

by

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The Popular arts, the crafts, are a precious record of the creative expression of the people. This great living tradition has been often handed down to us over the winding corridors of time, long centuries, even thousands of years. In the course of time, the process of integration and elimination has evolved beautiful patterns, but basically all these crafts are founded upon the living tradition of life, the mode of thought and habits of the people. In other words, the crafts are the true creative expression of the multitude of people and carry within their fold the truth of life, hence they are so powerful, convincing and vital.

Take the leather puppets of Mysore ! What a splendid decorative wealth of composition, design, and imagination. It bespeaks of a very old pictorial tradition which has developed over a long span of time. Yet with all the wealth of subject matter, the treatment is an unified, integrated and mature expression.

Or take the wood carvings, the dolls, metal work, textiles and the innumerable other creative expressions we call crafts. Behind the rich lines and colour of every good craft you will find a long line of artists. Where is that fine line which divides the artist from the craftsman ? Every good craftsman who enriches and develops his traditional craft is an artist, and master craftsmen should be treasured as the creative voice of the people. Why are the village crafts so convincing, decorative and attractive ? Because they are born of the soil, because they reflect the true feelings and emotions of the community where they were born. Only when unassimilated

alien ideas begin to creep in and influence the true crafts, they strike a false note, and the crafts cease to reflect the truth of the unified, assimilated expression.

I remember in Kulu the beautiful traditional shawl designs, sanctified by the passage of long centuries, so colourful, dignified and always of good taste. Suddenly they were improved upon by outsiders, people who knew nothing of the ancient traditions, who wanted to bring them "up-to-date" and make them "Modern". The highly conventionalised, beautiful designs of Kulu were suddenly contaminated by the introduction of hideous butterflies, trains and aeroplanes. It was an awful performance and both my wife and I tried our best to convince the weavers that the traditional designs even if in new combinations would be in far greater demand than these modern monstrosities that had nothing to do with the beautiful, unique and infinitely rich tradition of the Kulu textiles.

Like in everything else we must safeguard the best and see that the best is encouraged and helped by society to enrich our lives and carry far and wide the message of beauty which is so abundant in these beautiful crafts of India. Always remember our crafts can be the best ambassadors of our culture, our tradition, our rich heritage. The infinite richness and variety of Indian life has evolved a wonderful pageant of popular tradition and expression, we must safeguard and encourage by every means this wonderful treasure.

Cast a glance at the beautiful costumes and ornamentation of what we call tribal people, they are always in good taste, they are beautiful and they naturally express the characteristics and peculiarities of a particular people and

their culture.

There is nothing ugly, jarring in other words, false. It is a synthesis of all the varied elements that make up a particular culture. Crafts, like Art can be good, ugly, bad or average, indifferent. It all depends upon the particular set of people who are trying to express themselves. As I said before it is the truth of the expression that counts.

I have often watched the intricate and beautiful rangoli designs being carried out by young girls in villages in front of houses, shrines and auspicious places. I was greatly impressed at the ease with which ordinary girls could tackle the most complex patterns and make in no time a most intricate design, full of beautiful elements, yet all perfectly integrated into a rich pattern.

Look carefully at the numberless beautiful cultural patterns spread all over India. Look at the designs, ornaments of the Nagas or the peoples of the Western Himalayas, the the villagers of Orissa and the people of Gujarat. The wonderful rich designs of Rajasthan and the refined, simple yet most effective costumes of the fisherfolk of Kerala and the Western Coast.

It is wonderful indeed to have in one country such an infinite variety of creative expression, such as wealth of tradition and design.

We must guard jealously these wonderful echoes of the past, these eloquent voices of bygone days and use these priceless treasures to inspire the future Master Craftsmen in their search for better and more eloquent means of expression, to enrich our lives, to inspire us and provide a background to our quest for something different, something better.

I have jotted down these few lines this morning, as I wanted to tell you how I felt about this creative expression, these wonderful popular Arts. If everyone of us does just a little bit towards the maintenance of these great traditions, we have already done something towards our duty to our developing society, our evolving new pattern of life.

Remember the words of Plato: " Beautiful things will generate beautiful ideas, beautiful ideas will fashion a beautiful life, and a beautiful life will lead us to Infinite Beauty ".

We must also remember the inspiring words of Rabindranath Tagore:- " 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 ".

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