-experiences. This could be a piece of Kantian wisdom. The difficulties with regard to the philosophical niceties of Coomaraswamy's concept of man have their source

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 36-7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 30, italics not in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 30.

mainly in the historical anchorages of his thought. These may be overlooked without affecting the viability of his philosophical anthropology. His concept of man is neither eccentric nor fashionable. Its chief merit lies in restoring us to human dignity and the intellectual base line of *philosophia perennis*.

I should now like to make a point of methodological interest. A concept of man functions as a regulative notion, that is, no account of man's value experiences can be given without presupposing what one understands by 'man'. One's having a certain kind of art depends on one's self-identity, cultural or philosophical. If this be granted, then the difference between 'normal' or traditional art and the art of the post-Renaissance period is as it should be. The post-Renaissance concept of man was different from the one presupposed by the 'normal' view of art. Ours again is a concept of man grown under a different sky. The change in what the Renaissance people understood by 'man' implied a change in their view of art. In this they were no less consistent than the artist in the traditional society. Coomaraswamy makes this logical point an object of moral critique. I am not minimizing the value of Coomaraswamy's criticism of 'bourgeoisie fantasy'. What appears incredible is his view that the development of philosophy since Descartes and Locke has been on a wrong track. Must there be as many heresies as truths? This seems to be suggested by Coomaraswamy's orthodoxy.

### III

His concept of man is frankly metaphysical. Metaphysics, Coomaraswamy maintains involves an ontology of the supersensuous. A view of art that presupposes a metaphysical notion of man would be committed to repudiating such views as 'art is a matter of taste or aesthetic experience'. That art is aesthetic is then Coomaraswamy's *pūrva pakṣa*. He calls such views 'materialistic'<sup>15</sup> not only as an implication of the term 'aesthetic', but also in pejorative sense. By contrast the 'normal' view of art is 'intellectual',<sup>16</sup> and hence he proposes to discard the term 'aesthetic' altogether. This is based on a consideration of the original Greek meaning of the term. *Aisthesis* in Greek includes sensations, reactions of organisms (human and subhuman) to

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 12.

external stimuli, our passions and emotions. Passional experiences are passive. Aesthetics thus reduces the phenomena of art of psychology or taste. To call art aesthetic is a pathetic fallacy, rendering an intellectual affair 'sentimental'.<sup>17</sup> According to the aesthetic view of art, to appreciate art is to enjoy ourselves, 'our comfortable feelings'.<sup>18</sup> And to do this is to leave the *raison d'être* of art unexplained. 'The student (of art) understands the logic of composition; the illiterate only its aesthetic value'.<sup>19</sup> Rather than being a matter of feeling, art is an intellectual virtue. If art were a matter of our likes and dislikes, i.e., if it were an emotive phenomenon, one could also love ugly forms or deformities. The argument is neat and cogent. But is it decisive? Can it explain the grotesque in art?

Plato makes a comeback with Coomaraswamy's theory of art. What was more a matter of logic with Plato—as in his theory of Forms—becomes a matter of mystical *gnosis* with Coomaraswamy. One might feel that he has exploited the mystical possibilities of such of his mentors as Plotinus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Augustine to the extent of obliterating subtle distinctions in their thinking.

'Art', he says, 'is a kind of knowledge by which we know how to do our work'; it is 'a means of communication by signs and symbols'.<sup>20</sup> Further, we are told that art is 'a metaphysical rite ... . No distinction can be drawn between art and contemplation'.<sup>21</sup> Finally, art is 'the embodiment in material of a pre-conceived form',<sup>22</sup> it is 'the knowledge of how things ought to be made'.<sup>23</sup> Art is mimetic iconography.

Let us consider the thesis that art is a kind of knowledge. The cognitivity of art is constituted by two factors: contemplation and mimesis of archetypes. Art is the conscious transformation of a material by impressing on it a form which is the intellectual component of art. The form is an archetype conceived in intellect. It can be imitated, and the act of transforming a sensuous material by impressing on it the intellectually conceived form is mimetic. It is possible to ask, whether art has for its domain

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 250.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 177-78.

<sup>22</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 23.



the forms or forms as such and if forms in general can be imitated. Obviously, the archetypes of art are not the only archetypes.

Let us bring in another near synonymous term 'intelligible'. The intelligible form, he says, is the model, which the artist imitates. Mimesis brings into being an image of the model. Art thus is a matter of *imagination*. Whatever gives effectiveness to truth is rhetoric. Art is rhetoric, since a work of art is made to be effective. Art as aesthetic is false rhetoric or sophistry, i.e., intended *for effect*. This is a linguistic conception of art; its implication will appear shortly.

Art is adequate representation or symbolism of an intelligible model. Rhetoric is a general term for the act of *informing* any given material in such a manner that the archetype, the intelligible form, the model or truth (all of these are used interchangeably) is correctly represented. We get two sorts of things, 'works of art' and 'truth of art'. A work of art, for Coomaraswamy, is not an art-object which may be valuable for its own sake. Coomaraswamy would have us look through a work of art, it should be a reminder of the truth of art. In his remarkable phrase, art is a 'figure of thought'.

All art is applied art; a work of art is made to be effective and not meant for effect. A work of art is for use, for life. Art is for life's sake—this is a key-idea of Coomaraswamy's 'normal' view of art. One can talk of 'fine art' only if one holds that art is aesthetic. Art is craft; a work of art is an artefact. This may be regarded as a general implication of Coomaraswamy's notion of art as mimesis and rhetoric. There are two elements in a work of art, meaning and utility, and one can fairly ask how they are related. He says, 'Function and meaning cannot be forced apart. . . . Meaning is even historically prior to utilitarian application'.<sup>24</sup> This is Platonism pure and simple. But how and in what sense can meaning be 'historically' prior? It should rather have been *logically* prior to use. Something can be said to stand in a historical relation to another thing only if it is a natural, i.e., temporal (à la G.E. Moore) entity. Meanings or forms, in as much as they are intellectual conceptions, are not natural entities, and hence cannot stand in an 'historical' relation to a natural entity or property like utility. Coomaraswamy's own admission will illustrate the validity of this criticism. He says

<sup>24</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 40.

'Forms such as that of the dome, arch and circle have not been "evolved", but only applied: the circle can no more have been suggested by the wheel than a myth by a mimetic rite'.<sup>25</sup> How can that which is a non-evolutionary entity, one may ask, be 'historically' prior to an evolutionary one? Coomaraswamy's apriorism would reject any such suggestion as that there may be a *history* of architecture or calligraphy or sculpture.

Yet what he says about the relation of art to life must be pondered over. Art, if it be 'abstracted from the general activity of making things for human use, material or spiritual',<sup>26</sup> would become either sentimental or cynical. In an integrated society 'everyone possesses art of some sort, whether of painting, sculpture, blacksmithing, weaving, cooking or agriculture'.<sup>27</sup> In that state of affairs, every maker is responsible, and business for profit making does not take precedence over life.

What is the status of a work of art? The symbols of art are traditional and not personal or icons of private feelings. 'Adequacy' and 'inadequacy' of symbols, are, to Coomaraswamy, cognates of their 'truth' and 'falsity'. That is to say, works of art have normative constraints in truths of art. A symbol is judged as adequate or inadequate with reference to its referent, which it symbolizes. A meaningful symbol is neither conventional nor arbitrary. According to such a view as this, there cannot be 'art-forms' improperly so-called. A symbol of art is inevitable in itself since no other can replace it. Symbols of art, in being likenesses of their truths, are typical; they are iconic, or projections of their intended referents.

Coomaraswamy's notion of symbolism is linguistic. He says that symbolism is 'a language and a precise form of thought; a hieratic and a metaphysical language and not a language determined by somantic or psychological categories. Its function is in the analogical correspondence of all orders of reality and states of being or levels of reference'.<sup>28</sup> At the farthest remove from Wittgenstein.<sup>29</sup> Coomaraswamy says that 'all words are by first intention signs or symbols of specific referents...

While words are signs of things, they can also be heard or read

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>28</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1961, 2.12. Also 2.1511 and 2.1512.



as symbols of what these things themselves imply'.<sup>30</sup> Works of art or symbols of art are intended as means of communicating supersensuous truths or forms. 'The form is in the work of art as its "content"; but we shall miss it if we consider only the aesthetic surfaces and our own sensitive reactions to them'.<sup>31</sup> Aesthetic surfaces are not terminal values in art. To see the elegance of works of art is one thing, to use it according to the intention of its having been made at all is another. The former case makes a 'fetish' of a work of art. Fetishism, Coomaraswamy explains, is 'an attribution to the physical tangible symbol of values that really belong to its referent; . . . a confusion of actual with essential form. . . . The modern aesthetic approach makes fetishes of traditional works of art precisely in this sense'.<sup>32</sup> Does he forget that an ode could be written on a Grecian Urn? Would he say that Keats made a fetish of a work of art?

On the part of the artist, art is a kind of knowledge of how things ought to be made, efficiently embodying, rather symbolising by an object of sense a form conceived in intellect. Works of art thus made are used for an 'intellectual operation' by the spectator. This operation consists in identifying the referent symbolized. In this sense the symbols of art are *quasi-descriptive*. Their meaning lies in adequate symbolism, and it is on this account the spectator comes to know what the symbol is about. Perspicacity then is a value of works of art *qua* symbols.

The question of intelligibility is thus indispensable. A work of art should be defensible in terms of intellectual reasons, not in terms of *aesthetic* reasons. The nature of symbolism, for Coomaraswamy, is analogical. What does it mean? We cannot say that between a work of art and its referent there is a structural identity. It can of course be an unanalysed awareness (or feeling?) of a vague resemblance between the two. I say 'vague' in the sense of non-isomorphic. A work of art is not a logical picture or map of its referent. In Aristotelean terms, Coomaraswamy says, the intelligible form is a *formal* cause of works of art. As an *informed* entity a work of art is the *final* cause of the entire creative process. The spectator beholds the formal cause exhibited analogically in the final. He sees 'the Buddha in the image rather than an image of the Buddha'.<sup>33</sup> He sees as the artist was required

<sup>30</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 114.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

to have seen. Both of them share or experience the same creative vision. 'Same' is a strong word, but Coomaraswamy would require it. Coomaraswamy presupposes a society different from our own, with shared goals and intentions within a common way of life. 'Art' is another name for life.

## IV

The question of meaning and value in art is related to the question of intention in art. In assessing or evaluating a work of art both the meaning and result are taken into consideration. Usually, evaluation consists in considering what the work of art ought to be rather than what it is intended to be. According to Coomaraswamy, the principle of criticism should consider 'the ratio of intention to result'.<sup>39</sup> He distinguishes criticism of work of art from criticism of intention. The latter is moral, and the business of a critic *qua* art critic is 'to decide whether or not the artist has made a good job of the work he undertook to do'.<sup>35</sup> If the critic, on the other hand, goes 'behind' a work of art and says what the work should have been, he is making a prudential judgement. Only if the intentions were morally objectionable would such judgements be appropriate. In a successful work of art, Coomaraswamy says, form and content (here the words are used in their ordinary sense) become inseparable, that is, the work of art is internally consistent. Coomaraswamy takes it for granted that evidences for what the artist wanted to do are available. This is certainly true to a certain extent, and such evidences are presupposed in objective criticism. A preoccupation with effect or aesthetic surfaces would render criticism subjective, a matter of taste. The ideal critic is a *rasika*, i.e., one who knows and is interested in the values the artist cherishes. The *rasika* would be able to see the artist's point of view. No one but the *rasika* would be qualified to say what the artist meant.

The word 'intention' is often employed in various senses. it may mean 'ends' or 'goals', also what the artist has to say or do. The two senses are not identical. Answers to questions about the former are not answers to questions about the latter. Sometimes the word is used to mean attitudes behind the artist's selection of his themes. Hume thought that one of the sources of our appreciation of works of art is our awareness of the fitness

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 126.

of the work to the end for which it is produced. This is what is meant by the *functional* beauty of a work of art. Croce's case is one of cognitive intentionalism. There are others like Clive Bell who totally repudiate intention by saying that in order to appreciate work of art one does not bring anything from life, any knowledge of its ideas (Mallarmé's dictum about poetry may be recalled, or even Paul Valéry's emphasis on uselessness of art). Coomaraswamy would have a short way with such thinkers, and a longer way with Rabindranath (in most of his moods), Croce and Maritain, since all of them believe, in some or other sense, that art is knowledge. But Coomaraswamy would not identify, as Croce does, art with the activity of making it. He would, I believe, stand closer to Hume.

The relation between art and intention has a conceptual basis. Works of art are intentionally made artefacts. *Qua* man-made, they are intentionally made. Works of art are functional, goal-oriented objects, hence the intentional aspect is more than merely arbitrary; it provides the rationale of art. Intention is embedded theoretically in the very concept of art. Coomaraswamy would not deny this. He would say that intention should be considered in respect of the fitness or adequacy of the symbols of art, or with respect to the artist's ulterior concerns. In saying this he is also one with the Marxists. But what he in fact disallows is the use of the word 'ought' in judging works of art *qua* works of art. Is this not a disguised Kantianism?

Coomaraswamy has argued that different kinds of art do not require different principles of criticism. There can be a common critical method applicable to works of art of different kinds. This can be said only on the basis of a unified theory of art. He believes that 'all art has a fundamental unity'<sup>36</sup> or, 'the true philosophy of art is always and everywhere the same'.<sup>37</sup> A unified theory of art proceeds by asking a general question like 'what is art?' To ask such questions as this is to expect to find out and state the defining properties of art. Or, in other words, what do the different works of art, say, the Parthenon and the *Rāmāyana*, a Bengali folksong and a poem by Rilke, have in common? Coomaraswamy thinks that questions like this can be

<sup>36</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism*, 193.

<sup>37</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 29.

asked and answers are possible. But those who think that there is no such basic phenomenon as art would contend that Coomaraswamy is committing the essentialist fallacy. Those who really care to ask 'what is art?', do in point of fact make general statements about the nature of art. All of them need not necessarily be Platonists. Definitions of 'art' in terms of 'significant form', 'expression', 'intuition', etc. illustrate this.

What is important in Coomaraswamy's context in his concern with art in its basic, undifferentiated form or its fundamental nature. He can justifiably hold that for the purpose of evaluation, a general principle would be needed if critical judgements on different kinds of works of art are to be. What more would be required is different kinds of knowledge in each case.

## V

Beauty, says Coomaraswamy, depends not on taste but on judgement. It is a cognitive property of works of art. 'Whatever is well and truly made, will be beautiful in kind because of its perfection'.<sup>38</sup> It functions like a grading word. He writes: 'the well-built ship will be beautiful, but it is not for the sake of making something beautiful that the shipbuilder goes to work'.<sup>39</sup> Beauty is not a goal of art, it is an 'inevitable accident'. The artist works for determinate ends. As an end, beauty is indeterminate. When used in judgements the word 'beautiful' stands as the name of a supervenient property. 'Beauty', is a philosophers' word, it does not belong to the vocabulary of the artist.

Coomaraswamy maintains that beauty can be discovered anywhere, in natural objects and artefacts alike. This sense of 'beauty' is different from that which it has as a functional term. Does he use the term equivocally? With respect to 'beauty' he says two different things. One is the formalist view, that beauty is identical with ideal form; 'Beauty....is always "ideal" in the proper sense of the word'.<sup>40</sup> The other is the view expressed as follows: 'It is a matter of fact that a well-made icon will be beautiful, in other words, that it will please when seen by those for whose use it was made'.<sup>41</sup> Neither the example of ship above nor that of icon shows that beauty is ideal.

<sup>38</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 75.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

There is a third account of 'beauty' in Coomaraswamy. 'In point of fact, the conception of beauty and the adjective "beautiful" belong exclusively to aesthetic and should only be used in aesthetic judgement. We seldom make any such judgements when we speak of natural objects as beautiful; we generally mean that such objects as we call beautiful are congenial to us, practically or ethically'.<sup>42</sup> This is a Kantian position, Coomaraswamy uses the phrase 'complete judgement'<sup>43</sup> to mean a comprehensive judgement by art and value. A judgement by art merely says that such-and such-object is a true work of art, i.e., an adequate symbol of its archetype. A judgement by value states whether or not a work of art has a value for us, i.e., whether the model is well chosen or so made as to serve our immediate need. As regards values his opinion is that it is neither advantageous nor possible to separate spiritual and physical values in such a manner as to make some things sacred and other profane. But that is another story.

What matters most in the present context is his retaining, in spite of his notion of complete judgement, if not the primacy, at least the uniqueness of 'aesthetic' judgements. He says that to regard 'the useful, the stimulating and the moral elements in works of art as the essential'<sup>44</sup> is to indulge in 'sentimentality'.

Essentialism recurs again. What is this sole property which the most dissimilar works of art possess in common? In answer to this question Coomaraswamy recalls 'the history of a work of art'. There is in the beginning an aesthetic intuition; its internal expression; then its communicative externalization by technical activity, followed finally by an approximate arousal of the primitive intuition in the spectator or critic. For Croce the first two moments would be identical, in that they are not extra-aesthetic. Anyway, do these four moments of creative history define a work of art? Do they constitute sufficient and necessary conditions for an object's being a work of art? These may be necessary though not sufficient. But Coomaraswamy is not advocating a definist thesis either. He says explicitly that beauty is not a natural property, it cannot be said to exist anywhere. Rather it is a matter to be discovered. Does he mean *esse*

<sup>42</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1948, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, 64.

*est percipi?*

Beauty can be talked about from two levels, one of judgements, the other of vision. Coomaraswamy's meta-aesthetics or even meta-criticism is confined to the judgemental level. More important is the vision of beauty, which, he says, is 'a state of grace'. How can one achieve this state? Since it is spontaneous, no deliberate effort can bring it about. All that one can do is to remove hindrances to its manifestations. The Vedanta metaphor is that of brushing the surface of an unclean mirror. Once the hindrances are removed, the state of grace might dawn on the artist. This is Coomaraswamy's Vedanta.

Aesthetic judgements are elliptical expressions. Works of art have significant form (not in Clive Bell's sense of the phrase) in two ways. The art work reminds the spectator of the artist's vision of beauty, and thereby awakens his aesthetic emotion. Correspondingly, there would be a difference between experience and opinion in art: 'experience can only be sought by experience; opinions must be earned'.<sup>45</sup> Criticism can either be based on experience or on opinion. In the latter case aesthetic judgements are used, so to say, within inverted commas, that is, taking on authority that such-and-such a work of art is beautiful. In the case of criticism based on experience we have an altogether different thing, namely, creative criticism.

Coomaraswamy has raised the important point concerning the ways in which unsuccessful works of art are 'tolerated'. There can be 'uncritical' tolerance on grounds of charm or prettiness. In case of 'creative' tolerance the correspondence of form and content is completed by the force of imagination, that is, by recreating the original experience from 'mere suggestion'. This may be granted. But do we creatively tolerate the great Buddha of Mathura with its nose chopped off and the broken hand of the Venus de Milo? Neither of these is 'imperfect' as a work of art. Should we not say that we can also creatively tolerate successful though mutilated works of art? This would be a third possible way of tolerating works of art besides the two mentioned by Coomaraswamy. In this case creative tolerance means an appreciation made possible because of the perfection which permeates the fragments.<sup>46</sup>

The office of the creative critic is a high one. It is for him to

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>46</sup> Abanindranath Tagore, *Silpayana*, Calcutta 1954, 77.



reproduce the original vision that moved the artist. He discovers it anew both for himself and for us as well. Above all, his business is to reveal the beauty 'where we should have otherwise overlooked it, or more clearly than we have yet received'.<sup>47</sup> Creative art also functions in a similar manner. In Rabin-dranath's phrase, by art the 'invisible screen of the common-place' is removed from the face of things and thereby 'their ultimate significance' is intensified.<sup>48</sup> Recall what Wordsworth felt on seeing a picture of Peele Castle, painted by George Beaumont: 'The light that never was, on sea or land'. Art is a liberating force, if it is creative. A few instances of creative criticism in Coomaraswamy's sense may be cited: Rabin-dranath's essay on *Meghdūta*; Coomaraswamy's own 'The Dance of Shiva'; Sri Aurobindo's passage on the Mother and Child fresco from Ajanta; or Pater's study of Botticelli's 'The Birth of Venus'. The critic, no less than the artist, is 'challenged to reveal the beauty of all experiences, new and old'.<sup>49</sup> Art so conceived is imaginative realism.

By rediscovering beauty, as also by discovering it, we 'momentarily recover the unity of our being released from individuality'.<sup>50</sup> This is one of the spiritual implications of Coomaraswamy's 'discovery'-view of art. It is an open avowal of Vedanta. To be freed from individuality is to be released from mental and emotional confusions that bedevil the vision of beauty. To say that art-experience provides an escape from the tutelage of our pathological self is to maintain an instrumental valuation of art. This is Vedanta. It is Kant also, and even more Schopenhauer. For Coomaraswamy art is finally a hieratic aesthetic script of man's spiritual and contemplative experience.

The central feature of the Vedanta view of art, which we find Coomaraswamy embracing, is the disinterestedness of the art-experience. In most of his moods one can see him somewhat harsh or impatient with the notion of disinterested delight. With Kant the notion is theoretical, designed to distinguish our experience of the beautiful from both hedonism (the satisfaction in the pleasant) and our apprehension of the relation of reason to an act, actual or possible, of will. In either case the satisfaction

<sup>47</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, 69.

<sup>48</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, 69.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

is interested. But the satisfaction which occasions such judgements as 'This is beautiful' is disinterested, since we use no conception of the thing's nature. The judgements are 'reflective', not 'determinant'. Coomaraswamy would never say that works of art can be viewed without using any conception of their nature.

There is another point of greater significance. Disinterestedness is the *sine qua non* of any work of art for Kant. But with Coomaraswamy it is the mark of our encounter with 'intellectual' works of art only. Such a work of art is 'perfect' and therefore is a 'convincing statement of truth'.<sup>51</sup> Our encounter with such works of art transports us from aesthetic delight to understanding. 'In the deepest experience that can be induced by a work of art...our very being is shaken...to its roots', says Coomaraswamy. In no other sense he would allow the notion of disinterested delight in our art-talk. In a sense, disinterested feeling is no feeling at all. It is another name for knowledge, as Schopenhauer has remarked. Rabindranath has put the matter in a memorable sentence: 'Beauty is no phantasy, it has the everlasting meaning of Reality'.<sup>52</sup> Coomaraswamy would find much to agree with in this. In his own words, 'Nothing unintelligible could have been thought of as beautiful'.<sup>53</sup>

Coomaraswamy's has been an 'anthropological' approach to art. He holds that it is not by *our* aesthetic that we can hope to understand and interpret the arts of other people and other ages than our own. He is mindful of what the artist had to say about the use and meaning of his product. This is the attitude of the anthropological field worker, apart from the philosophical sense of the term. At a time when a divorce between *art* and *meaning* has taken place, Coomaraswamy's idea that the aesthetic signs constituting the language of art are full of meaning is significant indeed.

<sup>51</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 205.

<sup>52</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Creative Unity*, Macmillan, 1959, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 112.

## CHAPTER III

# The Aesthetics of Sri Aurobindo

### I

One of the key-ideas of Sri Aurobindo's system of thought is that 'all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony'.<sup>1</sup> A synonym of 'harmony' is 'integral'. Man, by definition, is an evolving spiritual being, and hence the specific problem of human existence can only be that of spiritual integration. Art is a human phenomenon, and thus before we come to state Sri Aurobindo's view of arts we must deal briefly with his concept of man. A statement of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical anthropology shows how spiritual integration can be an unavoidable problem arising from the human situation, and that art may be one of its solutions.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of spiritual evolution runs as follows:

(a) Evolution is the process of the revelation of the Spirit;  
(b) The process is integral in the basic sense of lifting up and linking up components of one stage into a whole which is higher and richer in spiritual values, and

(c) The Divine involves itself in ignorance and inconscience. It apparently negates itself in matter and gradually manifests its spiritual and divine character. Therefore, the full emergence of the Spirit in the cosmos brings about the life divine on earth. Or, in other words, the spirit is the source of creation and evolution, and also the final end of realization. In short, consciousness evolves in matter until the former becomes explicit, open, revealed and perceptible. As spirit is involved in matter, its manifestation in grades of consciousness is the 'truth' of evolution. 'A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter as a constant developing self-formation until the form can reveal the indwelling spirit, is then the key-note, central

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, New York 1949, 4.

significant motive of this terrestrial existence'.<sup>2</sup>

Now given Sri Aurobindo's theory of integral spiritual evolution, human existence becomes crucially important. Man is not the ultimate summit of evolution, although he is defined by his aspiration towards it. Himself an evolute, he yet sets in motion a scheme of change; with man evolution becomes self-conscious to a larger degree. The evolutionary view of man may be put briefly as follows. Man is what he can be. The basic principle of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical anthropology is that human existence is full of possibilities, that man as such has an unavoidable tendency towards self-exceeding. 'It is in his human nature, in all human nature, to exceed itself by conscious evolution, to climb beyond what he is'. What distinguishes human existence from other lower modes of being is that whereas in those modes of being actuality dominates over possibility, in human existence it is the possibilities that count.

That human possibilities are existential, is a statement which needs clarification. Man includes in himself all the lower evolutionary principles, transformed and integrated under the dominant principle of his being. He is a material body and also a living organism, but he is primarily a self-conscious mental being. Again, not only the lower principles of mental awareness, but even the higher principles, higher forms of awareness are involved in him, even if under the limitations imposed by mental awareness. Spiritual integration at the human level is imperfect, for the elements of the complex nature which is man's, jar and conflict. Man is a unique person in his self and also a multiperson in his manifestation of self, and this accounts for the conflicts within the individual and also in human history. The growth of man's self-awareness is a growing process of integration. The human quest is a search for a mode of self-awareness which can prove more effective in harmonizing the lower and the higher.

The peculiar complexity, as well as the plasticity, of human nature affords us with the fundamental existential responsibility that is man's and from which should follow all his religious, ethical, aesthetic and social 'ought-to-do's' and 'ought-to-be's'. Sri Aurobindo's phenomenology of human nature, adumbrated from a genetic-evolutionary point of view, shows that the appearance of man signifies a 'crucial step, a decisive change in

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 734.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 638.

the cause and process of the evolution'.<sup>4</sup> 'In him... the substitution of a conscious for a sub-conscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable'.<sup>5</sup>

The possibilities of human existence, then, imply man's spiritual responsibility. The responsibility is born of an urge which is towards a higher, i.e. more integrated, harmonious, mode of consciousness. The consequent task is to prepare the ground for the emergence of such a mode of consciousness. Man's morality, religion, art and literature, science and technology, education and social ordering—all these may be understood and evaluated in the light of this most fundamental responsibility that is placed on man in virtue of his unique position in the evolutionary process.

As laid down by Sri Aurobindo, the spiritual account of the evolution of man entails the evolution of the spiritual man. The evolution of man has a twofold aspect, the evolution of our outward nature and the evolution of our inner being. The former means primarily the development of our mind to the greatest possible extent, up to the unveiling of an intuitive intelligence. The second, i.e., the spiritual evolution of man himself, is directed to a new search for the soul, a deeper subjective view of life consequent upon the failure of rationalism. Human history is the record of the experiments through which man's mind has been perfecting itself, making possible a richer intuitive grasp of the truth of things. Man is the direction of movement towards more and more of integration of the different principles constituting his complex nature.

A reference to the failure of rationalism has been made in the preceding paragraph. Sri Aurobindo's concept of the mind is wide enough and its domain is not merely co-extensive with that of reason. Mind, as an emergent, extends from the sub-rational to the supra-rational. As a mode of consciousness, it divides, limits, cuts out and separates forms of things from the invisible whole of an indivisible existence in which they really are and must always be. Mind has a constant urge to go beyond the parts and grasp the whole, but by its inherent limitations it always fails in its attempts. This critique of pure reason does not close with a note of agnosticism. On the contrary, it throws the doors of the superconscient wide open. The evolutionary

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 750.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 751.

role of reason lacks 'its essential primary'.<sup>6</sup> It is, as Sri Aurobindo says, imprisoned in the act, that is, it is not under any one master. Reason is not autonomous; owing to the immense complexity of man's nature, reason is influenced and acted upon by the sedimented structures within human existence. Reason has to obey many masters; it has to justify our physical-vital tendencies, economic class-interests, traditional beliefs, etc. But it is true that reason obeys the subconscious or the subliminal as much as, at rare moments though, it obeys also the super-conscious. Sri Aurobindo's morphological analysis of human nature gives the mind great plasticity, making it a luminous medium for the truths of the higher regions of the supermind.

## II

We may now turn to answering the Kantian-looking question: 'How is art possible?' in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

Art is one of the many evolutionary episodes by which man has sought to express and increase 'his mental, vital, physical, spiritual existence'.<sup>7</sup> Intellectual knowledge and practical actions are devices by which man is able to express so much of his being and to grow into that which he has yet to actualize. 'But our intellect and mental knowledge and will of action are not our only means, not all the instruments of our consciousness and energy'.<sup>8</sup> The requisite harmony, answering to the complexity of human nature, cannot be merely rational. Harmony can only be spiritual, and the spiritual is supra-rational. The limitations of reason make room for art. Reason is not the sovereign master of our being because it cannot legislate for the whole of our being. It is, best, an 'intermediary or minister', its function being to lead man 'to the gates of a greater self-consciousness'.<sup>9</sup> The concept of the rational does not exhaust the concept of man. 'The rational or intellectual man is not the last and highest ideal of manhood. The spirit that manifests itself in man and dominates secretly the phases of his development, is greater and profounder than his intellect'.<sup>10</sup> The root powers of human life, says

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 612.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Compare Tagore: 'We must realize not only the reasoning mind, but also the creative imagination'. *The Religion of Man*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 124.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Sri Aurobindo, 'are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational'.<sup>11</sup> The rational is surpassed and left behind by the genius, for the rational only constructs, but does not create. In this light one might better understand Kant's celebrated view that creations of the mind which do not owe their origin in any way to the spiritual faculty in man (freedom and autonomy) are only a product of mechanical operations, of association of ideas, or even of mere lucky accidents. 'Rule and precept are incapable of serving as the requisite subjective standard for...the aesthetic and unconditioned finality in fine art'.<sup>12</sup> Kant finds the explanation of genius in 'the supersensible substrate of all the subjects (unattainable by any concept of understanding), and consequently in that which forms the point of reference for the harmonious accord of all our faculties of cognition...'.<sup>13</sup> Despite obvious differences between Kant's and Sri Aurobindo's respective philosophical positions, the point of concord also are striking.

But if the artistic is in no sense rational how can there be any rational discourse about art? Is all aesthetic discourse or our talk about art wholly non-cognitive? Sri Aurobindo is not an advocate of reductionism. Though art or the aesthetic impulse, properly speaking, springs from the infra-rational parts of our being, it does seek the help of the rational. Reason lays down the laws of aesthetics, purifies our appreciation and improves our taste. Within restricted bounds, reason corrects and sets aright our aesthetic instinct and impulse, by making it self-conscious and rationally discriminative. The rational as such may not also be the artistic but it is the creator of our aesthetic conscience, judge and guide. To put the matter in the terminology of modern philosophy, Sri Aurobindo is suggesting a distinction between first order and second order aesthetic judgements. Higher order judgements are essentially discursive, since they are directed towards a conceptual study or classification of the first order assertions of a specific domain.

'The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us; creation comes by a suprarational influx of light and power which must work always by vision and inspiration'.<sup>14</sup> This

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, ed. Meredith, 212.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 159.

account of art follows from Sri Aurobindo's concept of man. The metaphysical proof of the possibility of art is entailed by his view that the spiritual evolution of man himself necessitates the aesthetic harmonization of man's 'complex infra-rational sediments of existence, mediated by the rational, in terms of the suprarational. It may be argued whether art is at all efficacious in performing this task. Kant rested his belief in the ethical being of man, and so did Gandhi the moralist. Kant's 'supernatural' man is not necessarily non-aesthetic. The point is whether the ethical man is the whole man. Sri Aurobindo holds that 'ethical conduct is not the whole of life; even to say that it is three-fourths of life is to indulge in a very doubtful mathematics'.<sup>15</sup> If 'good' and 'the beautiful' are made interdefinable concepts, then another sort of solution can be had without succumbing to 'the intolerant arrogance of goodness'.<sup>16</sup> Tagore, for example, makes the 'good' and 'the beautiful' interdefinable concepts by defining both concepts in terms of harmony, which, he says, is the truth of man. Nothing that is disharmonious can be good, and the same is true of the beautiful. 'Harmony', we may note, has aesthetic overtones. The point suggested by Tagore is that ethics cannot dispense with aesthetic values. Sri Aurobindo strikes the right note when he says that, though ethical conduct is almost the first condition for human self-perfection, yet the aesthetic sense is no less indispensable. The harmony of the good and the beautiful is a desideratum of man's spiritual self. Such was Tagore's conclusion too. Sri Aurobindo also speaks of combining the good and the beautiful—'the powers of our psychological being' for a greater self-expression of man. As he puts it, the spiritual integration of the two powers of human existence is called forth by the spiritual evolution of man himself.

Though neither the good nor the beautiful can be the highest principle of the human order, yet Sri Aurobindo seems to propose a sort of primacy of the aesthetic sense: 'We can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty'.<sup>17</sup> Even a philosopher or a metaphysician, a rational man primarily, 'very readily misses (beauty) and impoverishes his thought by missing it'.<sup>18</sup> Kant has shown that *judgement* can be aware of such realms of

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 69.

<sup>17</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 110, Italics mine.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



being-freedom that pure reason aspires to, but ultimately fails to reach. Again ethics, which employs reason *practically*, remains to the end conceptual: 'That is *good* which by means of reason commends itself by its mere concepts'.<sup>19</sup> Only the aesthetic judgement of taste is disinterested. Sri Aurobindo holds that the aesthetic consciousness breaks through the mechanical operations of the mind, and since man is a 'mentalised' being, aesthetic consciousness is transmental in its import and movement. The ethical sense no doubt represents a spiritual advance of man and the spiritual integrates his physical and vital motives by imposing its practical laws of self-discipline on the will. Still it works under the limitations of the mind—the rational man. By contrast, the aesthetic sense takes hold of mental operations; and, in Sri Aurobindo's view, without it 'the self-perfection of the mental being' would remain impossible. By 'the self-perfection of the mental being, he means (on the mental plane), 'the right and harmonious possession and enjoyment of the truth, power, beauty and delight of human existence'.<sup>20</sup> The aesthetic sense is spiritual, higher than the ethical, though neither, he says, can be the highest principle of the human order. For Sri Aurobindo in short, art arises out of the necessity of the spiritual evolution of man himself.

### III

If art is possible, what then is art? The answer has by now been evident. Art is a general term for a wide variety of human acts. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, art-activity is distinguished from other human acts by its integration of work and knowledge. He writes, 'every well-made and significant poem, picture, statue or building is an act of creative knowledge, a living discovery of the consciousness, a figure of Truth'.<sup>21</sup> It may be that Sri Aurobindo is explaining art in terms of paradigmatic instances. But his is not a lonely voice. If art is not to be a mere mental or vital gratification, one might emphasize, as Kant did, the disinterestedness of aesthetic delight, or like Hegel, look upon art as an expression of Spirit. General theories of art and beauty have fallen into disrepute in recent times. But fashion is no proof of invalidity. It does not follow that the metaphysical criterion

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., 110.

<sup>21</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, 108.

of excellence of art that Kant or Hegel had in mind or that Sri Aurobindo proposes, is in no way capable of formulating aesthetic criteria of excellence in the arts. That art is a stepping-stone to some superior state of vision and blessedness has been a favourite theme in human history. In fact, it is in the interest of art itself that Sri Aurobindo prescribes 'spiritual aspiration' for art. For, he says, if art rises into the spiritual life (as distinct from even the religious) 'the more luminous, flexible, deep and powerful will the Art be that springs from that high motive'.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it is a misunderstanding of the import of the spiritual that makes one suspect it. Sri Aurobindo, in making art spiritual in essence, does not cut at the root of it, as Hegel's declaring the morality of art does.<sup>23</sup> His conception of the spiritual life is not exclusive, but integral. He writes, 'The widest spirituality does not exclude or discourage any essential human activity or faculty, but works rather to lift all of them up out of their imperfection and groping ignorance'.<sup>24</sup> Even in gnostic life art persists 'as expressions and means of the truth of the spirit and the beauty and delight of existence'.<sup>25</sup> In short, the immense value of art to the human spirit lies in its 'immediate power for inner truth, for self-enlargement, for liberation'.<sup>26</sup>

We find, then, that Sri Aurobindo invests art with a spiritual significance, which follows from his showing the possibility of art as entailed by his premises of the theory of the spiritual evolution of man. We may now turn to a consideration of the category of aesthetic consciousness, i.e., the suprarational Beauty.

#### IV

'Man's seeking after beauty reaches its most intense and satisfying expression in the great creative arts, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, but in its full extension there is no activity of his nature or his life from which it needs or ought to be excluded, provided we understand beauty both in its widest and its truest sense'.<sup>27</sup> Art, which is the result of man's

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>23</sup> For Hegel art is merely the sensuous expression of the Idea—its first expression. Therein lies its glory and therein lies its tragedy.

<sup>24</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 944.

<sup>26</sup> *The Human Cycle*, 163.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 151.

search and attainment of beauty, is spiritual both in terms of the creative act and appreciative knowledge. It is spiritual inasmuch as the rational is surpassed in both the moments of creation and enjoyment. By leaving the rational behind in the aesthetic mode of consciousness, man transcends his physical and vital impulses and desires, and stands in communion with 'the fundamental determinates of the Divine Delight of Existence'.<sup>28</sup> Sri Aurobindo writes, 'It is possible by bringing the soul to the surface to replace the egoistic standards of pleasure and pain by an equal, an all embracing personal-impersonal delight.... The artist and the poet do it when they seek the *rasa* of the universal from the aesthetic... from which the ordinary man turns away and...to which he is attached by a sense of pleasure'.<sup>29</sup> In this crucial passage Sri Aurobindo locates beauty in the heart of Reality—'the Delight of Existence'. It is involved in man's sub-rational gropings, and gradually finds expression in his spiritual evolution of himself. As man's self-expression becomes more and more self-conscious and spiritual, the physical and vital motives become non-egoistic and the delight of self-expression, non-hedonic in character. Further, the passage is not only reminiscent of the Upanishadic utterance that the Real is the essence of all felicity<sup>30</sup> but also echoes the essentials of the Vedanta aesthetics. Yet there is a difference. For Sri Aurobindo, the aesthetic consciousness is a mode of integral spiritual consciousness which, he says, 'links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole'.<sup>31</sup> His stand is that by extending the possible boundaries of knowledge, and since art is creative knowledge, we can include ultimate reality. According to the Vedantic tradition there is no hiatus between human consciousness and the ultimate. But the Vedantin does not conceive art as 'creative knowledge' of spiritual Bliss. Aesthetic delight is at best a foretaste of the state of self-realization, which is value-realization. The aesthetic attitude, the Vedantin would say, stands certainly higher than that of common or everyday life. The selflessness signified by art-experience is an indication of its transcendental character. But still art-experience falls short of the excellence of

<sup>28</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 236.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> *Raso Vai Sah*, see *Taittirīya*, 2.7.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, 566.

the state of self-realization, at best, it is but a sibling of that ultimate state.

By contrast, Sri Aurobindo's integral spiritual evolution accords to art a place of greater importance. His conception of the aesthetic consciousness as 'creative knowledge' is specially responsible for this. No Vedantin would say that 'A complete and universal appreciation of beauty and the making entirely beautiful our whole life and being must surely be a necessary character of the perfect individual and the perfect society'.<sup>32</sup> This is a unique feature of Sri Aurobindo's integral outlook in philosophy. But it must not be supposed that Sri Aurobindo is implying that the experience of delight in the aesthetic consciousness is one with the imperishable truth of beauty totally seized in its inner reality. The latter is supra-aesthetic, the divine delight or *ānanda*, which is cosmic. In disapproving the implication, since the aesthetic sense is not the highest principle of human existence, Sri Aurobindo agrees with the Vedantin. But where he disagrees is in dispelling the ascetic suspicion of the Vedantin with regard to the aesthetic sense, and making it continuous with the seeking for our 'highest, truest, fullest, largest self'. 'The aesthetic image is a brilliant mask of God, the suprarational beauty is the intuitive revelation of the face that animates the mask'.<sup>33</sup> Art is a key to self-discovery. The 'creative knowledge' which demarcates the aesthetic consciousness is part of a vision, involved in and inseparable from the act of creation. Inspired forms of beauty are symbolic of the unseen reality, a deeper and original truth which escapes the senses or the reason.

## V

It remains to see how Sri Aurobindo formulates the aesthetic criterion of excellence for he is a non-naturalist. Naturalism holds that there is an entailment between facts about a valued object and the predication of an evaluative category of that object. For example, he does not think that form and process can in any way go to make for 'significant form'.<sup>34</sup> If beauty is

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>33</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 160. See also *Isa*. 15: The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid. Sri Aurobindo comments that the Sun 'represents the divine illumination of the Kavi which exceeds mind and forms the pure self-luminous truth of things'. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 153.

spiritual, no factual considerations can ever amount to the spiritual value of an art-object. But Sri Aurobindo is not a non-naturalist of the extreme intuitionistic type. He thinks that aesthetic discourse is possible, and on the basis of factual considerations. The rationality of the discourse will lie in the discriminatory considerations of the valuable properties of an art-object. To put the matter in Kantian terms, we can say that the facts about an art-object are not constitutive of its aesthetic value. This is why he disallows an entailment relation between descriptive statements about an art-object and evaluative judgements. Concerning it, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes 'exterior truth' and 'a deeper and original truth' of beauty. Examples of 'exterior truth' are 'formal beauty—or the beauty of proportion and right process'. The artistic creations of the ages of reasons, he says, have intellectual greatness. Rationalism in aesthetics sets up reason and meticulous taste as the sovereign powers of aesthetic activity. The products of classicism have an intellectual greatness and perfection of technique. But Sri Aurobindo says that they are not achievements of a supreme, inspired and revealing beauty. The reason for this judgement is not hard to find. Art is supramental in its movement and motive: 'great art is not satisfied with representing the intellectual truth of things'.<sup>35</sup> Rational elements in art are necessary elements of its aesthetic excellence, but they may not be sufficient. On this issue Sri Aurobindo is decisive: 'All great artistic work proceeds from an act of intuition, not really an intellectual idea or a splendid imagination,—these are only mental translations,—but a direct intuition of some truth of life or being, some significant form of that truth, some development of it in the mind of man'.<sup>36</sup>

Two questions can now be asked: (a) If the statement quoted above is true of art in general, how are we to explain the divergence between European and Indian (also Chinese and Japanese) art? The truth of art may be identical, i.e. an intuitive grasp of some truth of life or being, as he says, but divergence would begin in the object of the intuitive vision, in the method of working out the vision, or in the part taken in it by the external form and technique. And (b) how is criticism possible if one adopts the spiritual view of art?

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, see also his remarks about Greek sculpture in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, 233.

<sup>36</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Foundations of Indian Culture*, 237.

Much, of course, depends on what one means by criticism. One may hold that criticism is the detection of the essential characteristic of creative work and, as Aristotle held, define it as the presentation of universal or typical, instead of particular or actual. The classical notion of criticism consisted in measuring the truth of creative works by reference to the methods of art. The classicist may give us, further, an analysis of the constituent elements of a typical form of creative work and prescribe the use of these various elements of plot, character, etc., expressed in a system of formal rules. He would propose symmetry or structural perfection as the measure of artistic excellence. The latter, the formal, is the least valuable part of the classical theory of art. It is easily imaginable that Sri Aurobindo would say much the same thing about the classical theory that he had said about what he called the typical and the conventional ages of human society.<sup>37</sup> The principle of the appeal of art to the imagination marks the cardinal difference between ancient and modern criticism. The classical theory of criticism is formal, whereas the modern or the romantic theory moves towards subjectivism.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of mind throws much light on the scope and limitations of the faculty of imagination. Aesthetic consciousness or creative imagination, for Sri Aurobindo, must image 'difficult and hidden truths'. It may be noted that his view of art is based on his view of poetry as *mantra*. He would say that a metaphor or a symbol employed in the Vedic style is expected to convey a reality, as a revealed symbol of the unrevealed, and hint luminously to the mind what for logical or practical thought would have ever remained inaccessible. The romantic view of the imagination is that it is 'a plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch-girl of the mind'.<sup>38</sup> The artist must be a seer, and hence imagination is 'a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but image difficult and hidden truth'.<sup>39</sup> It may be that he is judging the romantic theory by its failures, but there is much truth in what he says. Not only is he highly consistent in his concept of mind, but he can also explain the failures better than any other theories of art can.

<sup>37</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,

Coming now to the question regarding the possibility of criticism, one more point of importance remains to be mentioned. It may be argued that if we reject the classical view, aesthetic discourse becomes incommunicable, and that if the romantic's appeal to imagination is discarded, beauty will become formal. Either we should go in for classicism, or appeal to the imagination. Therefore, either aesthetics will become incommunicable or beauty will become formal. Sri Aurobindo would meet this argument if he establishes a conclusion which is inconsistent with it, i.e., if he holds that either aesthetic discourse is not incommunicable, or beauty is not formal. Both these disjuncts can be shown to be true in Sri Aurobindo's theory of art-criticism.

Ordinarily, rational discourse is communicable. But Sri Aurobindo has shown that mind is not purely a logical power and that its operations are impaired by several sub-rational forces that are egoistic. Working under these limitations as it does, its power of communication is practically limited. A suprarational orientation of mind will not only purify it, but will also increase its power and dimension. This is what the aesthetic consciousness seeks to do. The gap between the logical mind and the imagination is sought to be 'bridged by' conceiving aesthetic consciousness as creative knowledge. This integration co-ordinates creativity with appreciation.

Sri Aurobindo would brush aside the tradition led by Hobbes, and recently given currency by Ryle, as inadequate, by pointing to the complexity of the creative process. Notions of simple problem solving fail to account for creativity. Creative activity does not consist merely in the reshuffling of discrete elements of atomic contents and experienced forms into other combinations. The product of the creative mind is not a mere combination, but a creation in a sense that no behaviourist or mechanist can admit. A theory of mind that does not take into consideration the phenomenon of human creativity, or that reduces it to complex mechanical reshuffling and anticipatory manipulation, is not a theory of what is distinctive and of chief interest about the human mind. The critic's task, then, is a difficult one. What he has to give us is not only a necessary explanation, but also a sufficient explanation of the creative phenomenon. Criticism is a meta-aesthetic operation, and the critic, if he is interested in the advancement of creative truth and not the prop-

agation of a doctrinaire philosophy, must at least admit the limitations and inadequacies of his theories and method. The chief reason for this is that the creative process surpasses the logical mind.

Just as the artist may benefit by the aesthetic conscience and the critical control of the rational mind, the critic must also learn to be 'inspired, intuitive, revealing'.<sup>40</sup> Criticism, when it is on the right road, should help us to understand not only the form and element of art-works but the mind from which beauty emerges. It is only by mistaking his vocation that the critic might arrogate to himself the task of giving a method, process or rule by which beauty can or ought to be created. The appreciation of beauty needs deeper insight than critical reason is capable of having. Academic criticism is mostly superficial because it appears to be governed by the false idea that technique is the most important part of creation. It only prepares an artistic law and canon of construction, a sort of mechanical rule or process for the creation of beauty. But Sri Aurobindo reminds us. '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'.<sup>41</sup> The highest criticism, according to Sri Aurobindo is 'right description' of the aesthetic response. The critic must feel 'in appreciation the same divine intoxication and uplifting which the artist felt in creation', because the 'soul of beauty in us identifies itself with the soul of beauty in the thing created'.<sup>42</sup> This is the general stand of idealistic aesthetic, namely, there is *one* way of reading an object of art, and that there is *one* act of imagination which endows art-objects with individual meaning and value. Sri Aurobindo's position is a qualified one. He does not, like the general run of the idealistic philosophers, suggest that the material embodiment of art-objects is aesthetically irrelevant. He would maintain that creation and appreciation are different processes. One is 'creative knowledge' and the other only shares the mode of consciousness without ever embodying it in an aesthetic image. Appreciation is primarily responsive. The aesthetic being

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 158.



of man is largely, and ideally, moved by the action of the intuitive mind. In the case of the critic, this is not necessarily so. When the intuitive mind of a critic completes or even replaces the action of the rational intelligence, it can '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, limitations of the work as well as of its qualities. The intuitive intelligence, when it has been sufficiently trained and developed, can always take up the work of the intellect and do it with a greater power and light and surer insight.

## VI

We can now sum up Sri Aurobindo's view of art. For him art is integral, inasmuch as he harmonizes the classic and the romantic views of art. The distinction between the two views of art is, for him, of doubtful validity. He, moreover, introduces the category of the 'real' in order to designate classical art. By 'real' he understands 'the external truth of things'. The spirit of the real, as he says, serves in classic art to articulate the universal to the subordination of the individual expression. It results in a wide impartiality of vision. But if classic art works unaided by inspiration and solely by the process of intellect, it will speedily degenerate into a cult of 'the formal or academic', cold and mechanical workmanship, canonical and void of life. Romantic art seeks to bring out the striking and the individual, but its neglect of the external truth of things makes it lose its grip and declare the 'ugly, common or morbid' as the whole truth of life. A harmony of the classic and the romantic becomes the desideratum of an integral view of art. Sri Aurobindo believes that 'all great art has carried in it both a classical and a romantic as well as a realistic element'.<sup>45</sup> And this harmony which is the element of perfection in an artistic work can be achieved only if there is '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

<sup>43</sup> See Gallie, 'The Function of Philosophical Aesthetics' in *Aesthetics and Language*, Blackwell.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit, 158.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 154.

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 *swarupa* and *swabbava*'.<sup>46</sup> This discriminating inner sense rejects all that is foreign and superfluous and selects only that which can bring out the utter beauty—the supra-rational aesthetic truth in the art-work, making it, as it were, a brilliant golden mask and an image of the Sun.

### POETRY AND TRUTH IN SRI AUROBINDO

With Sri Aurobindo poetry becomes self-conscious in the same manner in which reason had come to self-consciousness with Kant. Sri Aurobindo's thoughts about the possibility of poetry, its nature and office, are contained in such of his writings as *The Life Divine*, *The Future Poetry*, in the volume of *Letters on poetry and literature* as also in the *Letters on Savitri*. Valuable remarks are scattered through the chapter on 'The Suprarational Beauty' in *The Human Cycle*, and in other works as *The National Value of Art*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and *On the Veda*. Significant as well are his translations of the *Upaniṣads* and the Vedic piece called the *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. In all these writings Sri Aurobindo could be said to have laid the foundation of a new aesthetics, and more importantly the hermeneutics of a new *genre* of poetry.

#### I

The problem of the connexion between poetry and truth becomes uniquely significant in Sri Aurobindo's case. It does not seem possible to separate his philosophy from his poetry. As in the case of Plato, so in that of Sri Aurobindo, image and argument are so deeply intermeshed that they can only be separated by violating the philosopher's intention. His writings illustrate Martin Heidegger's thesis about the intimate connexion between poetry and philosophy that 'All reflective thinking is poetic, and all poetry in turn is a kind of thinking'.<sup>47</sup> Poetry is indeed thought, although Sri Aurobindo would add, it is 'intuitive thinking'.<sup>48</sup> There is another considerable opinion, which

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'On the Way to Language', (tr. Stambaugh), Harper and Row, New York 1971, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Third Series, Bombay, 1946, 42.

is voiced by Whitehead, namely that in a line and a half of poetry Euripides could compress the main philosophical problems which had tormented European thought.<sup>49</sup> One of the functions of philosophy—as much as of poetry, notes Whitehead—is search for meanings as yet unexperienced, beyond those stabilized in etymology and grammar. This is what Sri Aurobindo has done in his philosophical writings, and spoken of as the poet's capability of 'going beyond the word or image he uses or the forms of the thing he sees'.<sup>50</sup> In poetry, said Bhavabhuti, *vācam artho anudhāvati*.<sup>51</sup>

A closer look at the matter can now be taken. An apotheosis of language as poetry had already taken place in the Vedas, and it was expected that a disclosure of Being or Logos could be effected through the mystic employment of language, called *mantra*. This implied a self-consciousness on the part of language itself, its power of projecting itself beyond the bounds of sense, an attempt, as it were, to have the word incarnate in the language. The concept of *mantra* relates to a widening of human consciousness through the liberating word. *Mantra*, to borrow an expression from Sri Aurobindo, is the all-puissant word. The notion sums up what words or language, if surcharged with self-vision, can do for the widening of being and consciousness.

Accordingly, *mantra* opens the dimension of poetry not only by expanding man's being and consciousness, but also by enhancing his capacity for delight. The ontology of what Sri Aurobindo calls the delight of existence is denoted by the Upanisadic term '*tadvanam*',<sup>52</sup> which when translated means, 'The name of That is the Delight'. The ontological term *ānanda* occurs in several of the Upanisads, but in the passages of the *Taittirīya* lies the clue to an aesthetics based on what could be called a sort of phenomenological Vedānta.

In a celebrated *Taittirīya* passage there is a statement concerning the *raison d'être* of phenomenal existence, which is said to have been projected by the self of things, the infinite, indivisible, self-conscious existence. What is of importance is the occurrence of the term *ānanda* along with its aesthetic cognate *rasa*, which is at once essence of a thing and its taste. One of the most influential trends in classical Indian aesthetics bases its

<sup>49</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, Cambridge 1961, 227-28.

<sup>50</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Bhavabhuti, *Uttara-rāma-carita*, VII.

<sup>52</sup> *Kena Upanishad*, IV. 6.

argument for the uniqueness of the aesthetic point of view on the concept of *rasa*. Its later followers are formidable in their significance, and Sri Aurobindo is one of them. The theory has received a persuasive formulation in his hands in accordance with his philosophy of the life divine.

What makes a point of view aesthetic? Let us consider the following passage from Mircea Eliade: 'A work of art reveals its meanings only in so far as it is regarded as an autonomous creation, that is, in so far as we accept its mode of being, that of an artistic creation, and do not reduce it to one of its constituent elements...or to one of its subsequent uses'.<sup>53</sup> To accept a thing's mode of being is to grasp its essence, its *rasa*. Philosophers have sought to get clear about the notion of the mode of being of a thing apperceived aesthetically. I shall mention only three such cases.

There is Kant's notion of the beautiful as the object of disinterested satisfaction. The satisfaction is free, it does not involve any concept, and the object reveals itself only by referring to the feelings of the subject. The Kantian intentions get further clarified in Schopenhauer for whom art is a manner of looking at, or even knowing things as they are in themselves. It is perceptive knowledge, a state of consciousness, freed from the working of the will, and stands beyond the scope of the principle of sufficient reason. That the aesthetic mode of apprehension or contemplation is disinterested is maintained also by Maritain. Talking about the role of creative intuition in poetry he has spoken of poetry engaging the human self in its deepest resources. The creative self reveals as well as sacrifices itself, in a saintlike fashion, to use a Christian metaphor. Or better still is the *Rgvedic* analogy<sup>54</sup> of the *purusa* sacrificing himself, and thereby bringing about not only the world at large, but also poetry.

There are, of course, certain assumptions, reacting from which one might object to the view that the aim of poetry is self-knowledge. In some of his intellectualist moods, Plato had maintained that the artist could never reach reality: he has to be contented with shadows. And the rationalists know only objective knowledge. But for Sri Aurobindo the highest poetry is one with the knowledge of the self.

<sup>53</sup> Mircea Eliade, 'History of Religions and a New Humanism' in *History for Religions*, Vol. I Chicago 1961, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Rgveda*, X. 9.9.

A purer perception lent its lucent joy ...  
 A door parted ...  
 Releasing things unseized by earthly sense:  
 A world unseen, unknown by outward mind  
 Appeared in the silent spaces of the soul.<sup>55</sup>

The true creator of poetry is the soul. Sri Aurobindo's argument is that if poetry has at all to do anything with Truth, it should be revelatory of a large and powerful interpretative vision of Nature, life and man. To find 'the hidden Word'<sup>56</sup> is to lift the mortal mind into a refined air, and therein lies the meaning of the story of man.

But how can this be possible? In order to see how poetry stands in relation to Truth, that is, how the inspired word discloses Being, one will have to look into the nature of the delight of existence, and Sri Aurobindo's ideas about the place of art in human life. Finally, his concept of poetry as an affirmation of Being will come into view.

## II

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical thought calls for an adventure of consciousness. He understands evolution not in terms of becoming more and more saintly or more intelligent but in terms of becoming more and more conscious. The process does not end with man as he is now, but rather consists in a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being, so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest. In short, an evolution of innate and latent but as yet unevolved powers of consciousness is the story of man's ascent.

Thus consciousness, for Sri Aurobindo, is the 'central secret'.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately and essentially, it is an intrinsic, self-existent consciousness. Self-consciousness, in this case, is inseparable from its being, a self-possession whose other name is self-delight'.<sup>58</sup> It is an objectless<sup>59</sup> delight, and has been aptly called 'the delight of existence'; interchangeably with 'the joy of existence' and 'the delight of being'.<sup>60</sup> This is the delight that

<sup>55</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Centenary edn., Vol. 28, 26-27.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>57</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 902.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 909.

'eternally exists'.<sup>61</sup> The ontology of the delight of existence is axiomatic with Sri Aurobindo, and he has developed the thesis by way of an exegesis of the relevant Upanisadic passages. There is a further thesis which is no less important. It is the admission of another order of delight, namely, 'the delight of becoming',<sup>62</sup> in and through which the delight of being is said to have a formative modality. The difference between the two grades of delight is that the one, the delight of being, is totally reflexive, while the other, the delight of becoming, is transitive. The latter always has, an object which is in a way the cause of an experience of delight. In the case of the former its own projected formations serve as 'reflectors'<sup>63</sup> of the consciousness of delight.

Sri Aurobindo's metaphor of reflector appears to me significant in more than one way. The notion of objectless delight is the paradigm of disinterestedness and impersonality. A comparable case is the Mahayana account of a Bodhisattva's emotions, which have no object at all. His love, for example, does not owe its existence to the 'persons' on whom it is directed, but to an inward condition of the heart which is one of the manifestations of spiritual maturity. In the case of Kant's notion of disinterestedness a similar note is struck, though the point is arrived at in the course of considering our satisfaction with the good and the pleasant. The contemplative feeling of the beautiful is free since neither reason nor sensation compels our assent.

The area of agreement of such thoughts as the above with Sri Aurobindo's is no doubt large, yet what is distinctive is his proceeding from an ontology of being. The dialectic of the two orders of delight marks for him the crux of creativity in art and literature. Sri Aurobindo explains the disinterestedness of aesthetic delight in terms of the subsumption of the delight of becoming under that of being. When the alleged causes of delight are transformed into reflectors one enters the state of experiencing 'objectless' delight, for which the other name is 'impersonality' or 'disinterestedness'. The point is that the view that the aesthetic feeling is disinterested requires, on Sri Aurobindo's part, spelling out a metaphysics of the self. And when that is one, it only remains a matter to be verified by the

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>63</sup> Loc cit.

experience that the creative self attains, however temporarily, and feeling 'all delight of Being as one's own delight of Being'.<sup>64</sup> To put it differently, the world is a conscious birth, a blaze of superconscient creativity of which, at the human level, man has an inkling in the task of poetic and artistic creation.

More than once Sri Aurobindo has drawn our attention to the subliminal<sup>65</sup> nature of aesthetic inspiration. The subliminal soul in man, he says, is open to universal delight. Man's surface existence, in his view, is a system of responses of which man is not the master. It is nervous and sensational, enslaved to habit, egoistic, and marked by a 'blank inability to seize the essence'<sup>66</sup> of things. *Rasa*, as Sri Aurobindo has it, is 'the essence of a thing and its taste'.<sup>67</sup> To look for the essence of a thing in its contact with oneself is the mark of delight, properly so-called. But when, instead of seeking the essence of the thing, one looks to one's nervous responses like pain, pleasure or indifference, *rasa* is apprehended in a dwarfed or perverted form. The delight of being is what *rasa* is. In the *Atharvaveda*<sup>68</sup> it is the immortal contemplative self, the spirit, that is delighted by the essence—*akāmo dhīro amṛta svayambhū rasena trptah*. Disinterestedness and detachment in respect of the manner of one's knowing, feeling and nervous responses are necessary conditions for seizing the essence of things. The chief value of poetry, and of all the finer arts, lies in the fact that they constitute an aesthetic device for developing the capacity for variable but universal delight. The delight of being is 'supra-aesthetic'<sup>69</sup> (Sri Aurobindo uses the term in its Greek sense, as does Kant), whereas the reception of things in our surface existence is aesthetic. In art and poetry, through an imposed detachment from egoistic sensation and universal attitude, it becomes possible for one part of our self-divided nature to seize the essence of things. In the *Anguttara Nikāya* there is mention of man's fair or lovely self (*kalyāṇam attānam*). Apropos of the *Atharva* Vedic idiom, one could say that the part of our self that delights or seizes the essence of things is immortal, just as *vyāñjanā* is the

<sup>64</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 909.

<sup>65</sup> Sri Aurobindo uses the term 'subliminal' in the sense of a consciousness larger than what he calls the surface existence.

<sup>66</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>68</sup> *Atharva Veda*, X. 4, 44.

<sup>69</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, 42.

immortal part of the meaning. Visvanath<sup>70</sup> calls the tasting of the essence the cognate of the tasting of *Brahman*. The issue with Sri Aurobindo is a larger one. *Rasa* is more than the informing spirit of poetry (*vākyam rasātmakam kāvyam*); it is the existential substrate of all that is. The arts are its deflected image in aesthetic experience.

To return to the value of poetry. Poetry helps us absorb the 'shocks of experience'<sup>71</sup> in a cathartic way. In *The National Value of Art* he writes, commenting on the Aristotlian notion of *Katharsis* and assimilating it to that of *cittaśudhi*, that art and poetry, 'provide a field in which (the) claims of the animal (the demands of body and the vital passions) can be excluded and the emotions, working disinterestedly...can do the work of *Katharsis*, emotional purification,...*Cittaśuddhi*, the purification of the heart, is the appointed road by which man arrives at his higher fulfilment'.<sup>72</sup> The argument is that it can be shown that art and poetry are powerful agents towards that end, and that way their supreme importance is established. And Sri Aurobindo says, 'they are that and more than that'.<sup>73</sup>

### III

Poetry and art, to paraphrase Sri Aurobindo, are developments by limitation out of the delight of existence, and are therefore capable of resolving themselves back into it through a reverse development. The analogy here holds just as it does between Mind and Supermind.<sup>74</sup> Hence poetry is one of our ways of going beyond the ordinary range of our consciousness. The *Rgveda*<sup>75</sup> called it the path of the word. The dialectical development of artistic delights into the delight of being comes about if the subliminal replaces what is called, the 'desire soul'. 'The artist and the poet do it when they seek the *rasa* of the universal from the aesthetic emotion or from the physical line or from the mental form of beauty or from the inner sense and power alike of that from which the ordinary man turns away and of that to which he is attached by sense of pleasure'.<sup>76</sup> I have

<sup>70</sup> Visvanath, *Sāhitya Darpan*, III, 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 102.

<sup>72</sup> *The National Value of Art*, 1970, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>74</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 115.

<sup>75</sup> *Rgveda*, X. 30.1.

<sup>76</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 206.



given this quotation simply because the passage perspicuously states the process of psychological transformation that occurs in the wake of the artistic mode of apprehension.

The point that is made is this: artistic apprehension ushers in a change in consciousness, and hence the thesis is parasitic upon Sri Aurobindo's concept of mind or his critique of mental operations. According to him, the human mind reaches beyond itself, since mind is 'a power of Ignorance seeking for Truth',<sup>77</sup> and in order that it may fulfil itself, the human mind, by its acts of self-exceeding, links itself with higher grades of consciousness. The passage then is from the mind in the ignorance to the mind in knowledge.

There are two marks of going beyond the given range or scale of mind, impersonality and universality, exceeding the personal ego, and usual limitations of the habitual point of view. These two mark off aesthetic experience, just as they do the spiritual. The spirituality of an experience consists in the fact that in and through it one discovers one's real self which is said to be characterized by absoluteness of conscious existence. The absoluteness implies freedom or 'self-possession' and delight. It is free in the sense that it is not bound either by desire, or even by desirelessness. The nature of the absoluteness of conscious existence is a creative or self expressive activity, which has the centre of its being in self-delight. Accordingly it enjoys issuing forth in endless forms. Delight and freedom are the two attributes of its self-expression. Now if that be the nature of our real self, then the delight of existence is, or ought to be, our real response in all situations. This is the demand of the new aesthetics. If it be possible to discover the real nature of the self as the self-delight of being or conscious existence, then the habitual mode of our living could undergo a metamorphosis. This is the most liberating part of Sri Aurobindo's thesis. With the broadening of consciousness an expansion of aesthetic values comes about. This is because of the important fact that beauty is an integral attribute of the supermind. And since art and poetry go a long way towards uncovering man's authentic self, aesthetic culture is a part, a very important part indeed, of spiritual experience. Art is man's lien on the Absolute.

Corresponding to the planes of consciousness there are planes of expression which are marked by impersonality and univer-

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 250.

salinity in varying degrees. 'The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us; creation comes by a supra-rational influx of light and power'.<sup>78</sup> And Sri Aurobindo talks of the 'unsealed vision'<sup>79</sup> of the poet. The poet's is the 'vision-mind'<sup>80</sup> or 'seeing mind'.<sup>81</sup> The poet is capable of figuring and embodying in words the intuition of the heart of things. In Sri Aurobindo's terms, the imagination is 'the highest point of mental seership'.<sup>82</sup> Imagination, he says, is a supplementary power of the mind, and functions to extract from things obvious and visible the things that are not such. Imagination is the mind's vehicle of summoning possibilities. Its power is not radically illusory. Imagination, in virtue of its figuring 'the "may be"s or "might be"s of the Infinite',<sup>83</sup> can transform itself into 'truth imagination'<sup>84</sup> as, the mind ascends towards truth-consciousness. To use Sri Aurobindo's distinction between the powers of manifesting and discovering, one might say that the mental imagination has to discover the unknown, while the truth-consciousness alone is capable of manifesting the known. Given the function of the mental imagination as a mediating power between the actualities of surface existence and the possibilities of higher grades of consciousness, it is now relevant to say something more. Since poetry operates through the imagination, it is capable of incarnating the discovered possibilities of Being in language. Poetry houses Being as grasped through the imaginative operations of the mind. It should also be taken into account that Sri Aurobindo has distinguished a four-fold gradation of the planes of experience, higher mind, illumined mind, intuition and overmind, apart from creative intelligence. Whatever may have been the grade of consciousness at work behind the creations of beauty, what is important is the fact that delight has always been a species of delight in being. And since this is so, the highest achievements in poetry, by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form, function to unseal the doors of the spirit.

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the theory of poetry as *mantra*, is argued in the following manner: 'If the...Overmind

<sup>78</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>80</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 302.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 299.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 391.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 392.

power... could come down into the mind and entirely transform its action', then, he says, 'no doubt there might be greater poetry written than any that man has yet achieved'.<sup>85</sup> The viability of the argument follows from the dialectic of the two orders of delight, those of being and becoming; and the capacity of the mind to exceed itself as well as the possibility of the overmental intervention. *Mantra* is the poetry of the Overmind. It is marked by a fourfold characteristic: 'the mystery of the inevitable word, the supreme rhythm, the absolute significance and the absolute utterance'.<sup>86</sup>

It should further be noted that the Overmind, he says, occupies a special place in Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics. In it we have a firm foundation of the experience of universal beauty and delight. The Overmind aesthesis grasps at once the essence and taste of things in its purity, and thus rescues poetry from the contingency of the special grace of the artistic consciousness and limitation of delight and beauty to the field of art. The Overmind is the source of genius. This point was hinted at by Kant when he said that genius is beyond the rules of discursive operations of the mind. The Overmind consciousness is an integral experience, an experience of the whole being, compared to which our experiences are partial. It responds to all things in such a manner that beauty and truth do not fall apart in the over-mental consciousness. That there can be an aesthetic response to truth also is only overmentally possible, because the Overmind 'sees and thinks and creates in masses, which reunites separated things, which reconciles opposites'.<sup>87</sup> And hence, 'the poet also can be seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty'. And 'it is his vision of its (truth's) beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm'.<sup>88</sup> It is on the basis of the over-mental experience that the full import of the notion of the delight of being can be realized. Poetry and Truth can be wedded together for 'the poet who is also a Rishi'.<sup>89</sup> Poetry of this *genre* would be the living shape of the bliss of Brahman, the full manifestation of the Logos. *Mantra* is poetry *per se*; the rest is literature.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>87</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>88</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 129.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 128.

## CHAPTER IV

# Freedom Through Feeling

KRISHNACHANDRA BHATTACHARYYA

### I

Two sets of factors are always involved when a perceived encounters an object of art: those in the art-object and those in the perceiver. The two sets of factors represent the two ends from either of which an aesthetic theory may originate. Aesthetic theories are at odds depending on whether one begins with the picture or one's experience of the picture. Starting off from the end of the perceiver one could expect to have a psychological aesthetics, or a theory characterised by the psychological approach to aesthetics. Starting at the other end, with art itself instead of with its effects, there would be an aesthetic theory, which could be called 'theory of art'.

The case of psychological aesthetics may be summarily put as follows. The fact to be studied in aesthetics is the aesthetic 'fact' which is a distinctive mode of our consciousness. The aesthetic is one way, among others, of being related to things. Or, affectivity is a modification of a human being's existence in its relationship to a world. The experience of art is a consummatory phenomenon, an enjoyment. It may be further stated that the concern of psychological aesthetics is to analyse aesthetic consciousness, to ascertain the condition of its realisation and the range and typical features of its occurrence. As a mode of perception, the aesthetic consciousness is believed to respond both to natural states of affairs as well as to artefacts. Art, then, is a special case within a general field, a highly significant case, because it is peculiarly designed to call forth this response. 'Aesthetic consciousness' is defined as a state of precarious but infinitely fruitful equipoise. All the purposes or ends of aesthetic activity, whether creative or appreciative, are internal to the

single context of aesthetic experience. And, lastly, if feelings or emotions reign supreme in such a state of mind, these are, to be sure, feelings or emotions sufficiently distanced to be contemplated.

A theory of art would now seem to turn the tables completely. It proposes that we can look upon the art-object as something in its own right, with properties independent of our reactions. The works of art, on this theory, are said to have independent properties and principles of their own, and these, it is said, cannot be reduced to aesthetic effects in the perceived. Art, it is pointed out, commands an appropriate response regardless of the attitude we bring with us when we come into its presence. How else do we explain the fact that the world recognises works of art as public treasures? Aesthetic experience is not as sophisticated, rare and artificial an attitude as the apologists of psychological aesthetics make out.

Aesthetic theories can be classified into theories of aesthetic response and theories of art. The variants of psychological aesthetics are to be met with in *Anandavardhana*, in the third *Critique* of Kant, in the development of Kantian suggestions by Schiller and Schopenhauer, in Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art', and lately, in Edward Bullough's celebrated essay 'Psychical Distance'. It should also be mentioned that psychological aesthetics has been a matter of concern for the philosophers and poets belonging to the Romantic tradition in Europe. In Rabindranath Tagore this theory found a very eloquent literary expression. And I should like to mention that Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya also subscribes to this trend in aesthetic theory.

When I say this I should not be taken to mean that Bhattacharyya produced a system of aesthetics either in the manner of Kant, or even Schiller. His 'Concept of Rasa' certainly cannot be so described. But if the essay defines and plots the field of aesthetics, it does make an important contribution to some aspects of the field. For instance, his notion of the 'Heart Universal' is highly fertile in explaining aesthetic communication. In the essay Bhattacharyya elaborates an essential feature of all aesthetic experience, whether in art or in life, in appreciation or creation. Though he propounds no theory of art, it is clear enough what kind of theory he inclines to. His may be a variety of phenomenological aesthetics, but he could never have been

an originator of such disturbing aesthetic insights as Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysiac distinction. Scattered through the two volumes of *Studies in Philosophy* there are relevant passages that are important for their uncovering of problems and clarification of concepts, besides of course the central essay on *rasa*. All this offers not only a coherence of material, but also a coherence of point of view ensured by the integrity of Bhattacharyya's philosophical mind.

Bhattacharyya's aesthetic philosophy is apparently based on what may be called a dialectic of feeling. But it does presuppose his notions of spiritual subjectivity and value. The positive subjectivity of feeling consists in its reflexivity, i.e., its freedom from all meant or significantly speakable or communicable content. 'Feeling', says Bhattacharyya, 'does not mean anything but itself'.<sup>1</sup> It can therefore only have an unmeant content from which it is not distinguished. Or, in feeling, content and consciousness determine each other. The indetermination of content and consciousness in feeling can be understood as the possibility of a self-subsistent unity of the two. Value is not mere feeling, rather it is unity of content and consciousness of feeling. Felt value is only imperfectly distinct from feeling, and cannot be spoken about without reference to feeling. Value is not an adjective of the object, although by a necessary illusion it is spoken of as if it were. It is identified with the object, but not conversely. Beauty is the value of a known object; its objectivity means its independence from valuation, resulting from impersonalization of the feeling. To say, for instance, that object X is beautiful is not to mean that it is so to the speaker. What is meant is that 'X' is beautiful.

## II

Bhattacharyya characterizes the aesthetic consciousness as 'the feeling par excellence'. This characterization follows from his distinction between three emotional levels, and presupposes his regressive method of analysis. Aesthetic feeling, according to Bhattacharyya, is a feeling of the third-order, the first ones being the natural feelings. Given the transcendental polarities of subjectivity and object, and the thesis that feelings are intentional, the natural or primary feelings come to be characterized as

<sup>1</sup> Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. II, Calcutta 1958, 75.

'object-immersed' feelings. A 'feeling of a feeling' is a higher-order feeling and freer, and most of all at the third level. The feeling of sympathy is taken as an instance of a 'feeling of a feeling' while what he calls 'a duplicated sympathy' would describe the feeling at the third level. Such a feeling is also described as 'spiritual' and 'contemplative'.

The contemplative or spiritual character of aesthetic feeling may be understood in the light of Bhattacharyya's methodology. He undertakes a phenomenological inquiry into the workings of human consciousness revealing different levels of experience. From the point of view of each higher level the entire content of the lower level becomes reoriented and viewed in a new perspective altogether. The attitude at each higher level is more subjective than at the level transcended. It could also be said that for Bhattacharyya the word 'spiritual' is adjectival vis-à-vis the ontological substantive (or subsistent) called 'subjectivity'. It should further be noted that regression into subjectivity parallels progression into freedom, a gradual process of the 'dropping of self-consciousness'<sup>2</sup> i.e., a process of being freed from the personal or private dimensions of experience.

In Bhattacharyya's mapping of subjectivity feeling occupies an important position. There are three levels of feeling—contemplative, sympathetic and primary. At the contemplative grade feeling is reflective, i.e., it involves an awareness of content as to a mode of awareness.<sup>3</sup> Reflective feeling, then, is a feeling of or about a feeling transcended, transcended, 'stripped of accidents, isolated in its purity'.<sup>4</sup> It is itself a joy, and represents a new depth of the spirit, and hence a spiritual value. In short, aesthetic feeling is 'idealised feeling',<sup>5</sup> and it is through this feeling alone, Bhattacharyya holds, that 'objective aesthetic quality'<sup>6</sup> can be discovered.

Three points may be noted about Bhattacharyya's characterization of aesthetic consciousness.

1. It is difficult to be sure if Bhattacharyya's analysis of feeling into primary, sympathetic and contemplative is absolutely inde-

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, 1956, 354.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (tr. Norman Kemp-Smith), Macmillan, London 1958, B 25.

<sup>4</sup> Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1956, 361.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 354.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 358.

pendent of normative intentions. Detachment from the object appears to be taken by him as a matter of worth, at least it is so in some passages. Again, between the three levels, detachment from the object has degrees. There is certainly a qualitative shift from the second to the third emotional level. The introversion of feelings through the levels of detachment comes about within the domain of spiritual subjectivity. Does the term 'spiritual' have for Bhattacharyya only a non-normative or purely descriptive employment?

2. Let us suppose that Bhattacharyya's analysis is in effect a phenomenological description, since only by 'bracketing' the lower level feelings, he thinks, can their ontological structures be understood. Now the qualitative difference between the second and the third emotional levels cannot perhaps be explained unless the ontological givenness of the feeling strata is also connected to a sort of axiological datum.

Let us grant that aesthetic consciousness is describable in terms of Bhattacharyya's third level of contemplative feeling. At this stage, he says, 'the feeling bodying forth the image is itself imaginary'.<sup>7</sup> If now, he wishes to say that no mental state can form the object of aesthetic appreciation unless it occurs within, and on the level of contemplative feeling, in that case he is, in fact, laying down a criterion. And a criterion is nothing but a norm of judgement.

3. Bhattacharyya does not seem to distinguish between feelings and emotions. The former are episodic, while the latter are dispositional mental states and this is a well-known distinction in the field of Sanskrit theory of poetry. The distinction, however, can be extended to other arts, visual and plastic.

### III

Given Bhattacharyya's thesis of intentionality in respect of feelings, and the consideration that there are respective projections of feelings at various levels, it can now be asked as to how he accounts for the object of aesthetic consciousness. In other words, how does he understand the logic of aesthetic judgements? It should be pointed out that Bhattacharyya does not in fact treat the term 'beautiful' as a term of appraisal but rather as an aesthetic category.

There are words or predicates that may be looked upon as

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 353.



reflexes of an 'object-feeling'. The word 'terrible', for example, belongs to the vocabulary of reflexes, given the 'object-feeling' of terror. It refers to the speaker, and describes what appears to be seen rather than that about what there actually is. But 'beauty', to Bhattacharyya, is neither a reflex of an 'object-feeling', nor an appraisal term. It is, he says, a 'transcendent expression',<sup>8</sup> detached from the object, with a self-subsisting reality. Beauty is a value, an absolute for spiritual subjectivity. An object of art is said to be beautiful or valued as such by looking upon it as a symbol of the value. The underlying structure, the thatness of the work of art is nothing that concerns aesthetic consciousness. As with Croce, so with Bhattacharyya, technique as well as the material structure fall outside aesthetic apprehension.<sup>9</sup> He considers a general theoretical discussion of the objective characters of beauty unprofitable. Technique is certainly not creativity: One should be distinguished from the other. But from the fact that the two need to be distinguished it does not follow that one of them, i.e., technique, is extra-aesthetic. Heidegger has always insisted that aesthetic apprehension is the grasping of something *present*.

For Bhattacharyya there can be only aesthetic valuation and no 'judgement' worth the name. The so-called aesthetic judgements of the form 'X is beautiful' (to be interpreted as a singular proposition) have two substantives, the object valued and the value. Bhattacharyya says that the object valued expresses the value substantive, just as a face expresses feelings. A reversal of the function of the terms comes about in the expression 'X is beautiful', since the valued object 'X' is subordinate to the predicate 'beautiful'. Or one might say that the predicate usurps the subject. The appearance of information in the expression is illusory. Elsewhere, Bhattacharyya calls it 'an impersonal proposition; the predicate is all and the subject seems to be nowhere'.<sup>10</sup> This remark may be considered as parallel to his mention of the 'dropping of self-consciousness' at the level of aesthetic consciousness or contemplative feeling.

Bhattacharyya's view concerning the essential non-rationality of aesthetic discourse is derived from his notion of value. Rationality or the theoretic character of a discourse consists, for him,

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 353.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 358.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, 290.

in terms of the speakability of the contents of consciousness. But since he says that valuation itself is selective feeling, a value as a felt absolute cannot be properly spoken of. To argue for the alleged rationality of aesthetic discourse would require assuming 'the speakability of the unspeakable'. Bhattacharyya therefore has to say that aesthetic discourse is exclamatory in nature; all that it does is to express 'a mystic wonder'<sup>12</sup> at the aesthetic appearance of an object.

In spite of the irresistible lure of Bhattacharyya's analysis certain difficulties present themselves.

1. The relation between aesthetic value and the aesthetic object is conceived of by Bhattacharyya under the shadow of Platonism. This is understandable if one were to say that 'beauty' is a name of a non-natural property, as Moore has in fact said. In that case 'beauty' would denote a fact of another order. But if one were to say of an art-object what Samkara has said, though in another context, that it was *satyānrte mithunīkṛta*, it would be disquieting indeed. Sartre, for example, says that aesthetic value is grasped only in 'absence', for one has to imagine seeing something that is not actually there to be perceived. Bhattacharyya too, like Sartre, leaves little or no room for perception in art-experience. Exactly the opposite view is taken by Merleau-Ponty, who leaves no room for imagination in this context. When Bhattacharyya says that the aesthetic object 'partakes'<sup>13</sup> of the aesthetic value, nothing much is gained, nor does the notion of 'partaking' help him in any significant manner. On the contrary, it renders the object unearthly.

2. The search for the object of art has always been a matter of ontological hide and seek for psychological aesthetics. Bhattacharyya is no exception to this. Subjectivity has its other in the meant object. But in the case of spiritual subjectivity the object is unmeant, and thus the ontological status of the object of reflective feeling becomes precarious. Is it out there or projected from within? Bhattacharyya quotes poetry when he says that the aesthetically valued object floats, as in a dream, 'in the ether of the heart and nowhere in space and time.'<sup>14</sup>

3. Aesthetic consciousness, for Bhattacharyya relates to the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, 271.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 356.

twin domains of art and nature. If nature can be an object for reflective feeling, it means that an aesthetic object is not necessarily an art-object. There is certainly a difference between a horse in nature and a painted horse—*citrta turaga*. If both can be objects of reflective feeling then how should we tell the one from the other in the context of a theory of art?

## IV

If Bhattacharyya likens 'the magic of appearance' (the phrase in Tagore's) of art objects to *māyā*, there is no reason to suppose that the riddle of their ontological status is in any way solved. It is at best a confession of the philosopher's inability to solve it. This is particularly illuminating, since it brings home the truth that philosophy cannot altogether dispense with employing non-discursive notions. The concept of *māyā* is paradigmatically a non-discursive idea. To say that art objects are *māyā*-like, i.e. they appear to be seen, yet are nowhere, is to fall back upon a line of escape which is overtly Vedantic. It is usual for poets to say that aesthetic creations shine in a 'light that never was on sea or land' (Wordsworth). Tagore has utilised the notions of *māyā* and *līlā* in his aesthetic writings. Now Bhattacharyya's concept of value as a felt content renders the aesthetic value or the category of the beautiful into a floating or free adjective. The informative content of aesthetic judgements is reduced by Bhattacharyya to exclamations. Critical judgements constitute an important sub-class of aesthetic judgements and these are appraisals as well as descriptions. So Bhattacharyya's account of aesthetic judgements need not be the whole story.

Let us now look a little more closely into Bhattacharyya's notion of the aesthetic object. The notion of the object, according to his analysis, is the objective obverse of the subjective; it is whatever is meant or referred to by the subject. And since feeling is at the furthest remove from any meaning attitude, the aesthetic mode of consciousness is essentially non-assertive. Bhattacharyya says that the aesthetic feeling 'consumes' the object, and the objective aesthetic properties are discovered, not created.<sup>15</sup> The discovery-view presupposes that the object of art has a sort of being. Obviously, it cannot be thingness, nor is it to be identified with such formal characters as symmetry, etc. On the contrary, formal characters, says Bhattacharyya, pre-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 356-57.

suppose aesthetic feeling. Of course, he does not deny that there is something in the object that determines the feeling. His point seems to be twofold: (i) the objectivity of the formal elements and that of the aesthetically relevant ones are of different orders; and (ii) the material thatness of the art-object is not the first content of the aesthetic consciousness. What is implied is that the aesthetic qualities stand detached from the 'fact-character' of the art-object. Hence the objectivity of the aesthetic qualities is symbolic, i.e. beauty is the symbol of aesthetic feeling. The object of symbolism, says Whitehead, is the enhancement of the importance of what is symbolized. There is much that is Kantian in Bhattacharyya's notion of the symbolic objectivity of art-objects. Kant held that the symbolic is a mode of intuiting<sup>16</sup> though non-schematizable. According to Bhattacharyya's metaphor, the aesthetic feeling incarnates itself in the aesthetic object, and thereby enjoys only itself in beholding its own image. A work of art is the typic body of the aesthetic feeling, and hence it can neither be identified with any physical object, nor with mental entities. It is the symbol of aesthetic subjectivity.

Bhattacharyya then suggests the following position. In the primary sense, it is the magic of reflective consciousness which transmutes a thing into a work of art. As a condition, technique may be necessary, although hardly sufficient; it is, after all, 'a summary of particular artistic experiences'.<sup>17</sup> Since no criterion of the aesthetic could be stated in terms of fact, it should further follow that any general theoretic discussion of the aesthetic character of art-objects would be a futile enterprise. The work of art can be said to control the aesthetic attitude only secondarily. An object of art comes to have its own manner of being only by what Heidegger has called 'a destructive analysis of the thingness of things' (*die Dingheit, das Dinghafte der Dinge*). In a large manner this is what Bhattacharyya has shown by deriving the notion of the aesthetic object from the notion of aesthetic feeling. Apart from the question of consistency involved in such a procedure, what is important is that the aesthetic object is not adventitious to aesthetic consciousness. Bhattacharyya's notion of aesthetic subjectivity is generative, and not merely reproductive. This should explain how creativity is involved in the aesthetic attitude.

<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (tr. J.H. Bernard), Section 59.

<sup>17</sup> Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. I, 358.

## V

Bhattacharyya appears to be in two minds about the roles of perception and imagination in the aesthetic attitude. And in this connexion I propose to amend a remark I have made in III above. As regards the respective roles of perception and imagination in the aesthetic mode of viewing an object, Bhattacharyya's position may now be carefully explicated. He points to the peculiarity of the relation between an object and its beauty; 'it is', he says, 'not seen as a quality or adjective of the object'.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, beauty is the substantive to which the object is adjectival. Bhattacharyya calls it 'the adjectivity of the object', and construes the relation between the two as that of the symbol and the symbolised. We have noted earlier that in the context of the aesthetic judgements of the form 'X is beautiful' Bhattacharyya speaks of the predicate as being usurped by the subject. In a similar manner he could now say that 'the beauty of an object appears to be *seen rather than imagined*' (Italics mine). To apperceive an object aesthetically is to intuit its aesthetic character by making its fact-character evanescent. For example, we see the depth of a still-life painting on a flat canvas. Bhattacharyya would like to take the question 'Are works of art physical objects?' to be about the category to which works of art belong, and to say that the latter are phenomenal. As a self-subsisting value beauty floats 'in the ether of the heart'.

## KALIDAS BHATTACHARYA

A part of the task of philosophy of art is to understand the structure of the kinds of experiences which are appropriate ends of our communion with a work of art as such. Towards such an understanding Kalidas Bhattacharyya's 'Some Reflections on Art'<sup>19</sup> richly contributes. He appears to have made out the case that aesthetic experience refers obliquely to three metaphysical ideas to which it is hard for us to be indifferent. They are *freedom*, which is synonymously continuous with *detachment*, and existence of a *consciousness* enjoying itself reflexively, occasioned by its own self-image projected on to an intentional space.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>19</sup> *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. 46, Nos. 1-4, 1980-81.

It is a happy event that Bhattacharyya has written at length on art, in view of his remark<sup>20</sup> that K.C. Bhattacharyya's 'The Concept of Rasa' is an unphilosophical piece. This remark is disquieting in view of the fact that the analysis of 'The Concept of Rasa' does presuppose a number of the senior Bhattacharyya's philosophical ideas, namely, those of psychic subjectivity, value, and the interjectional nature of aesthetic judgements. It was however expected that Bhattacharyya would write on art since he wrote the probing chapter on human feelings in his *Alternative Standpoints in Philosophy*. No less important has been his exposure to the problems of art in the course of his stay at Santiniketan.

Various trends of thought have been at work in the making of Bhattacharyya's premises. I say this not with the intention of calling attention to any alleged syncretism in his thinking, but rather to emphasize his sensitivity to fertile philosophical notions gleaned from diverse fields. Some of them may summarily be stated as follows. There is Kant's notion of judgements of Taste being aesthetical, and also his distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. There is a concept of freedom and traces of phenomenology derived from and mellowed by sustained thinking on the insights of both Kant and K.C. Bhattacharyya. Abhinavagupta has influenced him, but I believe that familiarity with such a Yogācāra treatise as the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* might have contributed to Bhattacharyya's aesthetic non-naturalism.<sup>21</sup> His search for the aesthetic essence could have come from Croce, and his manner of distinguishing 'art' from 'entertainment' reminds one of Collingwood. Tagore's view that art is the expression of the universal Man together with Jose Ortega Y Gasset's thesis about the so-called 'dehumanization of art' are utilised by him. Lastly, Plato's passion for pure colours and pure forms, as one finds in the *Timaeus*,<sup>22</sup> is echoed in his formulation of the classical idea of art, especially in the case of music. In spite of Bhattacharyya's idealistic essentialism, his awareness of aesthetic genres and art-movements should be reckoned remarkable for a thinker with an *a prioristic* tendency.

<sup>20</sup> *The Fundamentals of K.C. Bhattacharyya's Philosophy*.

<sup>21</sup> 'The real picture is not in the colours', II. 118-19.

<sup>22</sup> The importance of Plato's *Timaeus* in the history of European painting is seldom noted. It is highly significant that Raphael put the *Timaeus* in Plato's hand in his painting 'The School of Athens'.

## I

'Some Reflections on Art' is a fairly long essay, comprising six sections. Bhattacharyya begins with a twofold distinction, between aesthetic consciousness and everyday consciousness on the one hand, and between a creative artist and a connoisseur on the other. The second distinction is meant to reject Croce's thesis that the creator's intention and the spectator's response should happily converge. The rejection may also be taken to reopen the issue of *sahridaya*, a notion which weighed so heavily with the writers on poetics in Sanskrit.

A *sahridaya* is a qualified spectator who enjoys the aesthetic object, holding it at a psychic distance. What Edward Bullough has called psychic distance is a matter of attitude, a readiness in holding an object or viewing it in such a way that aesthetic perception occurs. This, or something very similar to this state of affairs is meant by Bhattacharyya's term 'freedom'. In point of fact, he uses the terms 'freedom' and 'distance' interchangeably. The attitude of the connoisseur who is a sort of ideal spectator, is an achievement insofar as it implies a freedom from the principles of expediency and utility. Freedom, for Bhattacharyya, is the existential perspective that underlies the aesthetic response.

This argument from freedom is further extended when he says that the artist's creative freedom is conative freedom. This freedom is positive, since it is freedom *to*. The connoisseur's freedom is a negative one, it is freedom *from*. The two senses of 'freedom' presuppose another sense of 'freedom', i.e. cognitive freedom, that is, the freedom to perceive things as they are, the capacity to viewing things with dispassionate eyes. It may be said that cognitive freedom is a necessary condition for conative freedom. There is of course negative freedom, i.e. freedom *from*, and we are told that it is emotive freedom, a free disposition to be filled in by richer contents of freedom in cognitive and conative senses. Bhattacharyya suggests that emotive freedom is always supplemented by either or both of the other two freedoms. The connoisseur exercises emotive, and cognitive freedoms, and the conative one only imaginatively. The creative artist exercises all three.

I should like to make a few more remarks on the distinction between the artist and the spectator, and these will be necessarily brief.

(a) There is a lot that is Kantian about Bhattacharyya's account of the non-occurrence of the kinds or types of freedom in isolation. This may be a feature of his concept of mind, but specifically it brings to mind the Kantian notion of the harmonious play of the faculties. Now if this is so, it could be asked if appreciation *qua* aesthetic experience ever implies a consciousness of simultaneity of the exercise of more than one freedom at the moment of enjoyment. *Mutatis mutandis*, the very same question could be raised about Kant's notion of aesthetic delight as a free play of the faculties. If no Kantian reply be forthcoming, we need not be concerned at the moment, because Kant did not employ phenomenological categories as Bhattacharyya does.

(b) It may be that Bhattacharyya's intention in advancing his notion of freedom has been to demarcate the domain of the aesthetic or to argue for the autonomy of art-experience. Partly through the influence of Kant and Schopenhauer, the notion of autonomy has been given various interpretations, some of which are either false or trivial. But that is another story. What seems to be Bhattacharyya's intention is that there is a distinct category of aesthetic experience, distinct from every other sort of experience, but yet somehow essential to our understanding of works of art. Understood like this, Bhattacharyya's usage of 'freedom' indeed is telling.

(c) He could have put the matter in the following way: By an exercise of freedom, it becomes possible to experience or create new possibilities of feeling, hitherto or ordinarily 'unknown modes of being' (the phrase is Wordsworth's). Freedom can be said to impose an order upon reality, or elicit an order in reality, and to thereby bring us to a condition of peace, stillness and reconciliation. Freedom involves a passage from passivity to activity, and be it noted, freedom is spiritual for Bhattacharyya. The exercise of freedom in art neither presents new facts about the world nor excites emotions. It alters the picture people have of their own feelings, as they are valued in consciousness. It is one of the possible ways of escaping from 'the general mess of imprecision of feeling'.<sup>23</sup>

(d) Now supposing the restatement of the function of freedom in art is rewarded by Bhattacharyya's assent, even then it could be argued that exercises of freedom are a part of the normal

<sup>23</sup> T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*.



processes of mind, rather than specialised activities. In that case a culture of freedom would be a natural stage in the development of mind, and hence art would not be autonomous. But it is autonomous in another sense in that, through exercises of freedom, it gives to the original experience a character that it demands, but which it would not otherwise have had. To attain, on occasion, sincerity and adequacy of feeling, may require an effort of imagination or freedom that is possible for everyone. Art has traditionally been regarded as a vehicle for such efforts. I believe, Bhattacharyya would not dissent from considerations such as these.

## II

Let us look at Bhattacharyya's portrait of the connoisseur a little more closely. The connoisseur can go a long way with the artist, but falls short of the final act, which is creation. He may command a wide and varied knowledge of the creative process, the artist's intentions, the history of the *genre* as well as the uniqueness of the created object. Yet, to quote Bhattacharyya, 'he only *knows* these and can neither *use* them nor therefore produce any art creatively'. In other words, 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' fall apart for the connoisseur. Theoretical knowledge about the phenomena of art is indirect in an important sense, and as such inauthentic. Knowledge about aesthetic matters gains in authenticity if and when it is marked by a 'full living interest all through', i.e., when it is a case of genuine companionship (*sāhacarya*) with the artist. This is Bhattacharyya's formulation of the notion of *sahṛdaya*.

In terms of this view aesthetic appraisals become at once descriptive-evaluative. A connoisseur's appraisal is informed by a real contact with the art-object. Accordingly, Bhattacharyya compares the connoisseur's knowledge to knowledge of a person through intimacy with him. Aesthetic appraisals presuppose a living acquaintance. The dialectics of appreciation may even require the connoisseur to forsake his individual point of view, and annihilate the distance between his way of looking at the art-object and its phenomenal objectivity in an intentional space.

But what about criticism which is taken as cognitive-discursive enterprise? The critical attitude is looked upon as ob-

jective and is expected to result in telling a good piece from a bad one. To Bhattacharyya such a procedure would appear inauthentic and artificial, and even finally unrewarding. He would say the *sāhacarya* alone can show when and how art fails or succeeds. Now, all this may be admitted. But the question remains how one could succeed in adopting the point of view of the art-object. And how to know that this has been adopted. Bhattacharyya does not shed any light on this. He is content with showing us the form of a possible experience. His connoisseur is a case of a paradigmatic possibility, the type of aesthetic spectator who combines acute sensitivity and formidable technical understanding with warm and generous susceptibility.

### III

There are two features that distinguish the artist from the connoisseur. These are his possession of conative freedom, and its exercise 'in the way of will'.<sup>25</sup> In the way of will the artist sublimates his feelings or emotions. A sublimated emotion is cut loose from its natural roots and is felt differently from a natural one. For example, to entertain Iago's jealousy is not to be jealous, nor is to enjoy sad music to become sad. Creative psychology, as Bhattacharyya tells us, consists of sublimated or autonomous emotions. They are autonomous in the sense that they are free emotions. They are not governed by the exigencies of biological and pragmatic modes of human existence. The life of sublimated emotions is another mode of being, which Tagore had called 'the surplus in man'.<sup>26</sup> For Bhattacharyya, the sublimated emotions are located in the domain of the spiritual. In their utter reflexivity they are man's essential humanity, his subjectivity *par excellence*. From all this, it should become evident that Bhattacharya subscribes to what may generally be called Vedantic aesthetics.

Bhattacharya uses his notion of 'sublimated emotion' to solve, or rather explain, a number of problems in aesthetics. I shall mention two of them. How is catharsis possible? In their purity, the aesthetic emotions acquire a 'negative capability' (the phrase occurs in a letter of Keats, and has been revived in modern times

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> *The Religion of Man*, Ch. III, Sec. P. Roy, "Tagore's Theory of Art", *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. 45, Nos. 1 and 2.

by T.S. Eliot), and can thereby project themselves on to an intentional locus. Purged of their natural privations, the aesthetic emotions, in their conative freedom, give rise to art, and, in the way of will, fashion aesthetic object. or, to put it simply, as Schopenhauer does, 'The ultimate object of will is always the aesthetic object'. This is the case because Bhattacharyya always relates the will to feeling and imagination. The aesthetic emotions enjoy a dislocation and discover themselves in imaginal embodiments. The art of drama could be taken to illustrate this point. Again, when the sublimated emotions are enjoyed reflexively, the art of the lyric arises. What he seeks to establish is that the aesthetic object is as *a priori* as the aesthetic consciousness. The aesthetic content is anticipated *a priori* or intended, and, where the art is successful, is appropriate to the *a priori* structure of the intending consciousness. Bhattacharya's argument from freedom is meant to be directed against empiricism in art and may have received its impetus from Kant and K.C. Bhattacharyya.

#### IV

The consequences of this view of art may now be briefly mentioned.

1. 'The beautiful' is an object-oriented expression. The aesthetic object is phenomenally objective; it appears as something 'given' to the objective pole of consciousness.

2. 'Beauty' is not a real predicate. If it were a quality then no quality could be said to be 'beautiful'. But we do call qualities, like a pigment in a painting, or the modulation of voice in a song, beautiful. The argument is not particularly strong.

3. Nor is 'beauty' a relation. Bhattacharyya's theory of art is non-teleological. No ascription of aesthetically significant predicates is justifiable in terms of such relations as 'conducive to' or 'adaptable for'. This is a part of Bhattacharya's thesis of the autonomy of art, and touches the problem of reason-giving in aesthetics.

4. Art is not entertainment. The idea that something is in vogue or in fashion or is enjoyed by people at large is empirical idea, whereas art is *a priori*. The two then are conceptually different.

5. Beauty, for Bhattacharyya is 'a trans-natural substantive'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., p. 60.

Now granted that 'beauty' is no predicate *simpliciter*. Can we say that, for Bhattacharya, it is the name of a non-natural property? In spite of a good deal of similarity, Bhattacharyya's non-naturalism is not Moore's. For the latter, there is and should be a difference between consciousness and its objects, while the former holds to the view that aesthetic objects are presentational entities and parasitic upon the aesthetic consciousness. This would offend Moore's realistic sensibility. In art, says Bhattacharya, consciousness and its object somehow merge in each other.<sup>28</sup>

If they so do, then Croce makes a comeback in Bhattacharya. The view at once suggests that the physical embodiments of aesthetic consciousness are aesthetically insignificant. Bhattacharya does not deny that aesthetic consciousness embodies itself, in the way of will, in physical existence. Rather his view presupposes a dualism, and also that, almost in the Cartesian manner, the relation between the two is contingent. On this issue, Bhattacharya might refer to K.C. Bhattacharyya's view that aesthetic feeling 'consumes the object'<sup>29</sup> and its 'fact-character' gets evanescent; or to Heidegger's<sup>30</sup> idea that the 'thingness' of a work of art is destroyed as it leaps from nowhere. All these views have their charm and persuasiveness. Yet a work of art is something public. It is something that can be valued, loved, preserved, neglected and studied. Moreover, Bhattacharya's theory does not appear to take technique into account. Often the history of art is the history of the techniques of art and their revolutionary roles and importance. I do not also know how he would analyse the case of the status of a damaged work of art. This is a difficult issue, and perhaps could be explained in terms of the fact that we often times *love* works of art. Aesthetic judgements are not merely judgements *upon*, but also of love.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> "The Concept of *Rasa*", I. 16 and 18.

<sup>30</sup> "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. A. Hofstadter, New York, 1971.

## CHAPTER V

### N.V. Banerjee: Art as the Will to Create

In course of a paper<sup>1</sup> contributed to a seminar on 'Indian Aesthetics and Art Activity' at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in 1968, Nikunja Vihari Banerjee has argued for the thesis that art is a means of adjustment to a life in bondage. I propose to consider the thesis and examine a few points raised by him.

#### I

A theory of art, properly so-called, Banerjee contends, has to do with an activity of the human mind, and *not* with works of art. It should investigate the nature of the activity of the human mind which underlies art as such, and provide an answer to the question as to what art is. The activity of the human mind which is essential to art is *the will to create*.

What of course Banerjee intends by the *will* is by no means clear. But it may be said that he employs the term in Hume-like<sup>2</sup> fashion in saying that the will is an activity of the mind, and that it is a feeling of a need demanding satisfaction. The will is a tendency or disposition to do something by way of satisfying the feeling of a need. There is a conceptual connexion between willing and feeling of a need calling for its own fulfilment. Thus understood, the word 'will' in the expression 'the will to create' is related immediately to the feeling of a need, and mediately, to some product. For an understanding of the logic of 'creation' the centrality of the feeling of a need cannot be profaned, though both the immediate and mediate factors are equally essential.

<sup>1</sup> N.V. Banerjee, 'Art as the Will to Create' in *Indian Aesthetics and Art Activity*, proceeding of a seminar, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1968, 177.

<sup>2</sup> *Treatise*, Selby-Bigge (ed.), Oxford, p. 399.

The will to create is nothing apart from its creation of something. The question how Banerjee proposes to *define* the concept of 'the will to create' may be waived, but what he says is clear enough by way of revealing the content of the concept.

What Banerjee intends to do with the expression 'the will to create' may be further clarified by comparing it with the cognate phrase 'the will to do'. In willing the agent experiences the feeling of a need, and consequently, brings about certain changes either within or outside himself. But all our needs do not concern us wholly or entirely. Generally our needs are considered, in the case of the will to do, in their specific aspects like producing and gathering food, building houses, procreating children, etc. Actions such as these are performed in the context of man's adjustment to his environment. That is what Banerjee means by saying that these needs do not concern our whole being, and if that be so, no need of a feeling of this sort can be said to motivate the will to create.

What then is the nature of the need, the feeling of which may serve as the appropriate motive of the will to create? In order to find an answer Banerjee asks us to look at the human situation.

Man's attempt at survival is a two-fold process in a temporal triad. The process of survival, the human adjustment to the environment, terminates with the death of the individual man. But, collectively, the process is unending for mankind. Man's attempt to adjust remains an unrealizable goal, never to become an accomplished fact. But at the same time man has the vision of perfect adjustment or harmony, free from the mutations of time. Banerjee calls this vision a need of man as a human being. The feeling of this need contributes to and in fact is central in the motive of his will to create. This need concerns him as a total being.

What Banerjee calls 'the vision of harmony' is much like Kant's 'Idea of Reason'<sup>3</sup> in its regulative use. And if that analogy be granted, then the vision would be valid only heuristically in respect of the feeling of a need of man as a human being, as distinguished from a mere animal. At once, Banerjee's notion of art is teleological, a causally explicable phenomenon. The activity of the human mind that underlies it is the will to create

<sup>3</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, A 647, B 675.

which operates in terms of the motivating function of the vision of man's perfect adjustment to his environment. Through art activity man seeks to translate, in one manner or another, his ethereal vision into some perceptible form. Apropos of Banerjee's persuasive definition of art, it could also be said that art is a serious job in the interest of the race, for what the artist does is done on behalf of all men. And art activity is essentially projective in nature, a fact which is evident from the visionary motivation behind the will to create.

## II

Banerjee shares the romantic's agony and the existentialists' anxiety over man's fallenness and his temporal mode of being. Banerjee's picture of the human situation has a family resemblance with Keats' world 'where men sit and hear each other groan',<sup>4</sup> or Arnold's 'darkling plain swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night'.<sup>5</sup> From such a world under 'the tyranny of time'<sup>6</sup> the vision of perfect harmony should provide a transcendence, which for Banerjee, however, is no other than a way of escape. The artist, Banerjee tells us, does not take refuge in the time-less or the eternal, but on the contrary, synchronises the temporal series, he absorbs before and after in the now. This is an important point, since man's everyday life contains conflicts, discords and pain and the vision of perfect harmony is an ageless dream. Hence the only way to make the ideal realisable is to synchronise the temporal triad, to make the instant eternal as sometimes happen in the experience of love, or what Blake described as holding 'Infinity in the palm of one's hand'.<sup>7</sup> Banerjee's notion of transcendence has nothing mystical. It is the actual world which providess the artist with an occasion for transcendence to the vision of perfect harmony, motivates his will to create, as well as providing the medium for translating the vision. Consequently, art as a transcending activity does not relate exclusively to the world of nature (for Banerjee art is not mimetic) nor exclusively to the world of aesthetic vision (as is the case with the mystic). One may, if one likes, compare Banerjee's

<sup>4</sup> "Ode to a Nightingale".

<sup>5</sup> "Dover Beach".

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> "Auguries of Innocence".

account of art activity to Bradley's<sup>8</sup> metaphor of the key-hole through which the Absolute may be seized at once. One of the *Upanisads* speaks of transcendence as *amrtasya setu*,<sup>9</sup> and as Tagore has it in one of his songs, music builds a bridge across the separation of the self from its ideal.

### III

Banerjee has some very interesting things to tell us about the ontology of works of art. They are neither mimetic nor do they belong to the furniture of the world. They do not constitute the choir of heaven either. They are products of imagination and yet not imaginary. They are perceptible and belong to a distinctive order of being. Banerjee's view has something in common with Cassirer's thesis that art is one of man's symbolising activities. Man, says Banerjee, while living in the wide world of nature, can find a place for himself in a new dimension of reality made up of diverse symbolic systems. And art is one such systems by which man adjusts himself to his environment. He belongs to a class apart from animals in virtue of his disposition to adjust to the world by means of his symbolising activity. Works of art, then, are symbols. Configurations of colour in painting, body movements in dance, the rhythm of words in poetry or notes in music all have symbolic values. Works of art are symbols of meaning, and as embodiments of meaning, they are significant objects in which symbol and meaning are indistinguishably fused together, *Vāgārthamiva Sampṛta*. Hence, works of art are class apart from the objects of our ordinary sense-experience as well as from ordinary verbal language. Their symbolic character constitutes an independent and insular world of their own.

### IV

Another of Banerjee's theses is about the privacy of aesthetic experience. The point is that the artist, adjusting himself to his environment by way of symbols, is released from the boundaries of his otherwise ordinary circumscribed existence. In that case how can he communicate with his audience, and how can one possibly appreciate his symbolic system? Banerjee finds the situation of art some what disturbing, and the problem insoluble.

<sup>8</sup> *Principles of Logic*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Śvetāśvatara*, 6.19.



Let us first see why he thinks this. A work of art demands recognition, and conveys an invitation for its appreciation. Tagore has said that his paintings call to the world, *ahamayam bho*. But since every man is not an artist, how can one enter into the experience of the artist as embodied in his work of art? The communication between the appreciator of a work of art and the artist as represented by that work must therefore be contingent or problematic. For a successful communion between the artist and the appreciator two factors are needed: mutual self-assertion and mutual empathy. Banerjee's posing the problem is very genuine, because, it may be recalled, in order to escape such an impasse both Hume and Kant have postulated a 'community of taste'<sup>10</sup> within which artistic communication can occur. Banerjee emphasizes the fact that the experience of an artist is peculiarly his own, which only he can live, but cannot communicate. It is not shareable by anyone else. There is no concept of *sāhridaya* in Banerjee's aesthetics. There may of course be an appreciator's experience in relation to the artist's experience embodied in a work of art. But can one be sure that the two experiences are structurally similar, still less identical? Instead of expressing despair over the situation we could say that there is a unique relation between an artist's work of art and its appreciation. The two being external to each other, their 'mutual otherness' is left unresolved: one might invoke an erotic metaphor and point to the case of unconsummated love. Doesn't artistic communion take place in the manner consummated love. Sceptics might argue that the so-called 'intercourse'<sup>11</sup> is a misnomer, the couple remain forever far from the coveted state of 'bi-unity'.<sup>12</sup> At no moment of intimacy can experiences of two bodies become ontologically one. Bodies, Sartre has argued, negate one another.

If the erotic metaphor fails, what is the way out? Banerjee has said elsewhere<sup>13</sup> that the conquest of otherness is a necessary presupposition of knowledge, though a convenient fiction. The problem of artistic communication is not solved and yet it resists

<sup>10</sup> *Critique of Judgement*, Analytic of the Beautiful, sections 20-21. For Hume, see *Essays*.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Wilson, *Origins of the Sexual Impulse*, Chap. IX, Panther, London, 1978.

<sup>12</sup> A K Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers*, Princeton University Press, 1977, 231, "The Tantric Doctrine of Biunity".

<sup>13</sup> *Language, Meaning and Persons*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1963.

liquidation. We become keenly alive to the problem every time we encounter a work of art.

*A fortiori*, the value of art lies in the human dignity it asserts, the protest against the dehumanizing influence of the environmental pressure we have to submit to in maintaining our animal existence. The transcendence it brings about is human in a special sense. To paraphrase one of Marx's dicta, through art man humanizes nature.

## Concluding Remarks

### I

It will have been seen from our foregoing studies that for all the thinkers we have discussed a new orientation of man, his spiritual or existential dimension was developed into a metaphysical perspective of transcendence. We have seen how a dynamic conception of man, be it Tagore's idea of man as the angel of surplus, or Sri Aurobindo's thesis that art is a key to our self-finding, or Coomaraswamy's call for a return to rhetoric, Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's account of freedom through feeling, etc., understands him as the locus of self-creative tensions which are nevertheless basically oriented toward others, how he integrates the natural, the existential or spiritual, and the metaphysical, in a dialectic mobilizing all human resources. Further, our thinkers seek to integrate the categories which in traditional philosophy have been treated mutually exclusive. Analysis and reflection, for them, bring about a process of self-realization toward a transcendent *telos*. In a sense, anthropology has been their common concern, and art is subsumed under man. Art has a human message, born out of man's freedom, it is the mark of his responsibility for his own realization. Art touches the ethical also for the responsibility of the artists is to all men. Life in art, just as the moral life, is a movement toward an *authentic* realization of the ego, based on genuine experience. Since man, in all his constitutive processes, is linked with his fellows, no genuine experience of the self is possible except in relation to the genuine experience of others.

All our thinkers have sought to open up a human horizon. In an age of the diminution of man in the wake of technology and industrial civilization theirs is a significant message. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy have been keenly aware of the fact that man has lost his innermost roots in nature, his relations with others, have deteriorated and his awareness of his metaphysical dimension, has been lost along the way. In their

anguish they are in the company of Husserl, who, in his *Crisis in European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology* said that nature as the experiential ground of man has in our time disappeared behind the intellectual constructions developed by science. Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception* has also elaborated the point that the gregarious life of industrial civilization does not promote deeper human relations. Man as an individual is cut off from his fellow man and remains isolated within the bounds of his inner life. In their own way, in terms of their anthropologies, from Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy to Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya all have argued for a restoration of man and thought that this could be brought about through art and aesthetic experience. In an elegiac poem Matthew Arnold put Goethe's message thus: 'Art still has truth, take refuge there'.<sup>1</sup> Our thinkers too voiced a similar idea.

## II

Some clarificatory remarks about Tagore might be in order. It may have been noticed that he lays stress on Truth. Adapting Keats, he is fond of saying 'Truth is Beauty' instead of saying 'Beauty is Truth'. Interesting also is his notion of the Real which is not equated with the beautiful. His essay, 'The sense of Beauty'<sup>2</sup> elaborates the relationship between Beauty and Truth through *ānanda* or joy. The phrase 'the truth of a friend' occurs in that essay. In another essay 'What is Art?'<sup>3</sup> Tagore comments that the real is 'truth made our own'. That means that truth, realized intimately is the real. Again, in his *Creative Unity*, we hear him say that beauty is no fantasy; it bears the everlasting meaning of reality. It should be possible to ask now, what, for Tagore, is Truth? We venture to suggest the following in answer.

Tagore operates with four concepts, truth, beauty, goodness and joy. Along with these there are two further terms, 'expression' (*prakāśa*) and 'art' (*śilpa*). The last two are notions of a different order from the first four, for it is expression in art that leads us to truth, beauty, and goodness experienced through joy or delight. Then there are the notions of 'the surplus in man' and 'harmony'. The former is the truth of man. Harmony or unity

<sup>1</sup> Mathew Arnold, "Memorial Verses".

<sup>2</sup> P. Neogy (ed.) *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, 5-9.

<sup>3</sup> Rabindranath Tagore. *Personality*, 32.

is the truth, and creativity seeks to achieve it. So we are forced to ask the question, what is truth?

'True' has connotations beyond the bounds of epistemology, and most of these have to do with the agreement with an ideal, as in 'true friend' for example. 'The truth' in this context, is an ideal manifestation. Keats did not confuse epistemic and aesthetic categories in his 'Ode', and Kierkegaard was not philosophically confused when he argued that the truth of human existence lay in individual passion rather than in anonymous knowledge of the truth.

In his *Logic*<sup>4</sup> Hegel looked for 'the deeper and philosophical meaning of truth', and remarked that when 'one speaks of a true friend, ... we mean a friend whose manner of conduct accords with the notion of friendship. In the same way we speak of 'a true work of art'. Now 'the deeper and philosophical meaning of truth'<sup>5</sup> is non-epistemic, and it had been one of Hegel's contentions to argue that the epistemic notion of truth requires a non-epistemic base. We try to satisfy our moral ideals, and we seek out others who satisfy them. Our true friends are those who satisfy our needs as friends. Keats found that he could be satisfied ultimately only by beauty. An expanded notion of Truth may be styled thus: Truth is self-satisfaction, and this meaning of truth I should like to ascribe to Tagore.

To Tagore truth is that which satisfies man's infinite perspective, his possibilities and aspirations, his urge for transcendence. Man is a boundless finitude with the roots of his values in the domain of the surplus. Hence the ideal is 'the more real' (*āro satya*). An aesthetically valid universe (*bhavalok sristi*) is a map of truth.

'We make truth ours by actively modulating its interrelations. This is the work of art',<sup>6</sup> is Tagore's contention, 'Reality' in his term for what he calls 'the personal truth'. Reality or the personal truth is Tagore's equivalent for what Kierkegaard has called 'subjective truth'.<sup>7</sup> Objective truth is truth for anyone and everyone. One can doubt if such a notion would have any significance in morals and arts. Objective truth, like Kant's forms and concepts of consciousness, has nothing to do with any particular individual.

<sup>4</sup> F.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, (Tr. W. Wallace), Oxford 1892.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 51-52.

<sup>6</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Religion of Man*, 64, 84.

<sup>7</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, (tr. A. Dru), Oxford 1938.

## III

To turn to Sri Aurobindo there appears to be much confusion regarding his notion of poetry as *mantra*. Sri Aurobindo may be taken as inclined to the view that poetry is the highest form of art, just as the French romantics, from Baudelaire to Valéry held that music was the acme of aesthetic perfection. There is a difference between Sri Aurobindo's idea of the language of poetry and that of the French romantics represented by Valéry. Sri Aurobindo's concept of language is closer to Heidegger's according to J.N. Mohanty.<sup>8</sup> The point is that, for Sri Aurobindo, the language of poetry is revelatory of consciousness, and if that be so, the evolution of consciousness would be revealed in poetry. Further, if consciousness evolves in a visionary manner, poetry likewise would become *mantra-like*. This is the kernel of Sri Aurobindo's thesis that the poetry of the future is *mantra*.

One needs not to consider Sri Aurobindo's own poetical works in order to evaluate the merits of his thesis. What needs to be seen is that his idea of poetry as *mantra* requires a metaphysical scheme to back it up. His evolutionary philosophy contributes to the viability of his theory of poetry, and also of his idea of art. It should further be noticed that *mantra* is not a commendatory term for Sri Aurobindo. To say that the poetry of the future will be *mantra* is to not imply that it is going to be better poetry than before. *Mantra* designates the poetry of a different order.

Aurobindo's vision is essentially futuristic. 'I am vanquished by the beauty of the Unborn', he wrote. Yet his affiliations with the Indian Renaissance are obvious. His writings on the arts, especially *The Significance of Indian Art*, are creative commentaries. When I say this, I have in mind Sri Aurobindo's pieces on the spirit of Indian art, the Hindu temple, the Ajanta frescos, and the dance of Shiva.

In *The Human Cycle* he has pointed out that there is no activity from which the aesthetic principle need or ought to be excluded. A complete and universal appreciation of beauty, and the making entirely beautiful of our whole life and being, he goes on to say, must surely be a necessary character of the perfect individual and the perfect society. This remark might remind one of what

<sup>8</sup> Bradley, 'Sri Aurobindo on Language' in *Sri Aurobindo: Homage from Visva-Bharati*, ed. S.C. Sengupta, Santiniketan, 1972.

Goethe told Eckermann that painting is the criticism of our dress, architecture is the criticism of our slums. Sri Aurobindo's theory of art is significant in establishing the aesthetic principle right in the heart of his ontology. Art and beauty are part of the process of the human ascent towards an intenser clarity of consciousness.

#### IV

Ananda Coomaraswamy is ordinarily known and acclaimed as the historian of Indian Art, but he is much else besides. Eric Gill wrote of Coomaraswamy in his *Autobiography*, that no one had written the truth in matters of art and life with such wisdom and understanding. Coomaraswamy gave an aesthetic orientation to the concept of Indian freedom. It may be true to say that the aesthetic philosophy of Indian nationalism found its most articulate exponent in him. 'Nations', he observed in *Essays in National Idealism*, 'are created by poets and artists, not by merchants and politicians. In art lie the deepest life principles'.

Often Coomaraswamy is looked upon as a revivalist, and it is held that the intention of his writings is anachronistic. This may not be true. He wrote with great sensitiveness about Tagore's paintings. Long before Archer and following him Sribharayan Ray has detected anything libidinous in those disturbing series of paintings, Coomaraswamy said that the intimacy of Tagore's paintings was 'comparable to the publication of a private correspondence'.

As a historian of Indian art, many of Coomaraswamy's categories and judgements have become dated in the light of later researches. Yet there is much that remains valuable. His pieces on the Auradhapura Buddha, the *yakshi* from Sanchi, the *Bodhisattva padmapāni* from Ajanta, etc., are worth attention.

Coomaraswamy's tirade in respect of the concept of 'aesthetics' cannot be brushed aside. He held that the philosophy of the arts is broader than aesthetics. He thought that aesthetics places the emphasis in art upon its superficial surface qualities and our subjective reactions to them. Coomaraswamy reminds us that beauty in scholasticism had to do with cognition, intellection, intelligibility as it did for Plato in his *Symposium*, 211. Beauty consists in harmony (*consonantia*), illumination (*claritas*), and shapeliness (*kalos*). The combination of these into beauty

(*pulchrum*) requires the knowledge inspired by dialectics, knowledge which must be known rather than merely felt. Coomaraswamy does not himself use the word 'dialectic', but I believe he would approve it in this context. Such has been the presupposition of his theory of art.

It is interesting to note the large measure of agreement between Coomaraswamy and Marx on the artistic failure of capitalism. It is the bourgeoisie who destroy the traditional artistic and religious values. Both of them held that art is useful and that it grows out of social practice or tradition. Art combines the historical (which Coomaraswamy calls 'metaphysical') with the sensuous. Beauty is subsidiary to usefulness, but capitalist theory and practice separates us from beauty, and hence leads to the slogan 'art for art's sake' without regard to social practice (tradition). Further both of them would agree that art must be judged not only by the intention of the artist but by the intention of the society in which the artist works.

When both Coomaraswamy and Marx are in agreement, the former would doubtless attribute this to the activity of *philosophia perennis*, whereas Marx would assign it to the accumulated social practice in history. For Marx evidences of artistic life would be man's projection of his earthly life to create the ideal life which is a product of human imagination. Coomaraswamy cannot see any hope in the future even though he opposes the aims and pretensions of capitalism. What prevents him from seeing beyond, the Marxist might say, is his misunderstanding of economics, which is to the superstructure what labour power is to value. This point is well taken, for just because one is a metaphysical idealist, one need not disregard utility. Even Croce places the useful alongside the good, the true and the beautiful. The difference between Coomaraswamy and Marx is that while both agreed that capitalism is *morally wrong*, Marx knew that in addition to this capitalism was also *prudentially wrong*. One wished, as it were, to return to feudalism; the other to move on to socialism.

The concept of the intentionalist fallacy is one of the topics that have engaged attention in recent writings on philosophical aesthetics. It should be worth recalling a fact that Coomaraswamy's essay 'intention' was published in 1944 (*The American Bookman*, 1A40, Winter). His method of criticism involves an understanding of the original artists' *intention* rather than simply



an evaluation of the resulting work of art. He cites Plato (*Laws* 668 C) as saying that connoisseurs of poems must know the essence of the intention of a work before they can judge its final values. Sometimes authors provide us with statements of their intention. For example, Dante says that the purpose of his *Commedia* is to remove men from the state of wretchedness to the state of blessedness. Coomaraswamy's argument is that the critic cannot know that a thing has been well said if he does not know what was to be said. Intention is the *reason* for a work of art. Objective criticism should understand the reasons of works of art instead of preoccupying itself with aesthetic surfaces.

Coomaraswamy agrees that intention *per se* is no criterion of the worth of a work of art, just as good intention does not guarantee good conduct. There must be, not only a will, but also the power to realise the purpose. He maintains that the critic *can* know what was in the author's mind with some certainty, but this implies work and not mere sensitivity and intuition. Criticism of works of art is possible only in terms of the ratio of intention to result. One has to go behind the work of art itself to inquire whether or not it ought to have been undertaken at all, and so also decide whether or not it is worth preserving. The point is that, for Coomaraswamy, objective criticism is not criticism of any work of art *qua* work of art. It is a criticism of the author's intentions. Criticism, when it is objective, is not a matter of the critic's likes and dislikes.

Does Coomaraswamy conceive the role of the critic in accordance with the concept of *sahridaya*? In point of fact Coomaraswamy's argument is a restatement of that concept in so far as it ensures aesthetic inter-subjectivity. *Sahridaya* is an accredited critical tool, or an important subjective requirement. Coomaraswamy does not appear to admit sceptical doubt regarding the possibility of aesthetic communication, or that there could be difficulties in finding evidence of the author's intention. A part of this might be explained in terms of Coomaraswamy's idea of iconography, and on the linguistic plane, in his theory of correspondence between signs and symbols, words and meaning. One might suggest that, for Coomaraswamy, apprehending the author's intention remains a possibility because he looks upon language, in its aesthetic employment, as iconography.

## V

Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's *The Subject as Freedom* is

acclaimed as a work of phenomenological *tour de force*. Various influences have gone into the making of the thesis. There is classical German philosophy, along with *Vedānta* as interpreted by Padmapadacarya. Bhattacharyya's own position in respect of *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* is also significant in this context. Bhattacharyya's 'The Concept of *Rasa*' is best appreciated in the perspective of his position in *The Subject as Freedom* and especially in the context of his chapter on 'Feeling' as a form of spiritual subjectivity. He does not consider such expressions as 'X is beautiful' to be judgements at all, but interjections. The reflexivity of such locutions as 'X is beautiful' is a pointer to the ontological state of the speaker, who according to Bhattacharyya's contention, could be taken to incarnate himself in his expression. His position is not that of aesthetic emotivism either, since 'X is beautiful' is not a judgement proper.

It has been suggested that Bhattacharyya has extended Abhinavagupta's thesis by eliciting the ontology implicit in his theory. However this may be, there should be no doubt as regards the extension of the concept of *rasa*, achieved by Bhattacharyya the ultimate significance of which is the deepening of a consciousness of spiritual subjectivity.

Subjectivity is realized in its spiritual dimension by an act of *vairāgya*, a withdrawal from what the phenomenologist would call the natural standpoint. This is achieved in a fuller measure in the aesthetic experience. The work of art, with all its natural, that is, non-aesthetic, properties suspended, acquires a phenomenal status. Bhattacharyya's analysis of the mode of being of the art-object, anticipates Gombrich's idea of illusion. But it should be noticed that by saying that the work of art, epistemically speaking, is an illusion does not solve the problem. Alexander reminds us that the beautiful is illusory, but it differs from illusion in that it is not erroneous. Tagore's dictum that art is *māyā* fares better. The epistemology of aesthetic perception requires to be founded on a different ground. The silver that appears on the mother of pearl, to take a celebrated Indian example, is neither a particular, nor an universal. It is not a particular as it does not react as silver does, and it is not universal, since it cannot be encountered anywhere else. It is unique, *apūrba*,<sup>9</sup> as Tagore would have it, as if it were detached from

<sup>9</sup> 'He *apūrba rup dekha dile keno ke jane*' and also '*jeno itihās jale bandha naha dese kale*', etc., '*Nilmanilata*' in *Banabani*. See P. Roy, 'Intentionality and the problem of Aesthetic Response', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Pune, 1985.

the spatio-temporal nexus of history. Faced with the problematic of the mode of being of an art-object, Bhattacharyya says that it floats dream-like in the ether of the spectator's heart. This may be poetry, but there is no other way of apprehending the situation.

Besides analysing the concept of *rasa*, Bhattacharyya addresses himself to considering the aesthetic category of the ugly and the notion of tragedy. We have left these out of our account. What is common to his analysis of the two notions is his treatment of aesthetic feelings. Drawing upon the classical Indian view that aesthetic feelings are a class apart from the feelings experienced in ordinary experience, Bhattacharyya suggests that they do not hold the sort of sway over our minds that worldly feelings do. This is the distinction between *rasa* and *bhāva*. Ordinary emotions or *bhāvas* are so transmuted in art that they lose their original quality. They are entertained, though not *experienced* in an ordinary sense. The terrible and the beautiful delight us in equal measure. A tragedy may be heart-rending, but it does not rend our hearts. The manner in which an emotion is experienced ordinarily may be called sentimental, but when the same emotion is encountered in art it does not affect us in a similar manner, nor do we respond sentimentally. Perhaps Ortega Y Gasset makes the same point with the help of his notion of *de-humanisation* as the characteristic feature of the aesthetic experience. Gasset's term may not be a happy one, but there should be no difficulty in appreciating its import. For Bhattacharyya the aesthetic experience is a *free* encounter, whereas ordinary experiences are causal in nature. Hirianna was right in coining the term 'art-experience' for denoting the former. Adapting Eliot's way of putting it, we may say that the self that delights in art is not the self that suffers or feels gratified.

## VI

Kalidas Bhattacharyya extends the thesis of Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya in terms of an explicit reference to the idea of freedom. He endorses the view that spiritual subjectivity is attained through the reflexivity of freedom, but brings in wider issues. Taking his cue from Kant's distinction between positive and negative freedom he speaks of creative freedom and its necessary correlate, emotive freedom. It is emotive freedom which raises us above what we have earlier called sentimentality,

but it is still devoid of any content, and requires to be filled in by a will or the 'freedom' to which is creative freedom. That creativity is a will was also Tagore's idea. Bhattacharyya brings it into sharper focus.

Kalidas Bhattacharya considers the notion of *sahridaya*. He takes the case of the connoisseur to be founded on an *imaginative* use of creative freedom, that is, the connoisseur reenacts the creative episode. But he can perform the role only if he is capable of raising himself above sentimentality. Bhattacharya speaks of another mode of freedom which he calls it cognitive freedom. It may be taken to imply freedom involved in perceiving aesthetic forms beyond the natural configuration of objects. This *genre* of freedom could be taken to correspond to the critical power of eliciting categories from our intuitions. Inasmuch as Kalidas Bhattacharya's typology of freedom involves conation along with emotion and the will, he is more of a cognitivist in art than Krishnachandra for the latter, as we have seen, dispensed with the notion 'judgement' in his analysis of expressions with 'beautiful' as their predicate.

Bhattacharya has something novel to say on the nature of the aesthetic consciousness and its relation to the aesthetic object. The aesthetic consciousness is *a priori*, and this is an important observation. The aesthetic object is said to be appropriate to the intending acts of the aesthetic consciousness, and it is *a priori* as well. The point which Bhattacharya seeks to establish is that creativity is an autonomous affair. The empirical factors are played down in favour of the non-empirical. Bhattacharya does not seem to consider the case that there is a type of givenness in each art: pigments, musical notes, words and sounds, stone, metals, the limbs of the dancer, and so on. These are transformed through the efficient causality of the aesthetic consciousness. The 'appropriateness' is an achievement, and if it is *a priori*, it must be so in a sense different from the way in which the aesthetic consciousness is *a priori*. It is true that the mere lump of bronze is not the Chola Parvati, nor is the mass of marble Michaelangelo's *David*, but neither Parvati, nor *David* can subsist in the absence of the lump of bronze or the mass of marble. Faced with such an argument, Bhattacharyya would say that a Parvati or a *David* is a non-natural substantive. Conative transformation of the natural is the gateway or step towards the non-natural.

## VII

N.V. Banerjee suggests that a work of art stands midway between Platonic forms and objects of empirical experience. This may be taken as a departure from the *a priorism* of the Bhattacharyyas. A work of art is a distinct dimension of reality; it is a significant object, says Banerjee. Its intermediate status explains its symbolic character.

But Banerjee is more concerned with the idea of art as an activity of the human mind; it is in his view, the will to create. By willing to create, man translates his vision of perfect harmony, so art is a transcending activity. Banerjee's psychology of artistic creation is rooted in the feeling of the need resting upon the vision of harmony. It also seems that he takes the will to create images of harmony to be a human prerogative. Even the depictions of discord and disharmony emphasise, though indirectly, man's need of harmony. Banerjee takes man's temporal mode of being to be a dehumanising experience. While art does offer a promising prospect, ultimately it remains a matter of unfulfilled transcendence.

In the last section of his essay Banerjee touches upon the problem of aesthetic communication, and ends on a sceptical note. The spectator is not the artist, and he may not respond to the invitation to appreciate a work of art. It is true, as Banerjee contends, that aesthetic appreciation presupposes artistic conventions, and appreciation takes place within the framework of a social and cultural community. For communication to take place what is required is mutual empathy and mutual self-assertion. This condition is unfulfilled in the case of artistic communication. The artist stands behind his work and perhaps no de-masking of his self is possible. He is represented by his work, which embodies his experiences. For the appreciator or spectator, on the other hand, the mutuality of self-assertion and empathy is precluded from the situation. Communication in other contexts is possible by conquering the otherness of each of the parties involved. But in artistic communication, with the work of art standing between the artist and the spectator, the element of otherness remains unconquered. Banerjee's scepticism concerning the possibility of *sahyodaya* hood points to the uniqueness of artistic communication. One may say that Banerjee's handling of artistic communication is tied up with the so-called problem of other minds. He construes art as a human

demand, and hence the adventure of artistic communication is ever alive. Banerjee's merit lies in the fact that without relying upon the classical critical tool of *sahyādaya*, he explores artistic communication with the seriousness of an epistemologist, locates its uniqueness, and does not liquidate its problematic character. That the problem of 'otherness' is inevitable in human existence is a fact which is encountered in every case of communication, and artistic communication is no exception to this.





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## BENGALI WORKS:

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 Atmaparichaya  
 Janmadine  
 Manusher Dharma  
 Sahitya  
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CATALOGUES

Philosophy - Art -  
Art - Philosophy

