# THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE

## 2. THE NATIONAL VALUE OF ART AND THE GREATNESS OF INDIAN ART


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# I. What Is Art

*"If Art's service is but to imitate Nature, then burn all the picture galleries and let us have instead photographic studios. It is because Art reveals what Nature hides, that a small picture is worth more than all the jewels of the millionaires and the treasures of the princes."*[1]

*"If you only imitate visible Nature, you will perpetrate either a corpse, a dead sketch or a monstrosity; Truth lives in that which goes behind and beyond the visible and sensible."*[2]

*"Art holds the mirror up to Nature that Nature may see her own image beside that of Art and realize her own deformity and imperfections."*[3]

*"...the nature of art is to strive after a nobler beauty and more sustained perfection than life can give, the nature of poetry is to soar on the wings of the inspiration to the highest intensities and keep winging, as far as may be, always near to them. A form which in the name of freedom remits and relaxes this effort, whatever its other merits and advantages, means a laxity of effort and is a dangerous downward concession."*[4]

## 1. The Object of Art – Indian and European

"ALL Art is interpretation. Creation is a misnomer; nothing in this world is created, all is manifested. All exists previously in the mind of the Knower. Art may interpret that which is already manifest or was manifest at one time, or it may interpret what will be manifest hereafter. It may even be used as one of the agencies in the manifestation. A particular type of face and figure may be manifested in the work of a popular artist and in a single generation the existing type of face and figure in the country may change and mould itself to

the new conception. These things are there in the type in the causal world with which our superconscious selves are perpetually in touch; they manifest in the psychical and become part of our thought. That thought we put out into the material world and there it takes shape and body as movements, as institutions, as poetry, Art and knowledge, as living men and women. Man creates his world because he is the psychic instrument through whom God manifests that which He had previously arranged in Himself. In this sense Art can create the past, the present and the future. It can re-manifest that which was and has passed away, it can fix for us that which is, it can prophesy that which will be.

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

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

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

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

A still higher reach is attained by imaginative European Art. Imagination, according to the European idea, is creative, not interpretative. What is really meant is that the imaginative artist transfers something that belongs to himself into the object of his study, some fancy that has flashed across or some

idea that has mastered his mind. Either he reads it into his subject by unconscious transference or he deliberately uses his subject as a mere excuse for putting his fancy or his idea into line and colour. The artist is interpreting himself, not his subject. This egoistic Art has often a very high value and some of the best European work has been done in this kind. More rarely his imaginative sympathy enables him to catch a glimpse of the thing itself hidden in the form. His imagination usually plays with it and prevents the vision from being true in all its parts, but he is able to do work of the highest attractiveness, vigour or artistic beauty.

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

The Indian begins at the other end. He sees the thing itself either by *sūkṣhma dṛṣṭi*, the soul-sight, or by *dhyāna*, a spiritual union with the object studied in which the truth it expresses dawns on the mind by the process of revelation. This he transfers to canvas by letting his inspired and informed

Will guide the pencil and the brush instead of using his intellect or merely technical means to find the best way of expression. He uses technique with power, but does not rely on it chiefly. The body he paints is the one which will in every part of it express the thing itself, not the actual material body which largely conceals it. When he descends into the psychical part and seeks to express imaginations, emotions, or passing phases, he carries his method with him. Not content with expressing as much of the feeling as the actual body reveals, he sees the emotion in its fullness by *dhyāna* or soul-sight and forces the body into a mould fit for its absolute expression. He sees the soul and paints it or he sees the heart or mind and paints it. He sees and, can, if he will, paint the body, merely. But usually he does not will it."[5]

## 2. The Three Elements of Art

*"To embellish life with beauty is only the most outward function of art and poetry, to make life more intimately beautiful and noble and great and full of meaning is its higher office, but its highest comes when the poet becomes the seer and reveals to man his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation."*[6]

### *a. Art for Art's Sake – The Perfection of Expressive Form*

"Art for Art's sake? But what, after all, is meant by this slogan and what is the real issue behind it? Is it meant, as I think it was when the slogan first came into use that the technique, the artistry is all in all? The contention would then be that it does not matter what you write or paint or sculpt or what music you make or about what you make it so long as it is beautiful writing, competent painting, good sculpture, fine music. It is very evidently true in a certain sense, – in this

sense that whatever is perfectly expressed or represented or interpreted under the conditions of a given art proves itself by that very fact to be legitimate material for the artist 's labour. But that free admission cannot be confined only to all objects, however common or deemed to be vulgar, – an apple, a kitchen pail, a donkey, a dish of carrots – it can give a right of citizenship in the domain of art to a moral theme or thesis, a philosophic conclusion, a social experiment even the Five Years' Plan or the proceedings of a District Board or the success of a drainage scheme, an electric factory or a big hotel can be brought, after the most modern or the still more robustious Bolshevik mode, into the artist's province. For, technique being all, the sole question would be whether he as poet, novelist, dramatist, painter or sculptor has been able to triumph over the difficulties and bring out creatively the possibilities of his subject. There is no logical basis here for accepting an apple and rejecting the Apple-Cart. But still you may say that at least the object of the artist must be art only, – even if he treats ethical, social or political questions, he must not make it his main object to wing with the enthusiasm of aesthetic creation a moral, social or political aim. But if in doing it he satisfies the conditions of his art, shows a perfect technique and in it beauty, power, perfection, why not? The moralist, preacher, philosopher, social or political enthusiast is often doubled with an artist – as shining proofs and examples there are Plato and Shelley, to go no farther. Only, you can say of him on the basis of this theory that as a work of art his creation should be judged by its success of craftsmanship and not by its contents; it is not made greater by the value of his ethical ideas, his enthusiasms or his metaphysical seekings."[7]

### *b. Art for Beauty's Sake – The Discovery and Revelation of Beauty*

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

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer, simply because they spiritually are – because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the

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

preoccupations a great artist, it is all we can justly ask from him, whatever his starting-point, to be a creator of Beauty. Art is discovery and revelation of Beauty, and we can say nothing more by way of prohibitive or limiting rule."[8]

### *c. Art for Spirit's Sake – The Expression of the Divine*

*"The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through beauty; the highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit."*[9]

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

equal aesthetic perfection by either artist and in either theme.

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

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

If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly; Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake, the spirit's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies, widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the Highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour."[10]

## 3. Art and Yoga

"The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel

something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. …I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had visions and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups a downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist."[11]

*"Is it possible for a Yogi to become an artist or can an artist be a Yogi? What is the relation of Art to Yoga?"*

"There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga,

there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint. It is no longer the one supreme all-engrossing thing for you, no longer an end in itself. Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature."[2]

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

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

Mediaeval Europe had no other conception of art. In India all her architecture, her sculpture, her painting have proceeded from this source and were inspired by this ideal. The songs of Mirabai and the music of Thyagaraja, the poetic literature built up by her devotees, saints and Rishis rank among the world's greatest artistic possessions."[13]

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

"Why not? The Mahabharata and Ramayana are certainly not inferior to anything created by Shakespeare or any other poet, and they are said to have been the work of men who were Rishis and had done Yogic tapasya. The Gita which, like the Upanishads, ranks at once among the greatest literary and the greatest spiritual works, was not written by one who had no experience of Yoga. And where is the inferiority to your Milton and Shelley in the famous poems written whether in India or Persia or elsewhere by men known to be saints, Sufis, devotees? And, then do you know all the Yogis and their work? Among the poets and creators can you say who were or who were not in conscious touch with the Divine ? There are some who are not officially Yogis, they are not gurus and have no disciples; the world does not know what they do; they are not anxious for fame and do not attract to themselves the attention of men; but they have the higher consciousness, are in touch with a Divine Power, and when they create they create from there. The best paintings in India and much of the best statuary and architecture were done by Buddhist monks who passed their lives in spiritual contemplation and practice; they did supreme artistic work, but did not care to leave their names to posterity. The chief reason why Yogis are not usually known

by their art is that they do not consider their art-expression as the most important part of their life and do not put so much time and energy into it as a mere artist. And what they do does not always reach the public. How many there are who have done great things and not published them to the world!"[14]

*"Have Yogis done greater dramas than Shakespeare?"*

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

manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.

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

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

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

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

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters, – although his art did not stop at painting alone."[15]

## II. The National Value of Art

"There is a tendency in modern times to depreciate the value of the beautiful and overstress the value of the useful, a tendency curbed in Europe by the imperious insistence of an age long tradition of culture and generous training of the aesthetic perceptions; but in India, where we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition, it is corrected only by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy, submerged but not yet destroyed in the temperament of the people. The value attached by the ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified ant-heap or beehive and confusing the lowest, though most primary in necessity, of the means of human progress with the aim of this great evolutionary process."[16]

"....thought is composed of two separate sides, judgment or reason and imagination, both of which are necessary to perfect ideation. It is by science, philosophy and, criticism on the one side, by art, poetry and idealism on the other, that the old state of humanity has been undermined and is now collapsing, and the foundations have been laid for the new. Of these science, philosophy and criticism have established their use to the mass of humanity by ministering to the luxury, comfort and convenience which all men desire and arming them with justification in the confused struggle of passions, interests, cravings and aspirations which are now working with solvent and corrosive effect throughout the world. The value of the other side, more subtle and profound, has been clouded to the mass of men by the less visible and

sensational character of its workings."[17]

## 1. The Activity of Human Thought and the Place of Art

"The activity of human thought divides itself broadly into two groups of functions, those of the right hand, contemplation, creation, imagination, the centres that see the truth, and those of the left-hand, criticism, reasoning, discrimination, inquiry, the centres that judge the truth when it is seen. In education the latter are fostered by scientific and manual training, but the only quality of the right-hand that this education fosters is observation. For this reason a purely scientific education tends to make thought keen and clear sighted within certain limits, but narrow, hard and cold. Even in his own sphere the man without any training of the right-hand can only progress in a settled groove; he cannot broaden the base of human culture or enlarge the bounds of science. Tennyson describes him as an eye well practised in Nature, a spirit bounded and poor, and the description is just. But a cultivated eye without a cultivated spirit makes by no means the highest type of man. It is precisely the cultivation of the spirit that is the object of what is well called a liberal education, and the pursuits best calculated to cultivate the growth of the spirit are language, literature, the Arts, music, painting, sculpture or the study of these, philosophy, religion, history, the study and understanding of man through his works and of Nature and man through the interpretative as well as through the analytic faculties. These are the pursuits which belong to the intellectual activities of the right-hand, and while the importance of most of these will be acknowledged, there is a tendency to ignore Art and poetry as mere refinements, luxuries of the rich and leisurely rather than things that are

necessary to the mass of men or useful to life. This is largely due to the misuse of these great instruments by the luxurious few who held the world and its good things in their hands in the intermediate period of human progress. But the aesthetic faculties entering into the enjoyment of the world and the satisfaction of the vital instincts, the love of the beautiful in men and women, in food, in things, in articles of use arid articles of pleasure, have done more than anything else to raise man from the beast, to refine and purge his passions, to ennoble his emotions and to lead him up through the heart and the imagination to the state of the intellectual man. That which has helped man upward, must be preserved in order that he may not sink below the level he has attained. For man intellectually developed, mighty in scientific knowledge and the mastery of gross and subtle nature, using the elements as his servants and the world as his footstool, but undeveloped in heart and spirit, becomes only an inferior kind of asura using the powers of a demigod to satisfy the nature of an animal. According to dim traditions and memories of the old world, of such a nature was the civilisation of old Atlantis, submerged beneath the Ocean when its greatness and its wickedness became too heavy a load for the earth to bear, and our own legends of the asuras represent a similar consciousness of a great but abortive development in humanity."[18]

## 2. The Aesthetic Value of Art

"The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual. By speaking of the aesthetic use as the lowest, we do not wish to imply that it is not of immense value to humanity, but simply to assign to it its comparative value in

relation to the higher uses. The aesthetic is of immense importance and until it has done its work, mankind is not really fitted to make full use of Art on the higher planes of human development. Aristotle assigns a high value to tragedy because of its purifying force. He describes its effect as *katharsis*, a sacramental word of the Greek mysteries, which, in the secret discipline of the ancient Greek Tantrics, answered precisely to our *cittaśuddhi*, the purification of the *citta* or mass of established ideas, feelings and actional habits in a man either by *saṁyama*, rejection, or by *bhoga*, satisfaction, or by both. Aristotle was speaking of the purification of feelings, passions and emotions in the heart through imaginative treatment in poetry but the truth the idea contains is of much wider application and constitutes the justification of the aesthetic side of art. It purifies by beauty."[19]

### *a. Purification of Conduct*

"At a certain stage of human development the aesthetic sense is of infinite value in this direction. It raises and purifies conduct by instilling a distaste for the coarse desires and passions of the savage, for the rough, uncouth and excessive in action and manner, and restraining both feeling and action by a striving after the decent, the beautiful, the fit and seemly which received its highest expression in the manners of cultivated European society, the elaborate ceremonious life of the Confucian, the careful *ācāra* and etiquette of Hinduism. At the present stage of progress this element is losing much of its once all-important value and, when overstressed, tends to hamper a higher development by the obstruction of soulless ceremony and formalism. Its great use was to discipline the savage animal instincts of the body, the vital instincts and the lower feelings in the heart. Its disadvantage

to progress is that it tends to trammel the play both of the higher feelings of the heart and the workings of originality in thought. Born originally of a seeking after beauty, it degenerates into an attachment to form, to exterior uniformity, to precedent, to dead authority. In the future development of humanity it must be given a much lower place than in the past. Its limits must be recognised and the demands of a higher truth, sincerity and freedom of thought and feeling must be given priority. Mankind is apt to bind itself by attachment to the means of its past progress forgetful of the aim. The bondage to formulas has to be outgrown, and in this again it is the sense of a higher beauty and fitness which will be most powerful to correct the lower. The art of life must be understood in more magnificent terms and must subordinate its more formal elements to the service of the master civilisers, Love and Thought."[20]

### *b. The Formation of Morality*

"The work of purifying conduct through outward form and habitual and seemly regulation of expression, manner and action is the lowest of the many services which the artistic sense has done to humanity, and yet how wide is the field it covers and how important and indispensable have its workings been to the progress of civilisation! A still more important and indispensable activity of the sense of beauty is the powerful help it has given to the formation of morality. We do not ordinarily recognise how largely our sense of virtue is a sense of the beautiful in conduct and our sense of sin a sense of ugliness and deformity in conduct. It may easily be recognised in the lower and more physical workings, as for instance in the shuddering recoil from cruelty, blood, torture as things intolerably hideous to sight and imagination or in

the aesthetic disgust at sensual excesses and the strong sense, awakened by this disgust, of the charm of purity and the beauty of virginity. This latter feeling was extremely active in the imagination of the Greeks and other nations not noted for a high standard in conduct, and it was purely aesthetic in its roots. ….But even on a higher plane the sense of virtue is very largely aesthetic and, even when it emerges from the aesthetic stage, must always call the sense of the beautiful to its support if it is to be safe from the revolt against it of one of the most deep-seated of human instincts. We can see the largeness of this element if we study the ideas of the Greeks, who never got beyond the aesthetic stage of morality. There were four gradations in Greek ethical thought, – the *euprepes*, that which is seemly or outwardly decorous; the *dikaion*, that which is in accordance with *dike* or *nomos*, the law, custom and standard of humanity based on the sense of fitness and on the codified or uncodified mass of precedents in which that sense has been expressed in general conduct, – in other words the just or lawful; thirdly, the *agathon*, the good, based partly on the seemly and partly on the just and lawful, and reaching towards the purely beautiful; then final and supreme, the *kalon*, that which is purely beautiful, the supreme standard. The most remarkable part of Aristotle's moral system is that in which he classifies the parts of conduct not according to our idea of virtue and sin, *pāpa* and *puṇya*, but by a purely aesthetic standard, the excess, defect and golden, in other words correct and beautiful, mean of qualities. The Greeks' view of life was imperfect even from the standpoint of beauty, not only because the idea of beauty was not sufficiently catholic and too much attached to a fastidious purity of form and outline and restraint, but because they were deficient in love. God as beauty, Sri Krishna in Brindavan, *Śyāmasundara*, is not

only Beauty, He is also Love, and without perfect love there cannot be perfect beauty, and without perfect beauty there cannot be perfect delight. The aesthetic motive in conduct limits and must be exceeded in order that humanity may rise. Therefore it was that the Greek mould had to be broken and humanity even revolted for a time against beauty. The *agathon*, the good, had to be released for a time from the bondage of the *kalon*, the aesthetic sense of beauty, just as it is now struggling to deliver itself from the bondage of the *euprepes* and the *dikaion*, mere decorousness, mere custom, mere social law and rule. The excess of this anti-aesthetic tendency is visible in Puritanism and the baser forms of asceticism. The progress of ethics in Europe has been largely a struggle between the Greek sense of aesthetic beauty and the Christian sense of a higher good marred on the one side by formalism, on the other by an unlovely asceticism. The association of the latter with virtue has largely driven the sense of beauty to the side of vice. The good must not be subordinated to the aesthetic sense, but it must be beautiful and delightful, or to that extent it ceases to be good. The object of existence is not the practice of virtue for its own sake but ananda, delight, and progress consists not in rejecting beauty and delight, but in rising from the lower to the higher, the less complete to the more complete beauty and to delight."[21]

### *c. The Purification of Emotions*

"The third activity of the aesthetic faculty, higher than the two already described, the highest activity of the artistic sense before it rises to the plane of the intellect, is the direct purifying of the emotions. This is the *katharsis* of which Aristotle spoke. The sense of pleasure and delight in the emotional aspects of life and action, this is the poetry of life,

just as the regulating and beautiful arrangement of character and action is the art of life. We have seen how the latter purifies, but the purifying force of the former is still more potent for good. Our life is largely made up of the eight *rasas*.* The movements of the heart in its enjoyment of action, its own and that of others, may either be directed downwards, as is the case with the animals and animal men, to the mere satisfaction of the ten sense-organs and the vital desires which make instruments of the senses in the average sensual man, or they may work for the satisfaction of the heart itself in a predominatingly emotional enjoyment of life, or they may be directed upwards through the medium of the intellect, rational and intuitional, to attainment of delight through the seizing on the source of all delight, the Spirit, the *satyam, sundaram, ānandam* who is beyond and around, the source and the basis of all this world-wide activity, evolution and progress. When the heart works for itself, then it enjoys the poetry of life, the delight of emotions, the wonder, pathos, beauty, enjoyableness, lovableness, calm, serenity, clarity and also the grandeur, heroism, passion, fury, terror and horror of life, of man, of Nature, of the phenomenal manifestation of God. This is not the highest, but it is higher than the animal, vital and externally aesthetic developments. The large part it plays in life is obvious, but in life it is hampered by the demands of body and the vital passions. Here comes in the first mighty utility, the triumphant activity of the most energetic forms of art and poetry. They provide a field in which these pressing claims of the animal can be excluded and the emotions,

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**In the Indian Sanskrit literature these are: शृंगार (Lovableness), हास्य; (Humour), करुणा (Pathos), रौद्र (Fury), वीर (Heroism), भयानक (Dreadful), विभत्स (Horror) एवं अद्भुत (Wonderful)*

working disinterestedly for the satisfaction of the heart and the imagination alone, can do the work of *katharsis*, emotional purification, of which Aristotle spoke. *Citta-śuddhi*, the purification of the heart, is the appointed road by which man arrives at his higher fulfillment, and, if it can be shown that poetry and art are powerful agents towards that end, their supreme importance is established. They are that, and more than that."[22]

## 3. The Educational Value of Art

### *a. The Value of Art in the Education and Actual Life of a Nation*

"The first question is whether the sense of the beautiful has any effect on the life of a nation. It is obvious, from what we have already written, that the manners, the social culture and the restraint in action and expression which are so large a part of national prestige and dignity and make a nation admired like the French, loved like the Irish or respected like the higher-class English, are based essentially on the sense of form and beauty, of what is correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair to the eye and pleasing to the imagination. The absence of these qualities is a source of national weakness. The rudeness, coarseness and vulgar violence of the less cultured Englishman, the over-bearing brusqueness and selfishness of the Prussian have greatly hampered those powerful nations in their dealings with foreigners, dependencies and even their own friends, allies, colonies. We all know what a large share the manner and ordinary conduct of the average and of the vulgar Anglo-Indian has had in bringing about the revolt of the Indian, accustomed through ages to courtesy, dignity and the amenities of an equal

intercourse, against the mastery of an obviously coarse and selfish community. Now the sense of form and beauty, the correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair and pleasing is an artistic sense and can best be fostered in a nation by artistic culture of the perceptions and sensibilities. It is noteworthy that the two great nations who are most hampered by the defect of these qualities in action are also the least imaginative, poetic and artistic in Europe. It is the South German who contributes the art, poetry and music of Germany, the Celt and Norman who produce great poets and a few great artists in England without altering the characteristics of the dominant Saxon. Music is even more powerful in this direction than Art and by the perfect expression of harmony insensibly steeps the man in it. And it is noticeable that England has hardly produced a single musician worth the name. Plato in his Republic has dwelt with extraordinary emphasis on the importance of music in education; as is the music to which a people is accustomed, so, he says in effect, is the character of that people. The importance of painting and sculpture is hardly less. The mind is profoundly influenced by what it sees and, if the eye is trained from the days of childhood to the contemplation and understanding of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in line and colour, the tastes, habits and character will be insensibly trained to follow a similar law of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in the life of the adult man. This was the great importance of the universal proficiency in the arts and crafts or the appreciation of them which was prevalent in ancient Greece, in certain European ages, in Japan and in the better days of our own history. Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts

and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.

A similar result is produced on the emotions by the study of beautiful or noble art. We have spoken of the purification of the heart, the *cittaśuddhi*, which Aristotle assigned as the essential office of poetry, and have pointed out that it is done in poetry by the detached and disinterested enjoyment of the eight rasas or forms of emotional aestheticism which make up life unalloyed by the disturbance of the lower self-regarding passions. Painting and sculpture work in the same direction by different means. Art sometimes uses the same means as poetry but cannot do it to the same extent because it has not the movement of poetry; it is fixed, still, it expresses only a given moment, a given point in space and cannot move freely through time and region. But it is precisely this stillness, this calm, this fixity which gives its separate value to Art. Poetry raises the emotions and gives each its separate delight. Art stills the emotions and teaches them the delight of a restrained and limited satisfaction, – this indeed was the characteristic that the Greeks, a nation of artists far more artistic than poetic, tried to bring into their poetry. Music deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other. Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movement purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, therefore, are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are, when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilising forces."[23]

***b. Art and the Training of Intellectual Faculty***

"The value of art in training of intellectual faculty is also

an important part of its utility. We have already indicated the double character of intellectual activity, divided between the imaginative, creative and sympathetic or comprehensive intellectual centres on the one side and the critical, analytic and penetrative on the other. The latter are best trained by science, criticism and observation, the former by art, poetry, music, literature and the sympathetic study of man and his creations. These make the mind quick to grasp at a glance, subtle to distinguish shades, deep to reject shallow self-sufficiency, mobile, delicate, swift, intuitive. Art assists in this training by raising images in the mind which it has to understand not by analysis, but by self-identification with other minds; it is a powerful stimulator of sympathetic insight. Art is subtle and delicate, and it makes the mind also in its movements subtle and delicate. It is suggestive, and the intellect habituated to the appreciation of art is quick to catch suggestions, mastering not only, as the scientific mind does, that which is positive and on the surface, but that which leads to ever fresh widening and subtilising of knowledge and opens a door into the deeper secrets of inner nature where the positive instruments of science cannot take the depth or measure. This supreme intellectual value of Art has never been sufficiently recognised. Men have made language, poetry, history, philosophy agents for the training of this side of intellectuality, necessary parts of a liberal education, but the immense educative force of music, painting and sculpture has not been duly recognised. They have been thought to be by-paths of the human mind, beautiful and interesting, but not necessary, therefore intended for the few. Yet the universal impulse to enjoy the beauty and attractiveness of sound, to look at and live among pictures, colours, forms ought to have warned mankind of the superficiality and ignorance of such a

view of these eternal and important occupations of human mind. The impulse, denied proper training and self-purification, has spent itself on the trivial, gaudy, sensuous, cheap or vulgar instead of helping man upward by its powerful aid in the evocation of what is best and highest in intellect as well as in character, emotion and the aesthetic enjoyment and regulation of life and manners. It is difficult to appreciate the waste and detriment involved in the low and debased level of enjoyment to which the artistic impulses are condemned in the majority of mankind."[24]

## 4. The Spiritual Value of Art

"…beyond and above this intellectual utility of Art, there is a higher use, the noblest of all, its service to the growth of spirituality in the race. European critics have dwelt on the close connection of the highest developments of art with religion, and it is undoubtedly true that in Greece, in Italy, in India, the greatest efflorescence of a national Art has been associated with the employment of the artistic genius to illustrate or adorn the thoughts and fancies or the temples and instruments of the national religion. This was not because Art is necessarily associated with the outward forms of religion, but because it was in the religion that men's spiritual aspirations centred themselves. Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression. Spirituality is a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the highest and most perfect Art which, while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality, as the best European

Art satisfies these requirements, reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things, the joy of God in the world and its beauty and desirableness and the manifestation of divine force and energy in phenomenal creation. This is what Indian Art alone attempted thoroughly and in the effort it often dispensed, either deliberately or from impatience, with the lower, yet not negligible perfections which the more material European demanded. Therefore Art has flowed in two separate streams in Europe and Asia, so diverse that it is only now that the European aesthetic sense has so far trained itself as to begin to appreciate the artistic conventions, aims and traditions of Asia. Asia's future development will unite these two streams in one deep and grandiose flood of artistic self-expression perfecting the aesthetic evolution of humanity.

But if Art is to reach towards the highest, the Indian tendency must dominate. The spirit is that in which all the rest of the human being reposes, towards which it returns and the final self-revelation of which is the goal of humanity. Man becomes God, and all human activity reaches its highest and noblest when it succeeds in bringing body, heart and mind into touch with spirit. Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance. So wonderfully has God made the world that a man using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours, can raise this apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach. What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas.

Behind a few figures, a few trees and rocks the supreme Intelligence, the supreme Imagination, the supreme Energy

lurks, acts, feels, is, and, if the artist has the spiritual vision, he can see it and suggest perfectly the great mysterious Life in its manifestations brooding in action, active in thought, energetic in stillness, creative in repose, full of a mastering intention in that which appears blind and unconscious. The great truths of religion, science, metaphysics, life, development, become concrete, emotional, universally intelligible and convincing in the hands of the master of plastic Art, and the soul of man, in the stage when it is rising from emotion to intellect, looks, receives the suggestion and is uplifted towards a higher development, a diviner knowledge.

So it is with the divine love-and joy which pulsates throughout existence and is far superior to alloyed earthly pleasure. Catholic, perfect, unmixed with repulsion, radiating through all things, the common no less than the high, the mean and shabby no less than the lofty and splendid, the terrible and the repulsive no less than the charming and attractive, it uplifts all, purifies all, turns all to love and delight and beauty. A little of this immortal nectar poured into a man's heart transfigures life and action. The whole flood of it pouring in would lift mankind to God. This too Art can seize on and suggest to the human soul, aiding it in its stormy and toilsome pilgrimage. In that pilgrimage it is the divine strength that supports. Sakti, Force, pouring through the universe supports its boundless activities, the frail and tremulous life of the rose no less than the flaming motions of sun and star. To suggest the strength and virile unconquerable force of the divine Nature in man and in the outside world, its energy, its calm, its powerful inspiration, its august enthusiasm, its wildness, greatness, attractiveness, to breathe that into man's soul and gradually mould the finite into the image of the Infinite is

another spiritual utility of Art. This is its loftiest function, its fullest consummation, its most perfect privilege."[25]

## 5. Art in the Life of a Nation

The enormous value of Art to human evolution is apparent from the above analysis. "It is obvious that no nation can afford to neglect an element of such high importance to the culture of its people or the training of some of the higher intellectual, moral and aesthetic faculties in the young. The system of education which, instead of keeping artistic training apart as a privilege for a few specialists, frankly introduces it as a part of culture no less necessary than literature or science, will have taken a great step forward in the perfection of national education and the general diffusion of a broad-based human culture. It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual master-pieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself."[26]

# III. The Indian Art

"The greatness of Indian art is the greatness of all Indian thought and achievement. It lies in the recognition of the persistent within the transient, of the domination of matter by spirit, the subordination of the insistent appearances of Prakriti to the inner reality which, in a thousand ways, the Mighty Mother veils even while she suggests. The European artist, cabined within the narrow confines of the external, is dominated in imagination by the body of things and the claims of the phenomenon. Western painting starts from the eye or the imagination; its master word is either beauty or reality, and, according as he is the slave of his eye or the playfellow of his imagination, the painter produces a photograph or a poem. But, in painting, the European imagination seldom travels beyond an imaginative interpretation or variation of what the physical eye has seen. Imitation is the key-word of creation, according to Aristotle; Shakespeare advises the artist to hold up the mirror to Nature; and the Greek scientist and the English poet reflect accurately the mind of Europe.

But the Indian artist has been taught by his philosophy and the spiritual discipline of his forefathers that the imagination is only a channel and an instrument of some source of knowledge and inspiration that is greater and higher; by meditation or by Yoga he seeks within himself that ultimate centre of knowledge where there is direct and utter vision of the thing that lies hidden in the forms of man, animal, tree, river, mountain. It is this *samyag jñāna*, this *sākṣhād darśana*, the utter, revealing and apocalyptic vision, that he seeks, and when he has found it, whether by patient receptivity or sudden inspiration, his whole aim is to express it utterly and

revealingly in line and colour. Form is only a means of expressing the spirit, and the one thought of the artist should be how best to render the spiritual vision. He is not bound by the forms that compose the world of gross matter, though he takes them as a starting-point for his formal expression of the vision within him; if by modifying them or departing from them he can reveal that vision more completely, his freedom and his duty as an artist emancipate him from the obligation of the mere recorder and copyist. The ancient Asiatic artists were not incapable of reproducing outward Nature with as perfect and vigorous an accuracy as the Europeans; but it was their ordinary method deliberately to suppress all that might hamper the expression of their spiritual vision.

Reality for its own sake, one of the most dominant notes of Art in Europe, Indian artistic theory would not have recognised; for we have always regarded the reality of the Europeans as an appearance; to us the true reality is that which is hidden; otherwise, there would be no need of the prophet, the philosopher, the poet and the artist. It is they who see with the *sūkṣma-dṛṣṭi*, the inner vision, and not like the ordinary man with the eye only. Beauty for beauty's sake, the other great note of European Art is recognised by us, but not in the higher work of the artist. Just as in the first ideal, the tyranny of the eye is acknowledged, so in the second is the tyranny of the aesthetic imagination. The Indian seeks freedom, and the condition of freedom is the search for ultimate Truth. But in this search the imagination is an unsafe and capricious guide; it misinterprets as often as it interprets. The claim of the eye to separate satisfaction can only be answered by the response of decorative beauty; the claim of the imagination to separate satisfaction can only receive the response of fancy playing with scene and legend, form and colour, idea and dream, for

pure aesthetic delight; but in the interpretation of things the eye and the imagination can assert no right to command, they are only subordinate instruments and must keep their place. Whenever, therefore, the Indian artist put away from him his high spiritual aim, it was to seek decorative beauty informed by the play of the imagination. Here he held decorative beauty to be his paramount aim and declined to be bound by the seen and the familiar. If by other lines than the natural, by subtler or richer methods than those of outward Nature, our old masters could gain in decorative suggestion and beauty, they held themselves free to follow their inspiration. Here, too, they often deliberately changed and suppressed in order to get their desired effect. If they had been asked to deny themselves this artistic gain for the sake of satisfying the memory in the physical eye, they would have held the objector to be the bondslave of an unmeaning superstition.

We of today have been overpowered by the European tradition as interpreted by the English, the least artistic of civilized nations. We have therefore come to make on a picture the same demand as on a photograph, the reproduction of the thing as the eye sees it, not even as the retrospective mind or the imagination sees it, exact resemblance to the beings or objects we know, or, if anything more, then a refinement on Nature in the direction of greater picturesqueness and prettiness and the satisfaction of the lower and more external sense of beauty. The conception that Art exists not to copy, but for the sake of a deeper truth and vision, and we must seek in it not the object but God in the object, not things but the soul of things, seems to have vanished for a while from the Indian consciousness.

Another obstacle to the appreciation of great art, to

which even those Indians who are not dominated by European ideas are liable, is the exaggerated respect for the symbols and traditions which our art or literature has used at a certain stage of development. I am accustomed for instance to a particular way of representing Shiva or Kali and I refuse to have any other. But the artist has nothing to do with my prejudices. He has to represent the essential truth of Shiva or Kali, that which makes their Shivahood or Kalihood, and he is under no obligation to copy the vision of others. If he has seen another vision of Shiva or Kali, it is that vision to which he must be faithful. The curious discussion which arose recently as to the propriety or otherwise of representing the Gods without beard or moustache, is an instance of this literalism which is a survival of the enslavement to form and rule characteristic of the eighteenth century. The literalist cannot see that it is not the moustache or beard or the symbol which makes the godhead, but the divine greatness, immortal strength, beauty, youth, purity or peace within. It is that godhead which the artist must draw and paint, and in the forms he chooses he is bound only by the vision in *dhyāna*. Whether his interpretation will gain an abiding place in the thought and imagination of the race, depends on its power to awake the deeper vision in the race. All that we can demand is that it shall be a real God, a real Shiva, a real Kali, and not a freak of his imagination or an outcome of some passing *saṁskāra* of his education or artistic upbringing. He must go to the fountain-head of knowledge within himself or his claim to freedom does not stand. It has already been said that the condition of freedom is the search for truth, and the artist must not allow his imagination to take the place of the higher quality.

Indian Art demands of the artist the power of communion with the soul of things, the sense of spiritual taking precedence of the sense of material beauty, and fidelity to the deeper vision within, of the lover of art it demands the power to see the spirit in things, the openness of mind to follow a developing tradition, and the sattwic passivity, discharged of prejudgments, which opens luminously to the secret intention of the picture and is patient to wait until it attains a perfect and profound divination."[27]

## 1. The Right Way of Approaching Indian Art

"Architecture, sculpture and painting, because they are the three great arts which appeal to the spirit through the eye, are those too in which the sensible and the invisible meet with the strongest emphasis on themselves and yet the greatest necessity of each other. The form with its insistent masses, proportions, lines, colours, can here only justify them by their service for the something intangible it has to express; the spirit needs all the possible help of the material body to interpret itself to itself through the eye, yet asks of it that it shall be as transparent a veil as possible of its own greater significance. The art of the East and the art of the West – each in its characteristic or mean, for there are always exceptions, – deal with the problem of these two interlocking powers in a quite different way. The Western mind is arrested and attracted by the form, lingers on it and cannot get away from its charm, loves it for its own beauty, rests on the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic suggestions that arise directly from its most visible language, confines the soul in the body; it might almost be said that for this mind form creates the spirit, the spirit depends for its existence and for everything it has to say on the form. The Indian attitude to the matter is at the opposite pole to

this view. For the Indian mind form does not exist except as a creation of the spirit and draws all its meaning and value from the spirit. Every line, arrangement of mass, colour, shape, posture, every physical suggestion, however many, crowded, opulent they may be, is first and last a suggestion, a hint, very often a symbol which is in its main function a support for a spiritual emotion, idea, image that again goes beyond itself to the less definable, but more powerfully sensible reality of the spirit which has excited these movements in the aesthetic mind and passed through them into significant shapes.

This characteristic attitude of the Indian reflective and creative mind necessitates in our view of its creations an effort to get beyond at once to the inner spirit of the reality it expresses and see from it and not from outside. And in fact to start from the physical details and their synthesis appears to me quite the wrong way to look at an Indian work of art. The orthodox style of Western criticism seems to be to dwell scrutinisingly on the technique, on form, on the obvious story of the form, and then pass to some appreciation of beautiful or impressive emotion and idea. It is only in some deeper and more sensitive minds that we get beyond that depth into profounder things. A criticism of that kind applied to Indian art leaves it barren or poor of significance. Here the only right way is to get at once through a total intuitive or revelatory impression or by some meditative dwelling on the whole, *dhyāana* in the technical Indian term, to the spiritual meaning and atmosphere, make ourselves one with that as completely as possible, and then only the helpful meaning and value of all the rest comes out with a complete and revealing force. For here it is the spirit that carries the form, while in most Western art it is the form that carries whatever there may be of spirit. The striking phrase of Epictetus recurs to the mind

in which he describes man as a little soul carrying a corpse, *psucharion ei bastazon nekron*. The more ordinary Western outlook is upon animate matter carrying in its life a modicum of soul. But the seeing of the Indian mind and of Indian art is that of a great, a limitless self and spirit, *mahāmātmā*, which carries to us in the sea of its presence a living shape of itself, small in comparison to its own infinity, but yet sufficient by the power that informs this symbol to support some aspect of that infinite's self-expression. It is therefore essential that we should look here not solely with the physical eye informed by the reason and the aesthetic imagination, but make the physical seeing a passage to the opening of the inner spiritual eye and a moved communion in the soul. A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things; but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one's self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life. That is why the Japanese with their fine sense in these things, – a sense which modern Europe with her assault of crowded art galleries and over-pictured walls seems to have quite lost, though perhaps I am wrong, and those are the right conditions for display of European art, – have put their temples and their Buddhas as often as possible away on mountains and in distant or secluded scenes of Nature and avoid living with great paintings in the crude hours of daily life, but keep them by preference in such a way that their undisputed suggestion can sink into the mind in its finer moments or apart where they can go and look at them in a treasured secrecy when the soul is at leisure from life.

That is an indication of the utmost value pointing to the nature of the appeal made by Eastern art and the right way and mood for looking at its creations."[28]

## 2. The Indian Architecture

"Indian architecture especially demands this kind of inner study and this spiritual self-identification with its deepest meaning and will not otherwise reveal itself to us. The secular buildings of ancient India, her palaces and places of assembly and civic edifices have not outlived the ravage of time; what remains to us is mostly something of the great mountain and cave temples, something too of the temples of her ancient cities of the plains, and for the rest we have the fanes and shrines of her later times, whether situated in temple cities and places of pilgrimage like Srirangam and Rameshwaram or in her great once regal towns like Madura, when the temple was the centre of life. It is then the most hieratic side of a hieratic art that remains to us. These sacred buildings are the signs, the architectural self-expression of an ancient spiritual and religious culture. Ignore the spiritual suggestion, the religious significance, the meaning of the symbols and indications, look only with the rational and secular aesthetic mind, and it is vain to expect that we shall get to any true and discerning appreciation of this art. And it has to be remembered too that the religious spirit here is something quite different from the sense of European religions; and even mediaeval Christianity, especially as now looked at by the modern European mind which has gone through the two great crises of the Renascence and recent secularism, will not in spite of its oriental origin and affinities be of much real help. To bring in into the artistic look on an Indian temple occidental memories or a comparison with Greek Parthenon

or Italian church or Duomo or Campanile or even the great Gothic cathedrals of mediaeval France, though these have in them something much nearer to the Indian mentality, is to intrude a fatally foreign and disturbing element or standard in the mind. But this consciously or else subconsciously is what almost every European mind does to a greater or less degree, – and it is here a pernicious immixture, for it subjects the work of a vision that saw the immeasurable to the tests of an eye that dwells only on measure.

Indian sacred architecture of whatever date, style or dedication goes back to something timelessly ancient and now outside India almost wholly lost, something which belongs to the past, and yet it goes forward too, though this the rationalistic mind will not easily admit, to something which will return upon us and is already beginning to return, something which belongs to the future. An Indian temple, to whatever godhead it may be built, is in its inmost reality an altar raised to the divine Self, a house of the Cosmic Spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite. As that and in the light of that seeing and conception it must in the first place be understood, and everything else must be seen in that setting and that light, and then only can there be any real understanding. No artistic eye however alert and sensible and no aesthetic mind however full and sensitive can arrive at that understanding, if it is attached to a Hellenised conception of rational beauty or shuts itself up in a materialised or intellectual interpretation and fails to open itself to the great things here meant by a kindred close response to some touch of the cosmic consciousness, some revelation of the greater spiritual self, some suggestion of the Infinite. These things, the spiritual self, the cosmic spirit, the Infinite, are not rational, but suprarational, eternal presences, but to the intellect only words,

and visible, sensible, near only to an intuition and revelation in our inmost selves. An art which starts from them as a first conception can only give us what it has to give, their touch, their nearness, their self-disclosure, through some responding intuition and revelation in us, in our own soul, our own self. It is this which one must come to it to find and not demand from it the satisfaction of some quite other seeking or some very different turn of imagination and more limited superficial significance.

This is the first truth of Indian architecture and its significance which demands emphasis and it leads at once to the answer to certain very common misapprehensions and objections. All art reposes on some unity and all its details, whether few and sparing or lavish and crowded and full, must go back to that unity and help its significance; otherwise it is not art. Now we find our Western critic telling us with an assurance which would be stupefying if one did not see how naturally it arose, that in Indian architecture there is no unity, which is as much as to say that there is here no great art at all, but only a skill in the execution of crowded and unrelated details. We are told even by otherwise sympathetic judges that there is an overloading of ornament and detail which, however beautiful or splendid in itself, stands in the way of unity, an attempt to load every rift with ore, an absence of calm, no unfilled spaces, no relief to the eye."[29]

"Now it may readily be admitted that the failure to see at once the unity of this architecture is perfectly natural to a European eye, because unity in the sense demanded by the Western conception, the Greek unity gained by much suppression and a sparing use of detail and circumstance or even the Gothic unity got by casting everything into the mould

of a single spiritual aspiration, is not there. And the greater unity that really is there can never be arrived at at all, if the eye begins and ends by dwelling on form and detail and ornament, because it will then be obsessed by these things and find it difficult to go beyond to the unity which all this in its totality serves not so much to express in itself, but to fill it with that which comes out of it and relieve its oneness by multitude. An original oneness, not a combined or synthetic or an effected unity, is that from which this art begins and to which its work when finished returns or rather lives in it as in its self and natural atmosphere. Indian sacred architecture constantly represents the greatest oneness of the self, the cosmic, the infinite in the immensity of its world-design, the multitude of its features of self-expression, *lakṣaṇa*, (yet the oneness is greater than and independent of their totality and in itself indefinable), and all its starting-point of unity in conception, its mass of design and immensity of material, its crowding abundance of significant ornament and detail and its return towards oneness are only intelligible as necessary circumstances of this poem, this epic or this lyric – for there are smaller structures which are such lyrics – of the Infinite. The Western mentality, except in those who are coming or returning, since Europe had once something of this cult in her own way, to this vision, may find it difficult to appreciate the truth and meaning of such an art, which tries to figure existence as a whole and not in its pieces; but I would invite those Indian minds who are troubled by these criticisms or partly or temporarily overpowered by the Western way of seeing things, to look at our architecture in the light of this conception and see whether all but minor objections do not vanish as soon as the real meaning makes itself felt and gives body to the first indefinable impression and emotion which

we experience before the greater constructions of the Indian builders. To appreciate this spiritual- esthetic truth of Indian architecture, it will be best to look first at some work where there is not the complication of surroundings now often out of harmony with the building, outside even those temple towns which still retain their dependence on the sacred motive, and rather in some place where there is room for a free background of Nature. I have before me two prints which can well serve the purpose, a temple at Kalahasti, a temple at Sinhachalam, two buildings entirely different in treatment and yet one in the ground and the universal motive. The straight way here is not to detach the temple from its surroundings, but to see it in unity with the sky and low-lying landscape or with the sky and hills around and feel the thing common to both, the construction and its environment, the reality in Nature, the reality expressed in the work of art. The oneness to which this Nature aspires in her inconscient self-creation and in which she lives, the oneness to which the soul of man uplifts itself in his conscious spiritual upbuilding, his labour of aspiration here expressed in stone, and in which so upbuilt he and his work live, are the same and the soul-motive is one. Thus seen this work of man seems to be something which has started out and detached itself against the power of the natural world, something of the one common aspiration in both to the same infinite spirit of itself, – the inconscient uplook and against it the strong single relief of the self-conscient effort and success of finding. One of these buildings climbs up bold, massive in projection, up-piled in the greatness of a forceful but sure ascent, preserving its range and line to the last, the other soars from the strength of its base, in the grace and emotion of a curving mass to a rounded summit and crowning symbol. There is in both a constant, subtle yet pronounced

lessening from the base towards the top, but at each stage a repetition of the same form, the same multiplicity of insistence, the same crowded fullness and indented relief, but one maintains its multiple endeavour and indication to the last, the other ends in a single sign. To find the significance we have first to feel the oneness of the infinity in which this nature and this art live, then see this thronged expression as the sign of the infinite multiplicity which fills this oneness, see in the regular lessening ascent of the edifice the subtler and subtler return from the base on earth to the original unity and seize on the symbolic indication of its close at the top. Not absence of unity, but a tremendous unity is revealed. Reinterpret intimately what this representation means in the terms of our own spiritual self-existence and cosmic being, and we have what these great builders saw in themselves and reared in stone. All objections, once we have got at this identity in spiritual experience, fall away and show themselves to be what they really are, the utterance and cavil of an impotent misunderstanding, an insufficient apprehension or a complete failure to see. To appreciate the detail of Indian architecture is easy when the whole is thus seen and known; otherwise, it is impossible.

This method of interpretation applies, however different the construction and the nature of the rendering, to all Dravidian architecture, not only to the mighty temples of far-spread fame, but to unknown roadside shrines in small towns, which are only a slighter execution of the same theme, a satisfied suggestion here, but the greater buildings a grandiose fulfilled aspiration. The architectural language of the north is of a different kind, there is another basic style; but here too the same spiritual, meditative, intuitive method has to be used

and we get at the same result, an aesthetic interpretation or suggestion of the one spiritual experience, one in all its complexity and diversity, which founds the unity of the infinite variations of Indian spirituality and religious feeling and the realised union of the human self with the Divine. This is the unity too of all the creations of this hieratic art. The different styles and motives arrive at or express that unity in different ways. The objection that an excess of thronging detail and ornament hides, impairs or breaks up the unity, is advanced only because the eye has made the mistake of dwelling on the detail first without relation to this original spiritual oneness, which has first to be fixed in an intimate spiritual seeing and union and then all else seen in that vision and experience. When we look on the multiplicity of the world, it is only a crowded plurality that we can find and to arrive at unity we have to reduce, to suppress what we have seen or sparingly select a few indications or to be satisfied with the unity of this or that separate idea, experience or imagination; but when we have realised the self, the infinite unity and look back on the multiplicity of the world, then we find that oneness able to bear all the infinity of variation and circumstance we can crowd into it and its unity remains unabridged by even the most endless self-multiplication of its informing creation. We find the same thing in looking at this architecture. The wealth of ornament, detail, circumstance in Indian temples represents the infinite variety and repetition of the worlds, – not our world only, but all the planes, – suggests the infinite multiplicity in the infinite oneness. It is a matter of our own experience and fullness of vision how much we leave out or bring in, whether we express so much or so little or attempt as in the Dravidian style to give the impression of a teeming inexhaustible plenitude. The largeness of this unity is base

and continent enough for any superstructure or content of multitude."[30]

"To condemn this abundance as barbarous is to apply a foreign standard. Where after all are we bound to draw the line? To the pure classical taste Shakespeare's art once appeared great but barbarous for a similar reason, – one remembers the Gallic description of him as a drunken barbarian of genius, – his artistic unity non-existent or spoilt by crowding tropical vegetation of incident and character, his teeming imaginations violent, exaggerated, sometimes bizarre, monstrous, without symmetry, proportion and all the other lucid unities, lightnesses, graces loved by the classic mind. That mind might say of his work …that here there is indeed a Titanic genius, a mass of power, but of unity, clarity, classic nobility no trace, but rather an entire absence of lucid grace and lightness and restraint, a profusion of wild ornament and an imaginative riot without law or measure, strained figures, distorted positions and gestures, no dignity, no fine, just, rationally natural and beautiful classic movement and pose. But even the strictest Latin mind has now got over its objections to the "splendid barbarism" of Shakespeare and can understand that here is a fuller, less sparing and exiguous vision of life, a greater intuitive unity than the formal unities of the classic aesthesis. But the Indian vision of the world and existence was vaster and fuller than Shakespeare's, because it embraced not merely life, but all being, not merely humanity, but all the worlds and all Nature and cosmos. The European mind not having arrived except in individuals at any close, direct, insistent realisation of the unity of the infinite self or the cosmic consciousness peopled with its infinite multiplicity, is not driven to express these things, cannot understand or put up with them when they are expressed in this oriental art,

speech and style and object to it as the Latin mind once objected to Shakespeare. Perhaps the day is not distant when it will see and understand and perhaps even itself try to express the same things in another language.

The objection that the crowding detail allows no calm, gives no relief or space to the eye, falls under the same heading, springs from the same root, is urged from a different experience and has no validity for the Indian experience. For this unity on which all is upborne, carries in itself the infinite space and calm of the spiritual realisation, and there is no need for other unfilled spaces or tracts of calm of a lesser more superficial kind. The eye is here only a way of access to the soul, it is to that that there is the appeal, and if the soul living in this realisation or dwelling under the influence of this aesthetic impression needs any relief, it is not from the incidence of life and form, but from the immense incidence of that vastness of infinity and tranquil silence, and that can only be given by its opposite, by an abundance of form and detail and life."[31]

"The Indian thinking and religious mind looks with calm, without shrinking or repulsion, with an understanding born of its agelong effort at identity and oneness, at all that meets it in the stupendous spectacle of the cosmos. And even its asceticism, its turning from the world, which begins not in terror and gloom, but in a sense of vanity and fatigue, or of something higher, truer, happier than life, soon passes beyond any element of pessimistic sadness into the rapture of the eternal peace and bliss. Indian secular poetry and drama is throughout rich, vital and joyous and there is more tragedy, terror, sorrow and gloom packed into any few pages of European work than we can find in the whole mass of Indian

literature. It does not seem to me that Indian art is at all different in this respect from the religion and literature. The Western mind is here thrusting in its own habitual reactions upon things in the indigenous conception in which they have no proper place. Mark the curious misreading of the dance of Shiva as a dance of Death or Destruction, whereas, as anybody ought to be able to see who looks upon the Nataraja, it expresses on the contrary the rapture of the cosmic dance with the profundities behind of the unmoved eternal and infinite bliss. So too the figure of Kali which is so terrible to European eyes is, as we know, the Mother of the universe accepting this fierce aspect of destruction in order to slay the Asuras, the powers of evil in man and the world. There are other strands in this feeling in the Western mind which seem to spring from a dislike of anything uplifted far beyond the human measure and others again in which we see a subtle survival of the Greek limitation, the fear, gloom and aversion with which the sunny terrestrial Hellenic mind commonly met the idea of the beyond, the limitless, the unknown; but that reaction has no place in Indian mentality. And as for the strangeness or formidable aspect of certain unhuman figures or the conception of demons or Rakshasas, it must be remembered that the Indian aesthetic mind deals not only with the earth but with psychic planes in which these things exist and ranges freely among them without being overpowered because it carries everywhere the stamp of a large confidence in the strength and the omnipresence of the Self or the Divine."[32]

## 3. The Indian Sculpture

"The sculpture and painting of ancient India have recently been rehabilitated with a surprising suddenness in the eyes of

a more cultivated European criticism in the course of that rapid opening of the Western mind to the value of oriental thought and creation which is one of the most significant signs of a change that is yet only in its beginning. There have even been here and there minds of a fine perception and profound originality who have seen in a return to the ancient and persistent freedom of oriental art, its refusal to be shackled or debased by an imitative realism, its fidelity to the true theory of art as an inspired interpretation of the deeper soul values of existence lifted beyond servitude to the outsides of Nature, the right way to the regeneration and liberation of the aesthetic and creative mind of Europe. And actually, although much of Western art runs still along the old grooves, much too of its most original recent creation has elements or a guiding direction which brings it nearer to the Eastern mentality and understanding. It might then be possible for us to leave it at that and wait for time to deepen this new vision and vindicate more fully the truth and greatness of the art of India.

But we are concerned not only with the critical estimation of our art by Europe, but much more nearly with the evil effect of the earlier depreciation on the Indian mind which has been for a long time side-tracked off its true road by a foreign, an anglicised education and, as a result, vulgarised and falsified by the loss of its own true centre, because this hampers and retards a sound and living revival of artistic taste and culture and stands in the way of a new age of creation. It was only a few years ago that the mind of educated India – "educated" without an atom of real culture – accepted contentedly the vulgar English estimate of our sculpture and painting as undeveloped inferior art or even a mass of monstrous and abortive miscreation, and though that has passed and there is a great change, there is still very common

a heavy weight of secondhand occidental notions, a bluntness or absolute lacking of aesthetic taste,* a failure to appreciate, and one still comes sometimes across a strain of blatantly anglicised criticism which depreciates all that is in the Indian manner and praises only what is consistent with Western canons. And the old style of European criticism continues to have some weight with us, because the lack of aesthetic or indeed of any real cultural training in our present system of education makes us ignorant and undiscriminating receptacles, so that we are ready to take the considered opinions of competent critics like Okakura or Mr. Laurence Binyon and the rash scribblings of journalists of the type of Mr. Archer, who write without authority because in these things they have neither taste nor knowledge, as of equal importance and the latter even attract a greater attention. It is still necessary therefore to reiterate things which, however obvious to a trained or sensitive aesthetic intelligence, are not yet familiar to the average mind still untutored or habituated to a system of false weights and values. The work of recovering a true and inward understanding of ourselves – our past and our present self and from that our future – is only in its commencement for the majority of our people."[33]

"To appreciate our own artistic past at its right value we have to free ourselves from all subjection to a foreign outlook and see our sculpture and painting, as I have already suggested about our architecture, in the light of its own profound intention and greatness of spirit. When we so look at it, we

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** "For example, one still reads with a sense of despairing stupefaction "criticism" that speaks of Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore as artistic creators of different styles, but an equal power and genius!"*[34]

shall be able to see that the sculpture of ancient and mediaeval India claims its place on the very highest levels of artistic achievement. I do not know where we shall find a sculptural art of a more profound intention, a greater spirit, a more consistent skill of achievement. Inferior work there is, work that fails or succeeds only partially, but take it in its whole, in the long persistence of its excellence, in the number of its masterpieces, in the power with which it renders the soul and the mind of a people, and we shall be tempted to go further and claim for it a first place. The art of sculpture has indeed flourished supremely only in ancient countries where it was conceived against its natural background and support, a great architecture. Egypt, Greece, India take the premier rank in this kind of creation. Mediaeval and modern Europe produced nothing of the same mastery, abundance and amplitude, while on the contrary in painting later Europe has done much and richly and with a prolonged and constantly renewed inspiration. The difference arises from the different kind of mentality required by the two arts. The material in which we work makes its own peculiar demand on the creative spirit, lays down its own natural conditions, as Ruskin has pointed out in a different connection, and the art of making in stone or bronze calls for a cast of mind which the ancients had and the moderns have not or have had only in rare individuals, an artistic mind not too rapidly mobile and self-indulgent, not too much mastered by its own personality and emotion and the touches that excite and pass, but founded rather on some great basis of assured thought and vision, stable in temperament, fixed in its imagination on things that are firm and enduring. One cannot trifle with ease in these sterner materials, one cannot even for long or with safety indulge in them in mere grace and external beauty or the more

superficial, mobile and lightly attractive motives. The aesthetic self-indulgence which the soul of colour permits and even invites, the attraction of the mobile play of life to which line of brush, pen or pencil gives latitude, are here forbidden or, if to some extent achieved, only within a line of restraint to cross which is perilous and soon fatal. Here grand or profound motives are called for, a more or less penetrating spiritual vision or some sense of things eternal to base the creation. The sculptural art is static, self-contained, necessarily firm, noble or severe and demands an aesthetic spirit capable of these qualities. A certain mobility of life and mastering grace of line can come in upon this basis, but if it entirely replaces the original dharma of the material, that means that the spirit of the statuette has come into the statue and we may be sure of an approaching decadence. Hellenic sculpture following this line passed from the greatness of Phidias through the soft self-indulgence of Praxiteles to its decline. A later Europe has failed for the most part in sculpture, in spite of some great work by individuals, an Angelo or a Rodin, because it played externally with stone and bronze, took them as a medium for the representation of life and could not find a sufficient basis of profound vision or spiritual motive. In Egypt and in India, on the contrary, sculpture preserved its power of successful creation through several great ages. The earliest recently discovered work in India dates back to the fifth century B.C. and is already fully evolved with an evident history of consummate previous creation behind it, and the latest work of some high value comes down to within a few centuries from our own time. An assured history of two millenniums of accomplished sculptural creation is a rare and significant fact in the life of a people.

This greatness and continuity of Indian sculpture is due

to the close connection between the religious and philosophical and the aesthetic mind of the people. Its survival into times not far from us was possible because of the survival of the cast of the antique mind in that philosophy and religion, a mind familiar with eternal things, capable of cosmic vision, having its roots of thought and seeing in the profundities of the soul, in the most intimate, pregnant and abiding experiences of the human spirit. The spirit of this greatness is indeed at the opposite pole to the perfection within limits, the lucid nobility or the vital fineness and physical grace of Hellenic creation in stone. And since the favourite trick …is to throw the Hellenic ideal constantly in our face, as if sculpture must be either governed by the Greek standard or worthless, it is as well to take note of the meaning of the difference. The earlier and more archaic Greek style had indeed something in it which looks like a reminiscent touch of a first creative origin from Egypt and the Orient, but there is already there the governing conception which determined the Greek aesthesis and has dominated the later mind of Europe, the will to combine some kind of expression of an inner truth with an idealising imitation of external Nature. The brilliance, beauty and nobility of the work which was accomplished, was a very great and perfect thing, but it is idle to maintain that that is the sole possible method or the one permanent and natural law of artistic creation. Its highest greatness subsisted only so long – and it was not for very long – as a certain satisfying balance was struck and constantly maintained between a fine, but not very subtle, opulent or profound spiritual suggestion and an outward physical harmony of nobility and grace. A later work achieved a brief miracle of vital suggestion and sensuous physical grace with a certain power of expressing the spirit of beauty in the mould

of the senses; but this once done, there was no more to see or create. For the curious turn which impels at the present day the modern mind to return to spiritual vision through a fiction of exaggerated realism which is really a pressure upon the form of things to yield the secret of the spirit in life and matter, was not open to the classic temperament and intelligence. And it is surely time for us to see, as is now by many admitted, that an acknowledgment of the greatness of Greek art in its own province ought not to prevent the plain perception of the rather strait and narrow bounds of that province. What Greek sculpture expressed was fine, gracious and noble, but what it did not express and could not by the limitations of its canon hope to attempt, was considerable, was immense in possibility, was that spiritual depth and extension which the human mind needs for its larger and deeper self-experience. And just this is the greatness of Indian sculpture that it expresses in stone and bronze what the Greek aesthetic mind could not conceive or express and embodies it with a profound understanding of its right conditions and a native perfection."[35]

"The more ancient sculptural art of India embodies in visible form what the Upanishads threw out into inspired thought and the Mahabharata and Ramayana portrayed by the word in life. This sculpture like the architecture springs from spiritual realisation, and what it creates and expresses at its greatest is the spirit in form, the soul in body, this or that living soul power in the divine or the human, the universal and cosmic individualised in suggestion but not lost in individuality, the impersonal supporting a not too insistent play of personality, the abiding moments of the eternal, the presence, the idea, the power, the calm or potent delight of the spirit in its actions and creations. And over all the art

something of this intention broods and persists and is suggested even where it does not dominate the mind of the sculptor. And therefore as in the architecture so in the sculpture, we have to bring a different mind to this work, a different capacity of vision and response, we have to go deeper into ourselves to see than in the more outwardly imaginative art of Europe. The Olympian gods of Phidias are magnified and uplifted human beings saved from a too human limitation by a certain divine calm of impersonality or universalised quality, divine type, *guṇa*; in other work we see heroes, athletes, feminine incarnations of beauty, calm and restrained embodiments of idea, action or emotion in the idealised beauty of the human figure. The gods of Indian sculpture are cosmic beings, embodiments of some great spiritual power, spiritual idea and action, inmost psychic significance, the human form a vehicle of this soul meaning, its outward means of self-expression; everything in the figure, every opportunity it gives, the face, the hands, the posture of the limbs, the poise and turn of the body, every accessory, has to be made instinct with the inner meaning, help it to emerge, carry out the rhythm of the total suggestion, and on the other hand everything is suppressed which would defeat this end, especially all that would mean an insistence on the merely vital or physical, outward or obvious suggestions of the human figure. Not the ideal physical or emotional beauty, but the utmost spiritual beauty or significance of which the human form is capable, is the aim of this kind of creation. The divine self in us is its theme, the body made a form of the soul is its idea and its secret. And therefore in front of this art it is not enough to look at it and respond with the aesthetic eye and the imagination, but we must look also into the form for what it carries and even through and behind it to pursue the profound

suggestion it gives into its own infinite. The religious or hieratic side of Indian sculpture is intimately connected with the spiritual experiences of Indian meditation and adoration, – those deep things of our self-discovery which our critic calls contemptuously Yogic hallucinations, – soul realisation is its method of creation and soul realisation must be the way of our response and understanding. And even with the figures of human beings or groups it is still a like inner aim and vision which governs the labour of the sculptor. The statue of a king or a saint is not meant merely to give the idea of a king or saint or to portray some dramatic action or to be a character portrait in stone, but to embody rather a soul state or experience or deeper soul quality, as for instance, not the outward emotion, but the inner soul-side of rapt ecstasy of adoration and God-vision in the saint or the devotee before the presence of the worshipped deity. This is the character of the task the Indian sculptor set before his effort and it is according to his success in that and not by the absence of something else, some quality or some intention foreign to his mind and contrary to his design, that we have to judge of his achievement and his labour.

Once we admit this standard, it is impossible to speak too highly of the profound intelligence of its conditions which was developed in Indian sculpture, of the skill with which its task was treated or of the consummate grandeur and beauty of its masterpieces. Take the great Buddhas – not the Gandharan, but the divine figures or groups in cave cathedral or temple, the best of the later southern bronzes of which there is a remarkable collection of plates in Mr. Gangoly's book on that subject, the Kalasanhara image, the Natarajas. No greater or finer work, whether in conception or execution, has been done by the human hand and its greatness is increased

by obeying a spiritualised aesthetic vision. The figure of the Buddha achieves the expression of the infinite in a finite image, and that is surely no mean or barbaric achievement, to embody the illimitable calm of Nirvana in a human form and visage. The Kalasanhara Shiva is supreme not only by the majesty, power, calmly forceful control, dignity and kingship of existence which the whole spirit and pose of the figure visibly incarnates, – that is only half or less than half its achievement, – but much more by the concentrated divine passion of the spiritual overcoming of time and existence which the artist has succeeded in putting into eye and brow and mouth and every feature and has subtly supported by the contained suggestion, not emotional, but spiritual, of every part of the body of the godhead and the rhythm of his meaning which he has poured through the whole unity of this creation. Or what of the marvellous genius and skill in the treatment of the cosmic movement and delight of the dance of Shiva, the success with which the posture of every limb is made to bring out the rhythm of the significance, the rapturous intensity and abandon of the movement itself and yet the just restraint in the intensity of motion, the subtle variation of each element of the single theme in the seizing idea of these master sculptors? Image after image in the great temples or saved from the wreck of time shows the same grand traditional art and the genius which worked in that tradition and its many styles, the profound and firmly grasped spiritual idea, the consistent expression of it in every curve, line and mass, in hand and limb, in suggestive pose, in expressive rhythm, – it is an art which, understood in its own spirit, need fear no comparison with any other, ancient or modern, Hellenic or Egyptian, of the near or the far East or of the West in any of its creative ages. This sculpture passed through many changes, a more ancient art of extraordinary grandeur and epic power

uplifted by the same spirit as reigned in the Vedic and Vedantic seers and in the epic poets, a later Puranic turn towards grace and beauty and rapture and an outburst of lyric ecstasy and movement, and last a rapid and vacant decadence; but throughout all the second period too the depth and greatness of sculptural motive supports and vivifies the work and in the very turn towards decadence something of it often remains to redeem from complete debasement, emptiness or insignificance."[36]

"…Indian artist had a perfect idea of proportion and rhythm and used them in certain styles with nobility and power, in others like the Javan, the Gauda or the southern bronzes with that or with a perfect grace added and often an intense and a lyrical sweetness. The dignity and beauty of the human figure in the best Indian statues cannot be excelled, but what was sought and what was achieved was not an outward naturalistic, but a spiritual and a psychic beauty, and to achieve it the sculptor suppressed, and was entirely right in suppressing, the obtrusive material detail and aimed instead at purity of outline and fineness of feature. And into that outline, into that purity and fineness he was able to work whatever he chose, mass of force or delicacy of grace, a static dignity or a mighty strength or a restrained violence of movement or whatever served or helped his meaning. A divine and subtle body was his ideal; and to a taste and imagination too blunt or realistic to conceive the truth and beauty of his idea, the ideal itself may well be a stumbling-block, a thing of offence. But the triumphs of art are not to be limited by the narrow prejudices of the natural realistic man; that triumphs and endures which appeals to the best, *sādhu-sammatam*, that is deepest and greatest which satisfies the profoundest souls and the most sensitive psychic imaginations."[37]

Sri Aurobindo, commenting on an article in a magazine where the front piece was a panel for a Pallava temple at Mahabalipuram intended to convey at once the essential character and appeal of Indian sculpture, observed, "This example from one of the great styles and periods shows, as is justly said, and shows very perfectly, the Indian principle in the treatment of the human figure, the suppression of small particulars and trivial details in order to secure an extreme simplicity of form and contour, – the best condition for accomplishing the principal object of the Indian sculptor which was to fill the form with the utmost power of spiritual force and significance. The figure of this princely doorkeeper of the temple in its union of calm, grave, sweet and restful serenity with a latent and restrained heroic energy in its stillness, noted by the writer as the distinctive power of this creation, is indeed equal, as he suggests, in its dignity and repose to any Greek statue, but it carries in it a more profound and potent meaning; it is a perfect interpretation of the still and intense Godward feeling, seized in one deep mood, in one fixed moment of it, which was the soul of the great ages of Indian religion. There is here a perfection of form with a perfection of significance. This restraint in power, this contained fullness opening an amplitude of infinite suggestion, is not rare or exceptional, it is a frequent greatness in the art of India."[38]

"Indian sculpture, Indian art in general follows its own ideal and traditions and these are unique in their character and quality. It is the expression great as a whole through many centuries and ages of creation, supreme at its best, whether in rare early pre-Asokan, in Asokan or later work of the first heroic age or in the magnificent statues of the cave-cathedrals and Pallava and other southern temples or the noble, accomplished or gracious imaginations of Bengal, Nepal and

Java through the after centuries or in the singular skill and delicacy of the bronze work of the southern religions, a self-expression of the spirit and ideals of a great nation and a great culture which stands apart in the cast of its mind and qualities among the earth's peoples, famed for its spiritual achievement, its deep philosophies and its religious spirit, its artistic taste, the richness of its poetic imagination, and not inferior once in its dealings with life and its social endeavour and political institutions. This sculpture is a singularly powerful, a seizing and profound interpretation in stone and bronze of the inner soul of that people. The nation, the culture failed for a time in life after a long greatness, as others failed before it and others will yet fail that now flourish; the creations of its mind have been arrested, this art like others has ceased or fallen into decay, but the thing from which it rose, the spiritual fire within still burns and in the renascence that is coming it may be that this great art too will revive, not saddled with the grave limitations of modern Western work in the kind, but vivified by the nobility of a new impulse and power of the ancient spiritual motive. Let it recover, not limited by old forms, but undeterred by the cavillings of an alien mind, the sense of the grandeur and beauty and the inner significance of its past achievement; for in the continuity of its spiritual endeavour lies its best hope for the future."[39]

## 4. The Indian Painting

"The art of painting in ancient and later India, owing to the comparative scantiness of its surviving creations, does not create quite so great an impression as her architecture and sculpture and it has even been supposed that this art flourished only at intervals, finally ceased for a period of several centuries and was revived later on by the Moguls and

by Hindu artists who underwent the Mogul influence. This however is a hasty view that does not outlast a more careful research and consideration of the available evidence. It appears, on the contrary, that Indian culture was able to arrive at a well developed and an understanding aesthetic use of colour and line from very early times and, allowing for the successive fluctuations, periods of decline and fresh outbursts of originality and vigour, which the collective human mind undergoes in all countries, used this form of self-expression very persistently through the long centuries of its growth and greatness. And especially it is apparent now that there was a persistent tradition, a fundamental spirit and turn of the aesthetic sense native to the mind of India which links even the latest Rajput art to the earliest surviving work still preserved at its highest summit of achievement in the rock-cut retreats of Ajanta.

The materials of the art of painting are unfortunately more perishable than those of any other of the greater means of creative aesthetic self-expression and of the ancient masterpieces only a little survives, but that little still indicates the immensity of the amount of work of which it is the fading remnant. It is said that of the twenty-nine caves at Ajanta almost all once bore signs of decoration by frescoes; only so long ago as forty years sixteen still contained something of the original paintings, but now six alone still bear their witness to the greatness of this ancient art, though rapidly perishing and deprived of something of the original warmth and beauty and glory of colour. The rest of all that vivid contemporaneous creation which must at one time have covered the whole country in the temples and viharas and the houses of the cultured and the courts and pleasure-houses of nobles and kings, has perished, and we have only, more or

less similar to the work at Ajanta, some crumbling fragments of rich and profuse decoration in the caves of Bagh and a few paintings of female figures in two rock-cut chambers at Sigiriya.*

These remnants represent the work of some six or seven centuries, but they leave gaps, and nothing now remains of any paintings earlier than the first century of the Christian era, except some frescoes, spoilt by unskilful restoration, from the first century before it, while after the seventh there is a blank which might at first sight argue a total decline of the art, a cessation and disappearance. But there are fortunately evidences which carry back the tradition of the art at one end many centuries earlier and other remains more recently discovered and of another kind outside India and in the Himalayan countries carry it forward at the other end as late as the twelfth century and help us to link it on to the later schools of Rajput painting. The history of the self-expression of the Indian mind in painting covers a period of as much as two millenniums of more or less intense artistic creation and stands on a par in this respect with the architecture and sculpture.

The paintings that remain to us from ancient times are the work of Buddhist painters, but the art itself in India was of pre-Buddhistic origin. The Tibetan historian ascribes a remote antiquity to all the crafts, prior to the Buddha, and this is a conclusion increasingly pointed to by a constant accumulation of evidence. Already in the third century before the Christian era we find the theory of the art well founded

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**Since then more paintings of high quality have been found in some southern temples, akin in their spirit and style to the work at Ajanta.*

from previous times, the six essential elements, *ṣaḍaṅga*, recognised and enumerated, like the more or less corresponding six Chinese canons which are first mentioned nearly a thousand years later, and in a very ancient work on the art pointing back to pre-Buddhistic times a number of careful and very well-defined rules and traditions are laid down which were developed into an elaborate science of technique and traditional rule in the later Shilpasutras. The frequent references in the ancient literature also are of a character which would have been impossible without a widespread practice and appreciation of the art by both men and women of the cultured classes, and these allusions and incidents evidencing a moved delight in the painted form and beauty of colour and the appeal both to the decorative sense and to the aesthetic emotion occur not only in the later poetry of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti and other classical dramatists, but in the early popular drama of Bhasa and earlier still in the epics and in the sacred books of the Buddhists."[40]

"The one important and significant thing that emerges is the constant oneness and continuity of all Indian art in its essential spirit and tradition. Thus the earlier work at Ajanta has been found to be akin to the earlier sculptural work of the Buddhists, while the later paintings have a similar close kinship to the sculptural reliefs at Java. And we find that the spirit and tradition which reigns through all changes of style and manner at Ajanta, is present too at Bagh and Sigiriya, in the Khotan frescoes, in the illuminations of Buddhist manuscripts of a much later time and in spite of the change of form and manner is still spiritually the same in the Rajput paintings. This unity and continuity enable us to distinguish and arrive at a clear understanding of what is the essential aim, inner turn and motive, spiritual method which

differentiate Indian painting first from occidental work and then from the nearer and more kindred art of other countries of Asia."[41]

"The spirit and motive of Indian painting are in their centre of conception and shaping force of sight identical with the inspiring vision of Indian sculpture…. The sculptor must express always in static form; the idea of the spirit is cut out for him in mass and line, significant in the stability of its insistence, and he can lighten the weight of this insistence but not get rid of it or away from it; for him eternity seizes hold of time in its shapes and arrests it in the monumental spirit of stone or bronze. The painter on the contrary lavishes his soul in colour and there is a liquidity in the form, a fluent grace of subtlety in the line he uses which imposes on him a more mobile and emotional way of self-expression. The more he gives us of the colour and changing form and emotion of the life of the soul, the more his work glows with beauty, masters the inner aesthetic sense and opens it to the thing his art better gives us than any other, the delight of the motion of the self out into a spiritually sensuous joy of beautiful shapes and the coloured radiances of existence. Painting is naturally the most sensuous of the arts, and the highest greatness open to the painter is to spiritualise this sensuous appeal by making the most vivid outward beauty a revelation of subtle spiritual emotion so that the soul and the sense are at harmony in the deepest and finest richness of both and united in their satisfied consonant expression of the inner significances of things and life. There is less of the austerity of Tapasya in his way of working, a less severely restrained expression of eternal things and of the fundamental truths behind the forms of things, but there is in compensation a moved wealth of psychic or warmth of vital suggestion, a lavish delight of the beauty of

the play of the eternal in the moments of time and there the artist arrests it for us and makes moments of the life of the soul reflected in form of man or creature or incident or scene or Nature full of a permanent and opulent significance to our spiritual vision."[42]

"The Indian artist lived in the light of an inspiration which imposed this greater aim on his art and his method sprang from its fountains and served it to the exclusion of any more earthly sensuous or outwardly imaginative aesthetic impulse. The six limbs of his art, the *ṣaḍaṅga*, are common to all work in line and colour: they are the necessary elements and in their elements the great arts are the same everywhere; the distinction of forms, *rūpabheda*, proportion, arrangement of line and mass, design, harmony, perspective, *pramāṇa*, the emotion or aesthetic feeling expressed by the form, *bhāva*, the seeking for beauty and charm for the satisfaction of the aesthetic spirit, *lāvaṇya*, truth of the form and its suggestion, *sādṛśya*, the turn, combination, harmony of colours, *varṇikābhaṅga*, are the first constituents to which every successful work of art reduces itself in analysis. But it is the turn given to each of the constituents which makes all the difference in the aim and effect of the technique and the source and character of the inner vision guiding the creative hand in their combination which makes all the difference in the spiritual value of the achievement, and the unique character of Indian painting, the peculiar appeal of the art of Ajanta springs from the remarkably inward, spiritual and psychic turn which was given to the artistic conception and method by the pervading genius of Indian culture. Indian painting no more than Indian architecture and sculpture could escape from its absorbing motive, its transmuting atmosphere, the direct or subtle obsession of the mind that has been subtly and strangely

changed, the eye that has been trained to see, not as others with only the external eye but by a constant communing of the mental parts and the inner vision with the self beyond mind and the spirit to which forms are only a transparent veil or a slight index of its own greater splendour.…Indian painting like Indian architecture and sculpture appeals through the physical and psychical to another spiritual vision from which the artist worked and it is only when this is no less awakened in us than the aesthetic sense that it can be appreciated in all the depth of its significance."[43]

"The orthodox Western artist works by a severely conscientious reproduction of the forms of outward Nature; the external world is his model, and he has to keep it before his eye and repress any tendency towards a substantial departure from it or any motion to yield his first allegiance to a subtler spirit. His imagination submits itself to physical Nature even when he brings in conceptions which are more properly of another kingdom, the stress of the physical world is always with him, and the Seer of the subtle, the creator of mental forms, the inner Artist, the wide-eyed voyager in the vaster psychical realms, is obliged to subdue his inspirations to the law of the Seer of the outward, the spirit that has embodied itself in the creations of the terrestrial life, the material universe. An idealized imaginative realism is as far as he can ordinarily go in the method of his work when he would fill the outward with the subtler inner seeing. And when, dissatisfied with this confining law, he would break quite out of the circle, he is exposed to a temptation to stray into intellectual or imaginative extravagances which violate the universal rule of the right distinction of forms, *rūpabheda*, and belong to the vision of some intermediate world of sheer fantasia. His art has discovered the rule of proportion,

arrangement and perspective which preserves the illusion of physical Nature and he relates his whole design to her design in a spirit of conscientious obedience and faithful dependence."[44]

"The Indian artist sets out from the other end of the scale of values of experience which connect life and the spirit. The whole creative force comes here from a spiritual and psychic vision, the emphasis of the physical is secondary and always deliberately lightened so as to give an overwhelmingly spiritual and psychic impression and everything is suppressed which does not serve this purpose or would distract the mind from the purity of this intention. This painting expresses the soul through life, but life is only a means of the spiritual self-expression, and its outward representation is not the first object or the direct motive. There is a real and a very vivid and vital representation, but it is more of an inner psychical than of the outward physical life. ….The feeling for life and character here is a very different thing from the splendid and abundant vitality and the power and force of character which we find in an Italian painting, a fresco from Michael Angelo's hand or a portrait by Titian or Tintoretto. The first primitive object of the art of painting is to illustrate life and Nature and at the lowest this becomes a more or less vigorous and original or conventionally faithful reproduction, but it rises in great hands to a revelation of the glory and beauty of the sensuous appeal of life or of the dramatic power and moving interest of character and emotion and action. That is a common form of aesthetic work in Europe; but in Indian art it is never the governing motive. The sensuous appeal is there, but it is refined into only one and not the chief element of the richness of a soul of psychic grace and beauty which is for the Indian artist the true beauty, *lāvaṇya*: the dramatic motive

is subordinated and made only a purely secondary element, only so much is given of character and action as will help to bring out the deeper spiritual or psychic feeling, *bhāva*, and all insistence or too prominent force of these more outwardly dynamic things is shunned, because that would externalise too much the spiritual emotion and take away from its intense purity by the interference of the grosser intensity which emotion puts on in the stress of the active outward nature. The life depicted is the life of the soul and not, except as a form and a helping suggestion, the life of the vital being and the body. For the second more elevated aim of art is the interpretation or intuitive revelation of existence through the forms of life and Nature and it is this that is the starting-point of the Indian motive. But the interpretation may proceed on the basis of the forms already given us by physical Nature and try to evoke by the form an idea, a truth of the spirit which starts from it as a suggestion and returns upon it for support, and the effort is then to correlate the form as it is to the physical eye with the truth which it evokes without overpassing the limits imposed by the appearance. This is the common method of occidental art always zealous for the immediate fidelity to Nature which is its idea of true correspondence, *sādṛśya*, but it is rejected by the Indian artist. He begins from within, sees in his soul the thing he wishes to express or interpret and tries to discover the right line, colour and design of his intuition which, when it appears on the physical ground, is not a just and reminding reproduction of the line, colour and design of physical nature, but much rather what seems to us a psychical transmutation of the natural figure. In reality the shapes he paints are the forms of things as he has seen them in the psychical plane of experience: these are the soul-figures of which physical things are a gross

representation and their purity and subtlety reveals at once what the physical masks by the thickness of its casings. The lines and colours sought here are the psychic lines and the psychic hues proper to the vision which the artist has gone into himself to discover."[45]

"This is the whole governing principle of the art which gives its stamp to every detail of an Indian painting and transforms the artist's use of the six limbs of the canon. The distinction of forms is faithfully observed, but not in the sense of an exact naturalistic fidelity to the physical appearance with the object of a faithful reproduction of the outward shapes of the world in which we live. To recall with fidelity something our eyes have seen or could have seen on the spot, a scene, an interior, a living and breathing person, and give the aesthetic sense and emotion of it to the mind is not the motive. There is here an extraordinary vividness, naturalness, reality, but it is a more than physical reality, a reality which the soul at once recognises as of its own sphere, a vivid naturalness of psychic truth, the convincing spirit of the form to which the soul, not the outward naturalness of the form to which the physical eye bears witness. The truth, the exact likeness is there, the correspondence, *sādṛśya*, but it is the truth of the essence of the form, it is the likeness of the soul to itself, the reproduction of the subtle embodiment which is the basis of the physical embodiment, the purer and finer subtle body of an object which is the very expression of its own essential nature, *svabhāva*. The means by which this effect is produced is characteristic of the inward vision of the Indian mind. It is done by a bold and firm insistence on the pure and strong outline and a total suppression of everything that would interfere with its boldness, strength and purity or would blur over and dilute the intense significance of the line. In the

treatment of the human figure all corporeal filling in of the outline by insistence on the flesh, the muscle, the anatomical detail is minimised or disregarded: the strong subtle lines and pure shapes which make the humanity of the human form are alone brought into relief; the whole essential human being is there, the divinity that has taken this garb of the spirit to the eye, but not the superfluous physicality which he carries with him as his burden. It is the ideal psychical figure and body of man and woman that is before us in its charm and beauty. The filling in of the line is done in another way; it is effected by a disposition of pure masses, a design and coloured wave-flow of the body, *bhaṅga*, a simplicity of content that enables the artist to flood the whole with the significance of the one spiritual emotion, feeling, suggestion which he intends to convey, his intuition of the moment of the soul, its living self-experience. All is disposed so as to express that and that alone. The almost miraculously subtle and meaningful use of the hands to express the psychic suggestion is a common and well-marked feature of Indian paintings and the way in which the suggestion of the face and the eyes is subtly repeated or supplemented by this expression of the hands is always one of the first things that strikes the regard, but as we continue to look, we see that every turn of the body, the pose of each limb, the relation and design of all the masses are filled with the same psychical feeling. The more important accessories help it by a kindred suggestion or bring it out by a support or variation or extension or relief of the motive. The same law of significant line and suppression of distracting detail is applied to animal forms, buildings, trees, objects. There is in all the art an inspired harmony of conception, method and expression. Colour too is used as a means for the spiritual and psychic intention, and we can see this well enough if we

study the suggestive significance of the hues in a Buddhist miniature. This power of line and subtlety of psychic suggestion in the filling in of the expressive outlines is the source of that remarkable union of greatness and moving grace which is the stamp of the whole work of Ajanta and continues in Rajput painting, though there the grandeur of the earlier work is lost in the grace and replaced by a delicately intense but still bold and decisive power of vivid and suggestive line. It is this common spirit and tradition which is the mark of all the truly indigenous work of India."[46]

"These things have to be carefully understood and held in mind when we look at an Indian painting and the real spirit of it first grasped before we condemn or praise. To dwell on that in it which is common to all art is well enough, but it is what is peculiar to India that is its real essence. And there again to appreciate the technique and the fervour of religious feeling is not sufficient; the spiritual intention served by the technique, the psychic significance of line and colour, the greater thing of which the religious emotion is the result has to be felt if we would identify ourself with the whole purpose of the artist. If we look long, for an example, at the adoration group of the mother and child before the Buddha, one of the most profound, tender and noble of the Ajanta masterpieces, we shall find that the impression of intense religious feeling of adoration there is only the most outward general touch in the ensemble of the emotion. That which it deepens to is the turning of the soul of humanity in love to the benignant and calm Ineffable which has made itself sensible and human to us in the universal compassion of the Buddha, and the motive of the soul moment the painting interprets is the dedication of the awakening mind of the child, the coming younger humanity, to that in which already the soul of the mother has

learned to find and fix its spiritual joy. The eyes, brows, lips, face, poise of the head of the woman are filled with this spiritual emotion which is a continued memory and possession of the psychical release, the steady settled calm of the heart's experience filled with an ineffable tenderness, the familiar depths which are yet moved with the wonder and always farther appeal of something that is infinite, the body and other limbs are grave masses of this emotion and in their poise a basic embodiment of it, while the hands prolong it in the dedicative putting forward of her child to meet the Eternal. This contact of the human and eternal is repeated in the smaller figure with a subtly and strongly indicated variation, the glad and childlike smile of awakening which promises but not yet possesses the depths that are to come, the hands disposed to receive and keep, the body in its looser curves and waves harmonising with that significance. The two have forgotten themselves and seem almost to forget or confound each other in that which they adore and contemplate, and yet the dedicating hands unite mother and child in the common act and feeling by their simultaneous gesture of maternal possession and spiritual giving. The two figures have at each point the same rhythm, but with a significant difference. The simplicity in the greatness and power, the fullness of expression gained by reserve and suppression and concentration which we find here is the perfect method of the classical art of India. And by this perfection Buddhist art became not merely an illustration of the religion and an expression of its thought and its religious feeling, history and legend, but a revealing interpretation of the spiritual sense of Buddhism and its profounder meaning to the soul of India."[47]

"To understand that – we must always seek first and foremost this kind of deeper intention – is to understand the

reason of the differences between the occidental and the Indian treatment of the life motives. Thus a portrait by a great European painter will express with sovereign power the soul through character, through the active qualities, the ruling powers and passions, the master feeling and temperament, the active mental and vital man: the Indian artist tones down the outward-going dynamic indices and gives only so much of them as will serve to bring out or to modulate something that is more of the grain of the subtle soul, something more static and impersonal of which our personality is at once the mask and the index. A moment of the spirit expressing with purity the permanence of a very subtle soul quality is the highest type of the Indian portrait. And more generally the feeling for character which has been noted as a feature of the Ajanta work is of a similar kind. An Indian painting expressing, let us say, a religious feeling centred on some significant incident will show the expression in each figure varied in such a way as to bring out the universal spiritual essence of the emotion modified by the essential soul type, different waves of the one sea, all complexity of dramatic insistence is avoided, and so much stress only is laid on character in the individual feeling as to give the variation without diminishing the unity of the fundamental emotion. The vividness of life in these paintings must not obscure for us the more profound purpose for which it is the setting, and this has especially to be kept in mind in our view of the later art which has not the greatness of the classic work and runs to a less grave and highly sustained kind, to lyric emotion, minute vividness of life movement, the more naive feelings of the people. One sometimes finds inspiration, decisive power of thought and feeling, originality of creative imagination denied to this later art; but its real difference from

that of Ajanta is only that the intermediate psychic transmission between the life movement and the inmost motive has been given with less power and distinctness: the psychic thought and feeling are there more thrown outward in movement, less contained in the soul, but still the soul motive is not only present but makes the true atmosphere and if we miss it, we miss the real sense of the picture. This is more evident where the inspiration is religious, but it is not absent from the secular subject. Here too spiritual intention or psychic suggestion are the things of the first importance. In Ajanta work they are all-important and to ignore them at all is to open the way to serious errors of interpretation. Thus a highly competent and very sympathetic critic speaking of the painting of the Great Renunciation says truly that this great work excels in its expression of sorrow and feeling of profound pity, but then, looking for what a Western imagination would naturally put into such a subject, he goes on to speak of the weight of a tragic decision, the bitterness of renouncing a life of bliss blended with a yearning sense of hope in the happiness of the future, and that is singularly to misunderstand the spirit in which the Indian mind turns from the transient to the eternal, to mistake the Indian art motive and to put a vital into the place of a spiritual emotion. It is not at all his own personal sorrow but the sorrow of all others, not an emotional self-pity but a poignant pity for the world, not the regret for a life of domestic bliss but the afflicting sense of the unreality of human happiness that is concentrated in the eyes and lips of the Buddha, and the yearning there is not, certainly, for earthly happiness in the future but for the spiritual way out, the anguished seeking which found its release, already foreseen by the spirit behind and hence the immense calm and restraint that support the sorrow, in the

true bliss of Nirvana. There is illustrated the whole difference between two kinds of imagination, the mental, vital and physical stress of the art of Europe and the subtle, less forcefully tangible spiritual stress of the art of India."[48]

"It is not necessary to dilate on the decorative arts and crafts of India, for their excellence has always been beyond dispute. The generalised sense of beauty which they imply is one of the greatest proofs that there can be of the value and soundness of a national culture. Indian culture in this respect need not fear any comparison: if it is less predominantly artistic than that of Japan, it is because it has put first the spiritual need and made all other things subservient to and a means for the spiritual growth of the people. Its civilisation, standing in the first rank in the three great arts as in all things of the mind, has proved that the spiritual urge is not, as has been vainly supposed, sterilising to the other activities, but a most powerful force for the many-sided development of the human whole."*[49]

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**"The spirit of old Indian Art must be revived, the inspiration and directness of vision which even now subsists among the possessors of the ancient traditions, the inborn skill and taste of the race, the dexterity of the Indian hand and the intuitive gaze of the Indian eye must be recovered and the whole nation lifted again to the high level of the ancient culture – and higher."*[50]

# List of References


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27. *SABCL 3, Pages 417-20,*
28. *SABCL 14, Pages 211-13,*
29. *SABCL 14, Pages 213-15,*
30. *SABCL 14, Pages 216-19,*
31. *SABCL 14, Pages 219-21,*
32. *SABCL 14, Pages 222-23,*
33. *SABCL 14, Pages 226-27,*
34. *SABCL 14, Page 227,*
35. *SABCL 14, Pages 227-30,*
36. *SABCL 14, Pages 230-33,*
37. *SABCL 14, Pages 236-37,*
38. *SABCL 17, Pages 300-01,*
39. *SABCL 14, Pages 237-38,*
40. *SABCL 14, Pages 239-41,*
41. *SABCL 14, Pages 241-42,*
42. *SABCL 14, Pages 242-43,*
43. *SABCL 14, Pages 243-45,*
44. *SABCL 14, Page 245,*
45. *SABCL 14, Pages 246-48,*
46. *SABCL 14, Pages 248-50,*
47. *SABCL 14, Pages 250-51,*
48. *SABCL 14, Pages 251-53,*
49. *SABCL 14, Pages 253-54,*
50. *SABCL 17, Page 252,*
51. *SABCL 14, Page 242,*


*[1]SABCL : Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*
*[2]CWM : Collected Works of the Mother*


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