

# BEAUTY

Compiled by Vijay from the writings of  
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother



*Sri Aurobindo Society*

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AUROPUBLICATIONS

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POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

## **Yoga in Everyday Life – Booklet Series**

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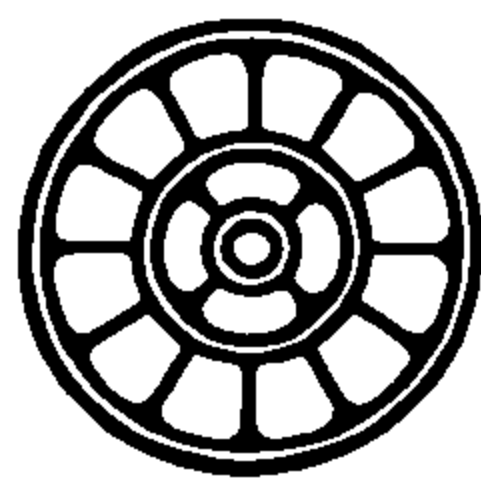
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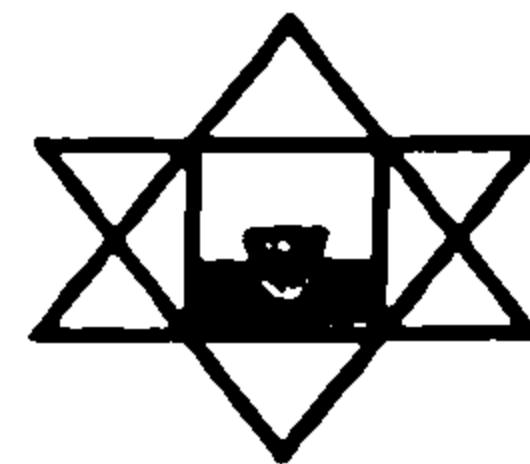
*This is one in a series of thirty booklets published by the Sri Aurobindo Society under the title "Yoga in Everyday Life". Our effort is to bring together, from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, simple passages with a practical orientation on specific subjects, so that everyone may feel free to choose a book according to his inner need. The topics cover the whole field of human activity, because true spirituality is not the rejection of life but the art of perfecting life.*

*While the passages from Sri Aurobindo are in the original English, most of the passages from the Mother (selections from her talks and writings) are translations from the original French. We must also bear in mind that the excerpts have been taken out of their original context and that a compilation, in its very nature, is likely to have a personal and subjective approach. A sincere attempt, however, has been made to be faithful to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.*

*We hope these booklets will inspire the readers to go to the complete works and will help them to mould their lives and their environment towards an ever greater perfection. The quotations from Sri Aurobindo are prefaced by his symbol and those from the Mother by her symbol.*



The Mother's



Sri Aurobindo's

"O TRUTH, COME, MANIFEST."

“आयाहि सत्य आविर्भव”

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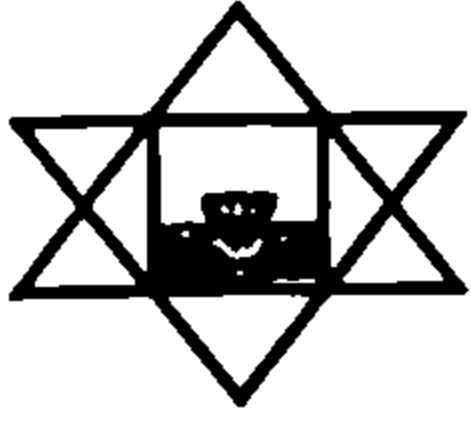
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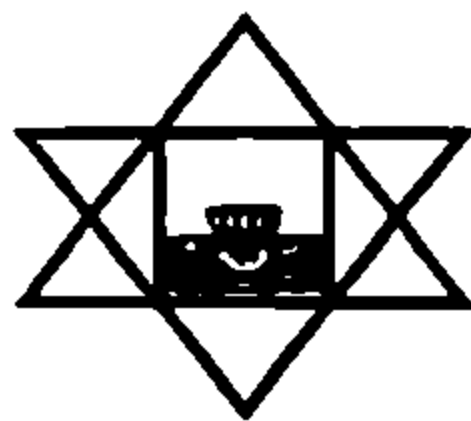
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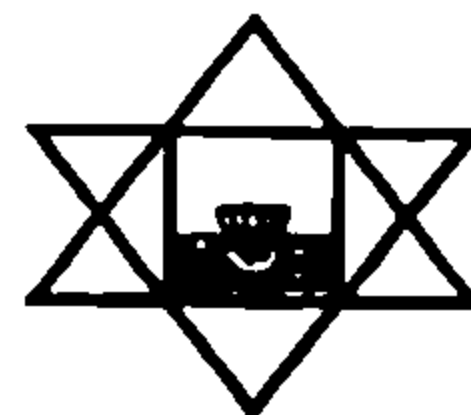
## BEAUTY IN LIFE



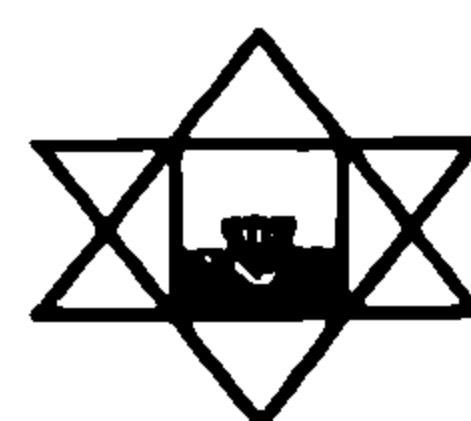
A complete and universal appreciation of beauty and the making entirely beautiful our whole life and being must surely be a necessary character of the perfect individual and the perfect society.



It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces 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.

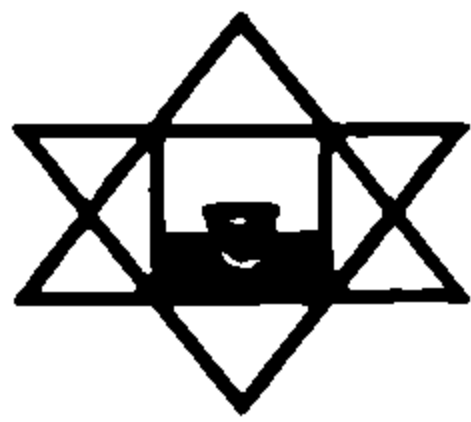


Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.



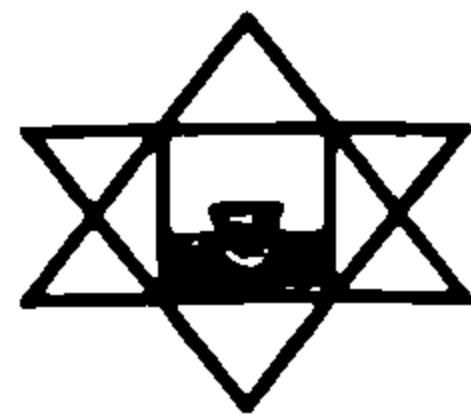
The preoccupation with universal beauty even in its aesthetic forms has an intense power for refining and subtilising the nature, and at its highest it is a great force for purification.





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.

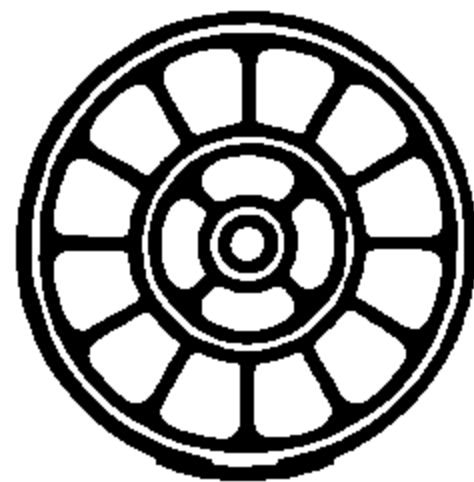
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The object of existence is not the practice of virtue for its own sake but *ānanda*, delight, and progress consists not in rejecting beauty and delight, but in rising from the lower to the higher, the less complete to the more complete beauty and to delight.

★

Let beauty be your constant ideal.

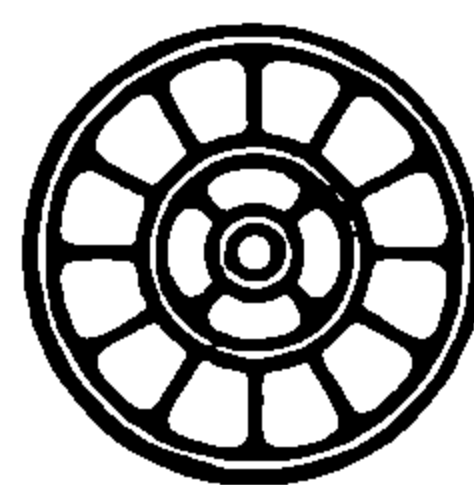


The beauty of the soul  
The beauty of sentiments  
The beauty of thoughts  
The beauty of the action  
The beauty in the work

so that nothing comes out of your hands which is not an expression of pure and harmonious beauty.

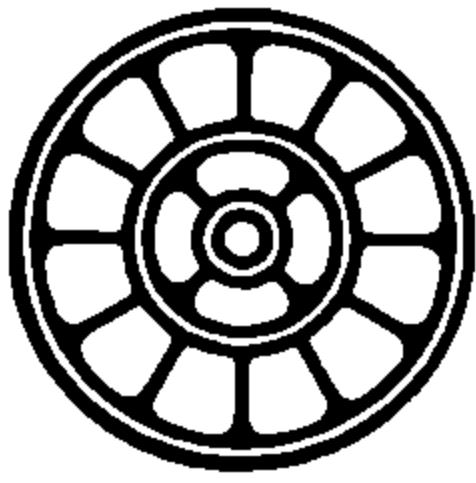
And the Divine Help shall always be with you.

★



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.

★



To do this yoga, one must have, at least a little, the sense of beauty. If one does not, one misses one of the most important aspects of the physical world.

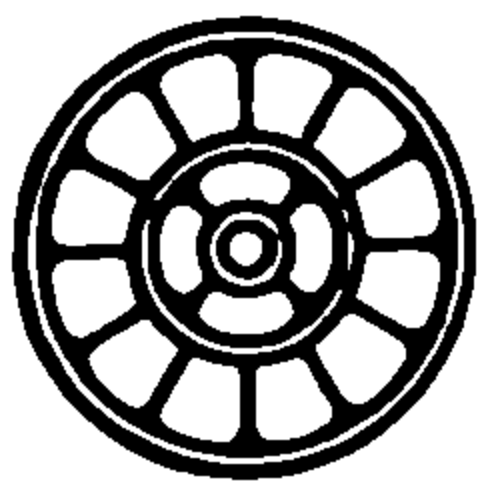
There is this beauty, this dignity of soul – a thing about which I am very sensitive. It is a thing that moves me and evokes in me a great respect always.

Yes, this beauty of soul that is visible in the face, this kind of dignity, this harmony of integral realisation. When the soul becomes visible in the physical, it gives this dignity, this beauty, this majesty, the majesty that comes from one's being the Tabernacle. Then, even things that have no particular beauty put on a sense of eternal beauty, of *the* eternal beauty.

I have seen in this way faces that pass from one extreme to the other in a flash. Someone has this kind of beauty and harmony, this sense of divine dignity in the body; then suddenly there comes the perception of an obstacle, a difficulty, and the sense of fault, of indignity – and then, a sudden deformation in the appearance, a kind of decomposition of the features! And yet it is the same face. It was like a flash of lightning, and it was frightful. That kind of hideousness of torment and degradation – what has been translated in religions as “the torment of sin” – that gives you a face indeed! Even features that are beautiful in themselves become horrible. And it was the same features, the same person.

Then I saw how horrible the sense of sin is, how much it belongs to the world of falsehood.

★



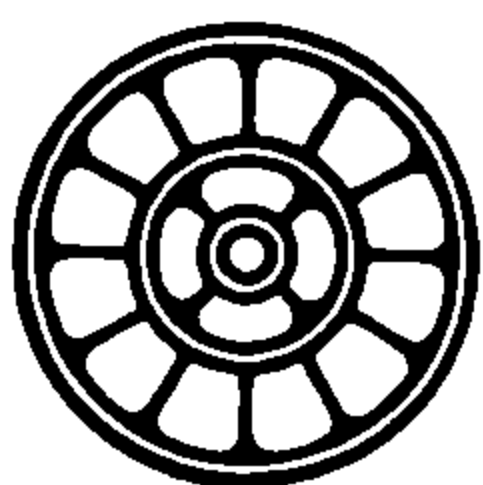
*"In this sound and balanced life a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions, which will give it the perfect proportions and the ideal beauty of form."*

That is the last stage. If you compare the human body as it now is with a higher ideal of beauty, obviously very few would pass the examination. In almost everyone there is a sort of unbalance in the proportions; we are so accustomed to it that we do not notice it, but if we look from the standpoint of the higher beauty, it becomes visible; very few bodies would bear comparison with perfect beauty. There are a thousand reasons for this unbalance but only one remedy, to instil into the being this instinct, this sense of true beauty, a supreme beauty which will gradually act on the cells and make the body capable of expressing beauty. This is still a thing which is not known: the body is infinitely more plastic than you believe. You must have surely noticed (perhaps very vaguely) that those who live in an inner peace, in an inner beauty, a light, and perfect goodwill, have an expression which is not quite the same as of people who live in bad thoughts, in the lower part of their nature. When the human being is at his best, above his base animality, he reflects something which is not there when he lives in a state of bestiality.

If one tried to change one's form out of egoism or that famous thing, vanity, naturally, one would not succeed, for it is something deeper which has the power to act; but if one could refrain from having at all times bad will, wicked thoughts, one would see a kind of harmony beginning to express itself gradually in the forms and features, for it is a fact that the body expresses the inner states.

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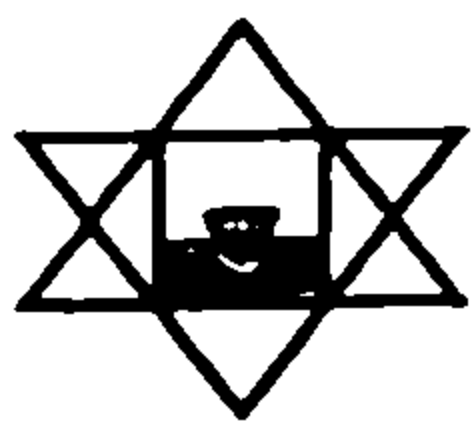
One could have a body that grows from perfection to perfection. There are many things in the body that make you say: "Ah, if it were like that! Ah, I would like it to be thus!" (I am not speaking of your character, for there are so many things that need changing; I am speaking only of your physical appearance). You see some disharmony somewhere and you say: "If this disharmony disappeared, how much better would it be!"... But why don't you think that it could be done? If you look at yourself in quite an objective way – not with that sort of attachment one has for one's little person, but quite objectively, you look at yourself as you would look at another person and tell yourself: "But this thing is not altogether in harmony with that", and if you look yet more closely, it becomes very interesting: you discover that this disharmony is the expression of a defect in your character. It is because in your character there is something a bit twisted, not quite harmonious, and in your body this is reproduced somewhere. You try to arrange it in your body and you find out that to get back to the source of this physical disharmony, you have to find out the defect in your inner being. And then you begin to work and the result is obtained.

You don't know to what an extent the body is plastic! From another standpoint, I would say it is terribly rigid and that is why the body deteriorates. But that is because we do not know how to make use of it. We do not know, when we are still fresh like little leaves, how to will for a luxuriant, magnificent, faultless flowering. And instead of telling oneself with a somewhat miserable look: "It is a pity my arms are too thin or my legs are too long or my back is not straight or my head is not quite harmonious", if one said: "It must be otherwise, my arms must be proportionate, my body harmonious, every form in me must express a higher beauty", then one will succeed. And you will succeed if you know how to do it with the true will that is

persistent, tranquil, that is not impatient, does not care for appearances of defeat, continues its work quietly, very quietly, continues to will that it be so, to look for the inner reason, to discover it, to work with energy. Immediately, as soon as you see a little black worm somewhere, which does not look pretty and makes a small rather unpleasant, disgusting stain, you pick it up, pull it out and throw it away and put a lovely light in its place. And after a time you discover: "Why! that disharmony I had in my face is disappearing; that sign of brutality, unconsciousness which was in my expression, it is going away." And then ten years later you don't recognise yourself any longer.

You are all, here, youthful matter; you must know how to profit by it – and not for petty, selfish and stupid reasons but for the love of beauty, for the need of harmony.

## THE DIVINE AS BEAUTY



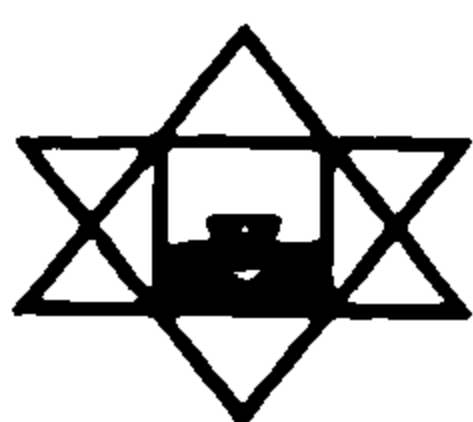
Beauty is the special divine Manifestation in the physical as Truth is in the mind, Love in the heart, Power in the vital. Supramental beauty is the highest divine beauty manifesting in Matter.

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God as beauty, Sri Krishna in Brindavan, *Shyamsundara*, 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.

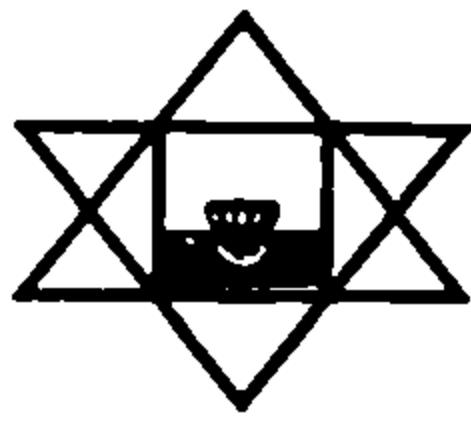
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The general power of Delight is love and the special mould which the joy of love takes is the vision of beauty. The God-lover is the universal lover and he embraces the All-blissful and All-beautiful. When

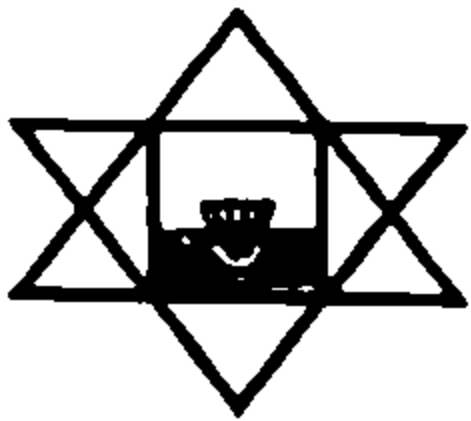
universal love has seized on his heart, it is the decisive sign that the Divine has taken possession of him; and when he has the vision of the All-beautiful everywhere and can feel at all times the bliss of his embrace, that is the decisive sign that he has taken possession of the Divine. Union is the consummation of love, but it is this mutual possession that gives it at once the acme and the largest reach of its intensity. It is the foundation of oneness in ecstasy.

★



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

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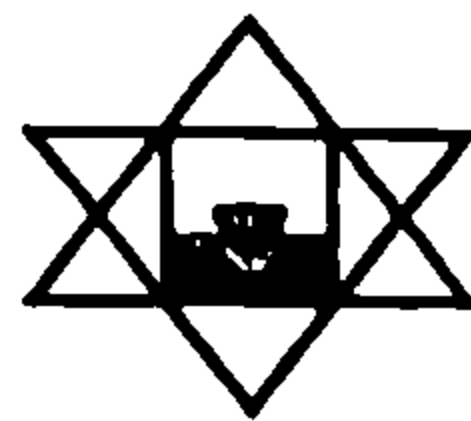
...beauty and delight, whatever form it takes, – for we may speak here of the two as one, – has an unaging youth, an eternal moment, an immortal presence.

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Delight is the soul of existence, beauty the intense impression, the concentrated form of delight...

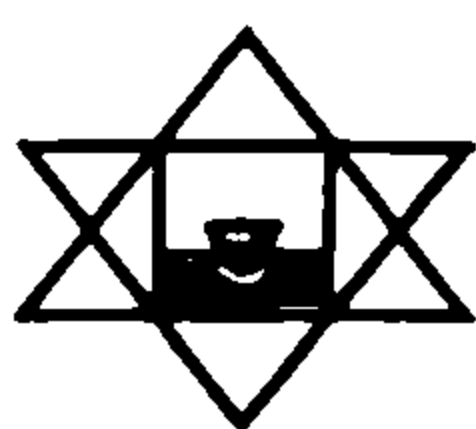
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Love and Beauty are powers of Ananda as Light and Knowledge are of Consciousness. Force is inherent in Consciousness and may be called part of the Divine Essence. Ananda is always there even when Sachchidananda takes on an impersonal aspect or appears as the sole essential Existence; but Love needs a

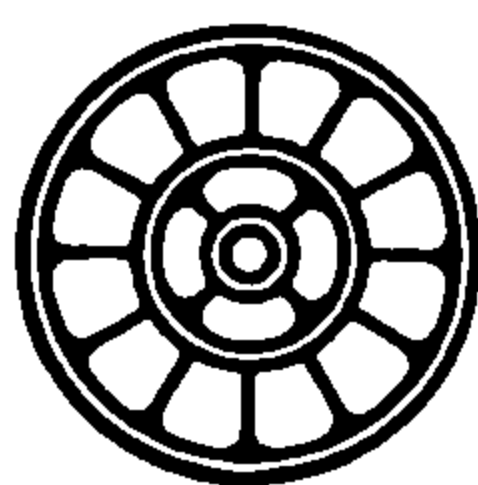
Lover and Beloved, Beauty needs a manifestation to show itself. So in the same way Consciousness is always there, but Knowledge needs a manifestation to be active, there must be a Knower and a Known. That is why the distinction is made between Ananda which is of the essence and Beauty which is a power of expression of Ananda in manifestation. These are of course philosophical distinctions necessary for the mind to think about the world and the Divine.

★



The beautiful and the good are held by many thinkers to be the same and, though the idea may be wrongly stated, it is, when put from the right standpoint, not only a truth but the fundamental truth of existence. According to our own philosophy the whole world came out of *ānanda* and returns into *ānanda*, and the triple term in which *ānanda* may be stated is Joy, Love, Beauty. To see divine beauty in the whole world, man, life, nature, to love that which we have seen and to have pure unalloyed bliss in that love and that beauty is the appointed road by which mankind as a race must climb to God. That is the reaching to *vidyā* through *avidyā*, to the One Pure and Divine through the manifold manifestation of Him, of which the Upanishad repeatedly speaks. But the bliss must be pure and unalloyed, unalloyed by self-regarding emotions, unalloyed by pain and evil. The sense of good and bad, beautiful and un-beautiful, which afflicts our understanding and our senses, must be replaced by *akhaṇḍa rasa*, undifferentiated and unabridged delight in the delightfulness of things, before the highest can be reached. On the way to this goal full use must be made of the lower and abridged sense of beauty which seeks to replace the less beautiful by the more, the lower by the higher, the mean by the noble.

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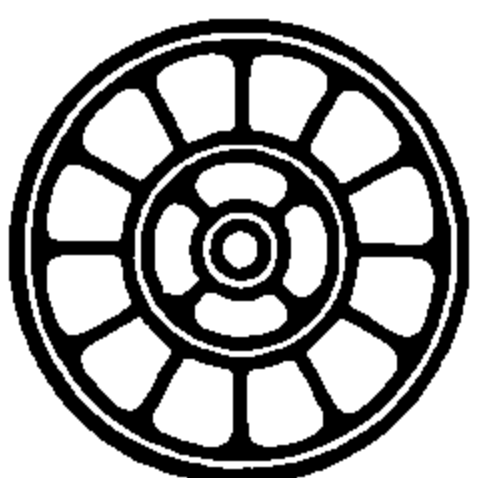


On the physical plane the Divine expresses himself through beauty, on the mental plane through knowledge, on the vital plane through power and on the psychic plane through love.

When we rise high enough, we discover that these four aspects unite with each other in a single consciousness, full of love, luminous, powerful, beautiful, containing all, pervading all.

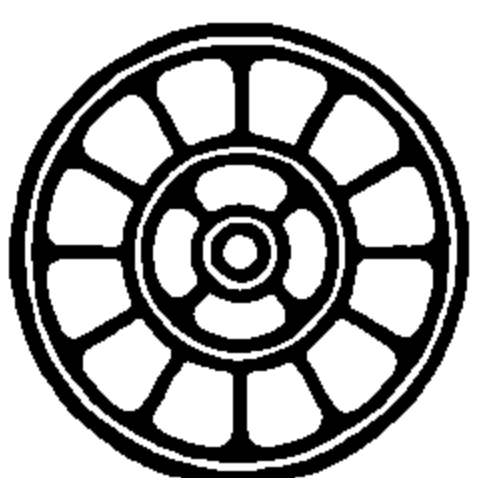
It is only to satisfy the universal play that this consciousness divides itself into several lines or aspects of manifestation.

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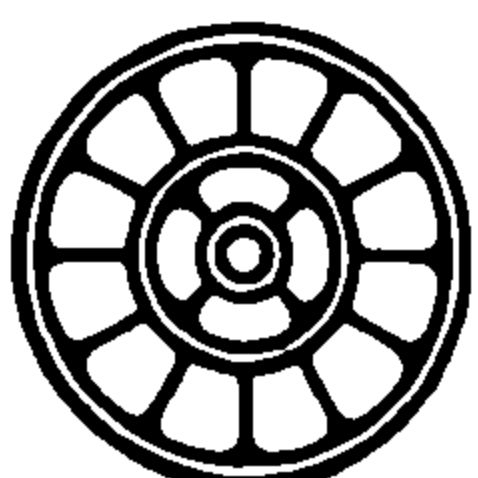
...in the physical world, of all things it is beauty which best expresses the Divine. The physical world is the world of form, and the perfection of form is beauty.... And once we admit this, that in the physical world beauty is the best and closest expression of the Divine, it is natural to speak of it as a “priestess”, who interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal. Its true role is to put the whole of manifested nature into contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, harmony, and through a sense of the ideal which raises you towards something higher.

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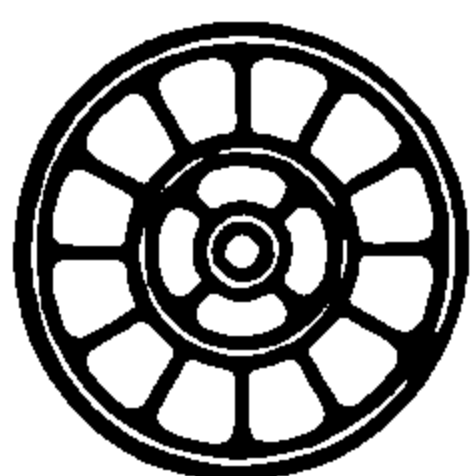
...in the vital one finds a complete sense of beauty and harmony. The beauty which is fundamental, profound, universal, constant belongs only to the psychic, but the sense of the beauty of form, of appearance, of colour, the educated, refined vital fully possesses.

★



Beauty, you are my way to the Divine.

★



In the world of forms a violation of Beauty is as great a fault as a violation of Truth in the world of ideas. For Beauty is the worship Nature offers to the supreme Master of the universe; Beauty is the divine language in forms. And a consciousness of the Divine which is not translated externally by an understanding and expression of Beauty would be an incomplete consciousness.

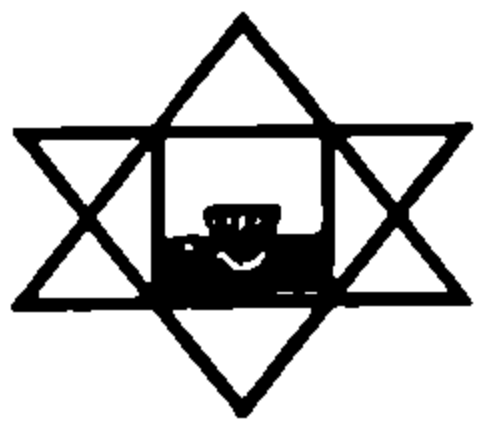
But true Beauty is as difficult to discover, to understand and above all to live as any other expression of the Divine; this discovery and expression exacts as much impersonality and renunciation of egoism as that of Truth or Bliss. Pure Beauty is universal and one must be universal to see and recognise it.

O Lord of Beauty, how many faults I have committed against Thee, how many do I still commit.... Give me the perfect understanding of Thy Law so that I may not again fail to keep it. Love would be incomplete without Thee, Thou art one of its most perfect ornaments, Thou art one of its most harmonious smiles. At times I have misunderstood Thy role, but in the depths of my heart I have always loved Thee; and the most arbitrary and radical doctrines could not extinguish the fire of worship which, from my childhood, I had vowed to Thee.

Thou art not at all what a vain people think Thee to be, Thou art not at all attached exclusively to this or that form of life: it is possible to awaken Thee and make Thee shine in every form; but for that one must have discovered Thy secret....

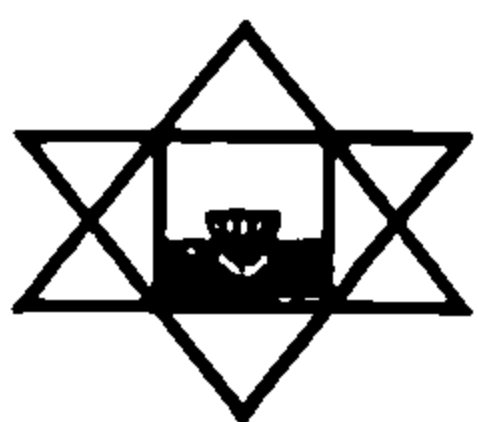
O Lord of Beauty, give me the perfect understanding of Thy Law, so that I may no longer fail to keep it, so that Thou mayst become in me the harmonious consummation of the Lord of Love.

## THE APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY



There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty which is seen by the inner eye, heard by the inner ear, etc. – but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions. There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony.

★



But as with truth of religion, so with the highest and deepest truth of beauty, the intellectual reason cannot seize its inner sense and reality, not even the inner truth of the apparent principles and processes, unless it is aided by a higher insight not its own. As it cannot give a method, process or rule by which beauty can or ought to be created, so also it cannot give to the appreciation of beauty that deeper insight which it needs; it can only help to remove the dullness and vagueness of the habitual perceptions and conceptions of the lower mind which prevent it from seeing beauty or which give it false and crude aesthetic habits: it does this by giving to the mind an external idea and rule of the elements of the thing it has to perceive and appreciate. What is farther needed is the awakening of a certain vision, an insight and an intuitive response in the soul. Reason which studies always from outside, cannot give this inner and more intimate contact; it has to aid itself by a more direct insight springing from the soul itself and to call at every step on the intuitive mind to fill up the gap of its own deficiencies.

We see this in the history of the development of literary and



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



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

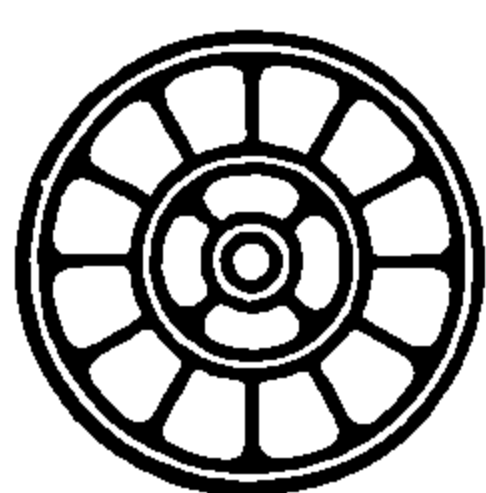
What has been said of great creative art, that being the form in which normally our highest and intensest aesthetic satisfaction is achieved, applies to all beauty, beauty in Nature, beauty in life as well as beauty in art. We find that in the end the place of reason and the limits of its achievement are precisely of the same kind in regard to beauty as in regard to religion. It helps to enlighten and purify the aesthetic instincts and impulses, but it cannot give them their highest satisfaction or guide them to a complete insight. It shapes and fulfils to a certain extent the

aesthetic intelligence, but it cannot justly pretend to give the definitive law for the creation of beauty or for the appreciation and enjoyment of beauty. It can only lead the aesthetic instinct, impulse, intelligence towards a greatest possible conscious satisfaction, but not to it; it has in the end to hand them over to a higher faculty which is in direct touch with the suprarational and in its nature and workings exceeds the intellect.

And for the same reason, because that which we are seeking through beauty is in the end that which we are seeking through religion, the Absolute, the Divine. The search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and the vital impressions, impulsions, desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination. Behind them the soul of beauty in us desires the contact, the revelation, the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things which it feels to be present, but which neither the senses and instincts by themselves can give, though they may be its channels, – for it is suprasensuous, – nor the reason and intelligence, though they too are a channel, – for it is suprarational, supra-intellectual, – but to which through all these veils the soul itself seeks to arrive. When it can get the touch of this universal, absolute beauty, this soul of beauty, this sense of its revelation in any slightest or greatest thing, the beauty of a flower, a form, the beauty and power of a character, an action, an event, a human life, an idea, a stroke of the brush or the chisel or a scintillation of the mind, the colours of a sunset or the grandeur of the tempest, it is then that the sense of beauty in us is really, powerfully, entirely satisfied. It is in truth seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and

knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.

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

*What are the roots of our life?*

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

one wonders, "Why did I feel it is beautiful?" then, by making an effort with one's intelligence one may succeed in understanding it; but at the beginning one is not preoccupied with the why, one feels that it is beautiful, and that's all, one is satisfied with that.

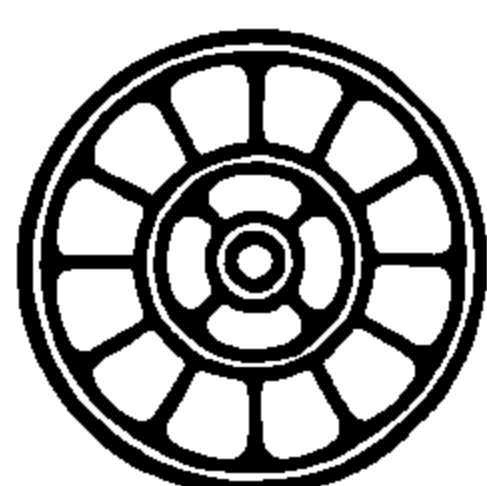
For example, you enter a historical building, and suddenly you are seized by the sense of a great beauty; how do you explain it? If someone asks you about it you would say, "Well, I feel that it is beautiful." But if an architect enters a building and has the same feeling that it is beautiful, he will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

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

In fact, beauty is something very elusive. It is a kind of harmony which you experience much more than think, and the true suprarational relation with beauty is not at all a "reasonable" relation (Sri Aurobindo will tell you this at the end), it completely overpasses reason, it is a contact in a higher realm. But what precisely he tells us in this paragraph is that when it is an instinct it is found mixed with movements of ignorance and a lack of culture and refinement. So this instinct is sometimes very gross

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

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*In one of your writings you have said that beauty is universal and that one must be universal in order to see and recognise it.*

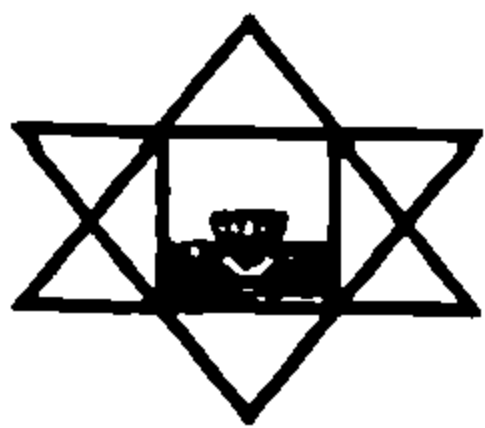
Yes. I mean one must have a universal *consciousness* in order to see and recognise it. For instance, if your consciousness is

limited to one place, that is, it is a national consciousness (the consciousness of any one country), what is beautiful for one country is not beautiful for another. The sense of beauty is different. For example (I could make you laugh with a story), I knew in Paris the son of the king of Dahomey (he was a negro – the king of Dahomey was a negro) and this boy had come to Paris to study Law. He used to speak French like a Frenchman. But he had remained a negro, you understand. And he was asked (he used to tell us all kinds of stories about his life as a student), someone asked him in front of me: “Well, when you marry, whom will you marry?” – “Ah! a girl from my country, naturally, they alone are beautiful....” (*Laughter*) Now, for those who are not negroes, negro beauty is a little difficult to see! And yet, this was quite spontaneous. He was fully convinced it was impossible for anyone to think otherwise.... “Only the women of my country are beautiful!”

It is the same thing everywhere. Only those who have developed a little artistic taste, have travelled much and seen many things have widened their consciousness and they are no longer so sectarian. But it is very difficult to pull a person out of the specialised tastes of his race – I am not even speaking now of the country, I am speaking of the race. It is very difficult. It is there, you know, hidden right at the bottom, in the subconscious, and it comes back without your even noticing it, quite spontaneously, quite naturally. Even on this very point: the woman of your race is always much more beautiful than the woman of other races – spontaneously, it is the spontaneous taste. That's what I mean. So, you must rise above that. I am not even speaking of those who find everything that's outside their own family or caste very ugly and bad. I am not speaking at all of these people. I am not even speaking of those for whom one country is much more beautiful than another. And yet, these people have already risen above the altogether ordinary way of

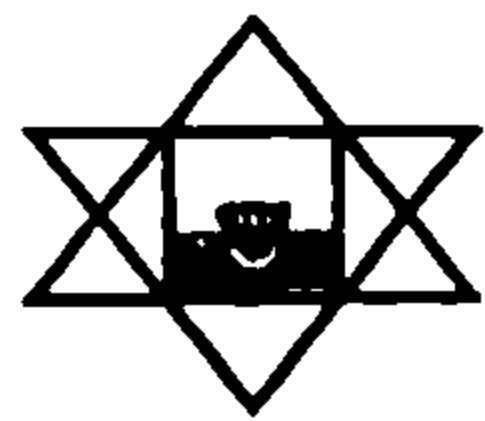
thinking. I am not even speaking of a question of race.... It is very difficult, one must go right down, right down within oneself into the subconscious – and even farther – to discover the root of these things. Therefore, if you want to have the sense of beauty in itself – which is quite independent of all these tastes, the taste of the race – you must have a universal consciousness. Otherwise how can you have it? You will always have preferences. Even if these are not active and conscious preferences, they are subconscious preferences, instincts. So, to know true beauty independent of all form, one must rise above all form. And once you have known it beyond every form, you can recognise it in any form whatsoever, indifferently. And that becomes very interesting.

### UGLINESS AND BEAUTY



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

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When I had the dividing reason I shrank from many things; after I had lost it in sight, I hunted through the world for the ugly and the repellent, but I could no longer find them.

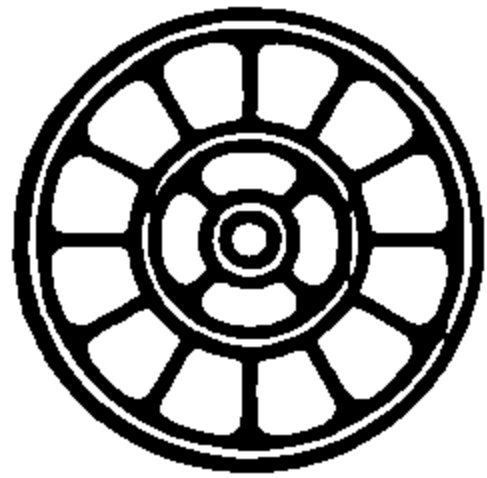
God had opened my eyes; for I saw the nobility of the vulgar, the attractiveness of the repellent, the perfection of the maimed and the beauty of the hideous.



I knew my mind to be conquered when it admired the beauty of the hideous, yet felt perfectly why other men shrank back or hated.

To feel and love the God of beauty and good in the ugly and the evil, and still yearn in utter love to heal it of its ugliness and its evil, this is real virtue and morality.

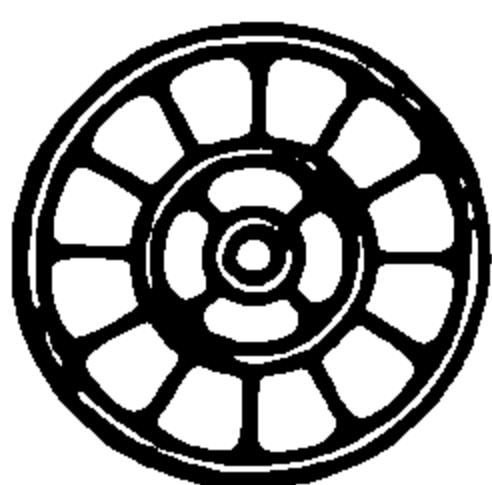
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*Can those who have a sense of beauty also become cruel?*

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

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This world, I must say, is a world of extremes from the point of view of taste, artistic and literary culture; on one side, it makes a great effort to discover something that's very high, very pure, very noble,

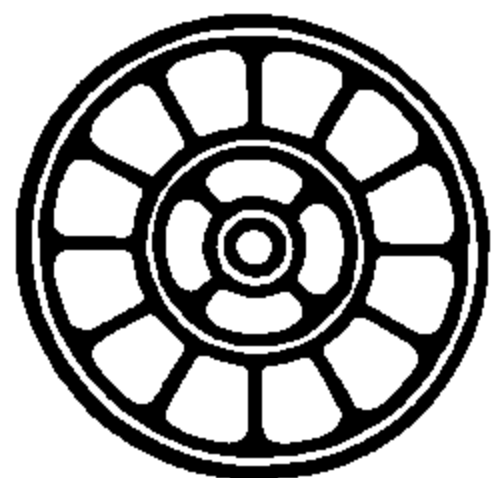


and on the other, at the other end, it sinks into a vulgarity which certainly is infinitely greater than the vulgarity of the past two or three centuries. What is curious is that, going back two or three centuries, people who were uncultured were gross, but their grossness resembled that of animals, and there was not much perversion in it; there was a little, because as soon as the mind is there, perversion comes in, but there was not a great deal of perversion. But now, what does not rise to the mountain-peak, what remains on ground-level, is *absolutely* perverted in its grossness, that is, it is not only ignorant and stupid, it is ugly, dirty and repugnant, it is deformed, it is wicked, it is *very* low. And it is indeed the wrong use of the mind which has produced this. Without the mind this perversion did not exist, but it's the wrong use of the mind which produces this perversion. Well, it has become what is ugly from every point of view, now, what is vulgar and ugly.

There are things, things considered very pretty nowadays... I have seen photographs or reproductions which are considered very fine but they are *frightfully* vulgar in their perversion, and yet people go into ecstasies over them and find them pretty! It's because there is something deformed, not only without culture, not only undeveloped, but deformed, something that's much worse, because it is much more difficult to restore something perverted and deformed than to enlighten something ignorant and uneducated. Well, I think some things have been great instruments of perversion, and among these one may put the cinema. It could have been, and I hope it will become, an instrument of education and development; but for the moment it has been an instrument of perversion, and of a truly hideous perversion: perversion of taste, perversion of consciousness, and everything with a terrible moral and physical ugliness. Yet it is something which can be used for education, progress, culture and artistic development; and from this point of view it could be

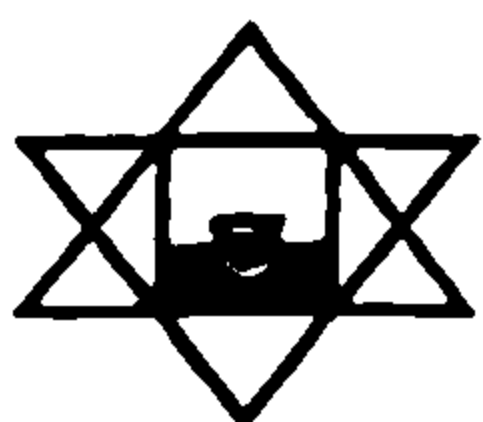
a means of spreading beauty and culture much more widely and making them much more accessible to all, than the former methods could do.

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Don't you think there are enough ugly things in the world without one's giving a picture of them in books? This is something which always used to surprise me, even when I was a child – life is so ugly, so full of mean, miserable, even at times repulsive things, what is the use of imagining yet worse things than are already there? If you imagined something more beautiful, a more beautiful life, that would be worth the trouble. People who take pleasure in writing ugly things show a great poverty of mind – it is always a sign of a poverty of mind. It is infinitely more difficult to tell a story beautiful from beginning to end than to write a story ending with a sensational event or a catastrophe. Many authors, if they had to write a story which ends happily, beautifully, would not be able to do it – they do not have enough imagination for that. Very few stories have an uplifting ending, almost all end in a failure – for a very simple reason, it is much more easy to fall than to rise. It is much more difficult to end one's story on a note of greatness and splendour, to make one's hero a genius seeking to transcend himself, because for that one must be a genius oneself, and this is not given to everybody.

### ART FOR ART'S SAKE



Art for Art's sake? But what, after all, is meant by this slogan and what is the real issue behind it? Is it meant, as I think it was when the slogan first came into use, that the technique, the artistry is all in all? The contention would then be that it does not matter what you write or paint or sculpt or what music you make or about what

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

But then, the theory itself is true only up to a certain point. For

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

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer, simply because they spiritually are – because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds, – of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first

surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it – as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that, however; what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there, his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be, the something More that it is. And so from this point of view of a realised supreme harmony all is or can be subject-matter for the artist, because in all he can discover and reveal the beauty that is everywhere. Again, we land ourselves in a devastating catholicity; for here too one cannot pull up short at any given line. It may be a hard saying that one must or may discover and reveal beauty in a pig or its poke or in a parish pump or an advertisement of somebody's pills, and yet something like that seems to be what modern Art and Literature are trying with vigour and 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.

But 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.

## References

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 2a: CWSA Vol. 1, p. 442  
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N.B. Abbreviations: CWSA – The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo

CWM – Collected Works of the Mother, Second Edition

The quotation in the last line of the introduction is from 'White Roses'.