

PLACE OF ART IN HUMAN LIFE

by

SVETOSLAV ROERICH

The importance of Art, its vital place in our life can never be overestimated. The wise Hebrew Philosopher Rabbi Gamaliel advised: "The study of Law is a noble thing if it is connected with Art." But as the old Roman saying goes; "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" - ("Art is long, but life is short".) To really master the Arts requires application, devotion, dedication. Yet even a general knowledge and familiarity will go a long way to enrich our life, open up new horizons and form new and precious contacts.

Here I would like to mention a few definitions of Art and its ultimate function as formulated by a few great men whose names are well familiar.

Rabindranath Tagore when speaking of Art said: "In Art the person in us sends his answer to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across a lightless world of facts".

Swami Vivekananda the Spiritual Leader said: "That person cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the grandeur and beauty of Art".

The great Russian writer Dostoyevsky said: "Beauty will save the world", while Plato the Greek Philosopher almost two thousand five hundred years earlier pronounced: "He who contemplates the beautiful elevates himself".

How simple, yet beautiful are these statements, they all clearly define the importance of Art and its ultimate mission. Many years ago speaking on creative thought I said: "Violence will hesitate under the vaults of a lofty cathedral while it will thrive in an ugly den". We must

beautify our surroundings, our homes, our lives and they will in turn radiate their influence upon us and our children.

The Arts have always been known and appreciated as the great magnets of men and religion freely made use of this great field of human expression. The best artists were engaged to build beautiful temples, erect great sculptures and images, depict subjects of spiritual significance and awaken and attract through them the masses which came in contact with these works of Art. This was done for the sake of religion and had to conform to the canons of the particular faith. But how great is the power of true Art: After long centuries, even thousands of years when the religious sentiments that once moved mankind began gradually to wane, the great artistic merit of these temples and images has come to the fore recognised and appreciated by everybody regardless of their faith, These images, these edifices, these sculptures attract us perhaps even more, but not so much through the appeal to our religious feelings, as through their great message of Art. It is indeed a great triumph of Art that these images are sought for all over the world, people are ready to pay fortunes to possess them and the entire world pays tribute to them and admires them.

This to me is the real, most eloquent evidence of the transcendental power that resides in Art and in Beauty.

In many countries there was a practice to surround expectant mothers with beautiful images, beautiful inspiring symbols. The thought behind it was to influence through the medium of the mother the formation of the child.

It is of special interest and something that may have escaped our attention that hermitages, places which were chosen by hermits for meditation and retirement were almost invariably chosen amidst very beautiful surroundings, so that

beauty could inspire and elevate the souls who attempted to transcend earthly life and rise above the every day.

These are some of the hidden powers residing in Art, in Beauty, the healing touch of more perfect combinations, harmony and the inspiration which fills greater Art.

I shall now give a few examples of the regenerative and happiness-giving power which resides in the appreciation of Beauty of which I was a witness.

I remember many years ago a well educated middle aged man who held an important post came to visit us in the Himalayas. My Father was then alive and in his conversation with this man he became aware that whenever this man referred to mountain he always said they were either black or light, apparently referring to shadow and the lit up portions.

My Father became interested and in the course of his conversation he found out that this man had apparently no sense of colour or rather was not using at all his colour discriminating faculty. My Father at great length and pain began to explain to him the differences of the shades, the colours, the harmonies, the constant changes of the finest nuances that exist in the hills and mountains. After some time my Father's patience was rewarded, this man gradually began to discern the differences of colours and began to see the different shades. There was no end to his joy as a new rich world unfolded before him, he became aware of a new world of beauty which he never was conscious of all his life.

The other one is about a simple man from North India who worked for me as a driver for many years. Whenever there was no driving to be done he would happily attend to all sorts of other duties and work. One day I sent him into

the distant mountains to collect for me from a great altitude a certain flower which was about to blossom then. He went and was away for quite some time. After his return he reported to me about all the work he did and then with sudden enthusiasm and eagerness turned to me and said: "How I wish Sahib was there with me, I have seen something most beautiful. At a great height there was a rapid mountain stream frozen over by a crust of ice, the water was rippling and running below the ice and the sun was shining from the side and the whole stream was sparkling with every conceivable colour, it was so beautiful I never saw anything like it". - Just think of the joy which was kindled in this simple man by the sight of beauty.

When I was in Moscow at the time of my exhibition one day we went with my wife to a large Department Store where you can buy anything needed by and for children. I believe its name is 'Children's Paradise'. As we were getting out of our car and crossing the pavement towards the entrance I suddenly heard behind me a little voice exclaiming: "Mamma, Mamma how beautiful" and as I turned round I saw a little boy holding on with one hand to his mother's hand and pointing with the other towards the bright Kulu Shawl worn by my wife. The little boy must have been not more than four years old, but he was completely overcome by the emotion of beauty as he stood there with his eyes transfixed and little hand stretched out.

This episode takes me back to a time many, many years ago, last century, in West Bengal, when a little boy whose name was Gadadhar was plunged into his first Samadhi upon seeing a flight of white Herons tracing their course across the dark blue sky. This boy was to become Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa: Infinite are the examples one could cite of

the Power of Beauty - One must only keep one's eyes and heart open and prepare to receive its Blessed Tidings.

Before I close I would like to narrate to you an old Russian legend which came down from the middle ages - it is quaint and naive like all Primitives are, but it breathes unalloyed faith and truth.

When Christ was ascending to Heaven, minstrels approached Him and said: "Lord, whom are you leaving us to, what will happen to us, how shall we live without you"? And Christ said: "Don't cry my children, I shall give you golden mountains and silver rivers, I shall give you spacious residences where you shall dwell in happiness". St. John who was present then said to Jesus: "Lord don't give them golden mountains and silver rivers, someone powerful and covetous may take it away from them and they may not know how to keep them, but give them the power of Your songs and command that he who will listen to these songs and appreciate them will find the doors of paradise open" - and Christ answered: "Yes, I shall not give them golden mountains and silver rivers, but I shall give them My songs and command that everyone who will listen to them, everyone who appreciates them, will find the gates of paradise wide open".

January 1968.

-(Condensed from his address to Fine Arts Association)-

SOUTHERN CHRONICLE



SITA IN CAPTIVITY
(An Oil Colour Painting in Realistic Style)
By CHIRAYINKIL SRIKANTAN NAIR

VOL. 10

OCTOBER 1984
SPECIAL NUMBER

NO. 10

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION

and the NEW 20—POINT PROGRAMME

- * KVIC, a service organisation dedicated to uplift the weaker sections of the society with jobs and better wages, by constantly upgrading technology.
- * KVIC in 1983-84 (provisional) produced goods amounting to Rs. 849.18 crores and provided employment to 35.90 lakh persons (provisional)
- * During 1984-85, the target of production is Rs. 1000 crores with an employment level of 39.36 lakhs.
- * KVIC's Intergrated Rural Development Programme is specifically meant for persons below the poverty line "Scheduled castes and tribes" are another set of people who derive the benefits of KVI programmes.

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION

PLACE OF ART IN HUMAN LIFE

By SVETOSLAV ROERICH



The importance of Art, its vital place in our life can never be overestimated. The wise Hebrew Philosopher Rabbi Gamaliel advised: "The study of Law is a noble thing if it is connected with Art." But as the old Roman saying goes; "*Ars Longa, Vita Brevis*" ("Art is long, but life is short") To really master the Arts requires application, devotion, dedication. Yet even a general knowledge and familiarity will go a long way to enrich our life, open up new horizons and form new and precious contacts.

Here I would like to mention a few definitions of Art and its ultimate function as formulated by a few great men whose names are well familiar.

Rabindranath Tagore when speaking of Art said: "In Art the person in us sends his answer to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across a lightless world of facts".

Swami Vivekananda the Spiritual Leader said: "That person cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the grandeur and beauty of Art".

The great Russian writer Dostoyevsky said: "Beauty will save the world", while Plato the Greek Philosopher, almost two thousand five hundred years earlier, pronounced: "He who contemplates the beautiful elevates himself".

How simple, yet beautiful are these statements, they all clearly define the importance of Art and its ultimate mission. Many years ago speaking on creative thought, I said: "Violence will hesitate under the vaults of a lofty cathedral while it will thrive in an ugly den". We must beautify our surroundings, our homes, our lives and they will in turn radiate their influence upon us and our children.

The Arts have always been known and appreciated as the great magnets of men and religion freely made use of this great field of human expression. The best artists were engaged to build beautiful temples, erect great sculptures and images depict subjects of spiritual significance and awaken and attract through them the masses which came in contact with these works of Art. This was done for the sake of religion and had to conform to the canons of the particular faith. But how great is the power of true Art: After long centuries, even thousands of years when the religious sentiments that once moved mankind began gradually to wane, the great artistic merit of these temples and images has come to the fore recognised and appreciated by everybody regardless of their faith. These images, these edifices these sculptures attract us perhaps even more, but not so much through the appeal to our religious feelings, as through their great message of Art. It is indeed a great triumph of Art that these images are sought for all over the world, people are ready to pay fortunes to possess them and the entire world pays tribute to them and admires them.

This to me is the real, most eloquent, evidence of the transcendental power that resides in Art and in Beauty.

In many countries there was a practice to surround expectant mothers with beautiful images, beautiful inspiring symbols. The thought behind it was to influence through the medium of the mother the formation of the child.

It is of special interest and something that may have escaped our attention that hermitages, places which were chosen by hermits for meditation and retirement were almost invariably chosen amidst very beautiful surroundings, so that beauty could inspire and elevate the souls who attempted to transcend earthly life and rise above the every day.

POEMS

By LOUISE JANIN
France

(In addition to being an internationally reputed Artist, Louise Janin has also attained eminence as a front rank Poet and Art Critic. Her poems and original Essays on Art have been featured prominently in the leading magazines in Europe. Verily did a Chinese Master of painting, centuries ago, propose the aphorism that a painting should be a poem without words, and a poem a painting on words. Editor).

BOSOM ENEMY

Dear enemy,
Barb to inmost me,
How well you ken me
In my leprous privacy!
What the crowd adulated,
Quick to ingratitate,
You, keen to penetrate,
Scalpel, find chamber-naked.

Solitary
Foe, you are salutary
As never lover
Delighting to discover
Virtues not known nor praised enough.
The north wind's rough
But coldly keen, and truth
Is cold; and, lacking ruth
You are as a brisk breeze
Stripping hypocrisies,-
While they who seek to please
Give the enervating warmth of a steam bath
With a softened soul for aftermath.

* * *

A SONG FOR SUMMER

Ho! - for the glimmer and glamour
Of straight-strong under the sun!
The knife-keen dive of a swimmer,
The speed of a race well run.

SOUTHERN CHRONICLE

The shaft to stoutest armour
Sped sure and a foe's life done.
A song on the air of summer
Launched, and a true love won.

* * *

GONGS

Sound the gongs of Dagon, send the sound
Along the sheen, the long lagoon!
Waked be Watergod's bronze voice
Calling his creatures to rejoice
In the bounty of the great round moon.
Tong, tong! Salute the plenilune!
Hierophants of Dagon, lift your song, intone
The golden runic tune.

* * *

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

When we are stiff and still under the stelae
Let the cold marble bear its chiseled lie,
Since in the shadow of the sable wing,
Mean minds are sudden awed to awareness. Kin
And comrades that we leave, remember dumbly,-
And a poor futile stone professes dumbly,-
How littlest lives are scatterings of the Life
That spilt the stars, that sparks through pious lies:
The primal Godhead, parcelled into sin.

* * *