

ART IN ART  
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# CHAPTER 1

## ART, BUT WHY?

The famous Impressionist painter, Vincent Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' was sold for about 45 million US dollars. 'The Pack', a rusty old van with a number of sledges which appear to drag behind it; by the German avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys, who died in 1986, has recently been acquired for 16.5 million marks by the Neve Galerie in Kassel, Germany. Even in a developing country like India, veteran painter, M.F. Husain is reported to have sold a painting in 1990 for one million rupees. Later, twenty portraits painted by the neo-realist painter, Bikash Bhattacharjee were auctioned as publicised for more than 20 million rupees. – Since the mid-'80s, such prices have become common-place all over the world. Prices of art works have increased dramatically in the past few years. Therefore, more people around the world are amazed and have become curious about the phenomenon, called Fine Arts. — BUT WHY it is so?

The Fine Arts had received so much public attention, only occasionally before. Unlike the Performing and Literary Arts, they have been under the exclusive domain of artists, patrons and writers on Art; while its business being conducted by the museums, art galleries and private collectors. Nevertheless, they have always been integrated with the wholistic ethos which belongs to every culture. They have tended to reflect the social, political and religious ideologies of any given time. One of the convincing ways to judge the quality of life in any culture is to look at its Arts, especially its Visual Arts, because many of them have fortunately survived the onslaught of time as well as the disasters, both natural and man-made. Over a period of time, the Visual Arts acquired an elevated status and were called 'Fine Arts'. It included Drawing, Graphics, Painting and Sculpture.

During the 20th century, other associated genres such as : pottery, ceramics, tapestries, posters, design and photo-graphy; which had been considered earlier as 'Crafts', also graduated, and very rightly so, to the status of 'Fine Arts' ;because their range of expression has expanded considerably in recent times, mainly due to the innovations in materials and technology. Previous formal distinctions do not apply now. In addition, new terms such as : Installation, Mixed media and Collage have been introduced, for which the artists use more than one medium in a particular work.

The ever expanding position of Visual Arts in the contemporary society is most intriguing. With the advent of photography, (later, film and television, and now computers), they were thought to be in mortal danger. Drawing, Painting and Graphics were particularly vulnerable. About 150 years ago, the French portrait painter Paul Delarocroix (1798-1863), on seeing a photograph for the first time, cried out, "From today, Painting is dead." Fortunately this did not happen. — BUT WHY?

In the first half of this century, the two world wars brought so much pain, horror and disaster for the mankind; that the citadels of established norms and styles of creativity were widely questioned. Visual Arts too had its share of detractors. Dictators like, Hitler and Mussolini recognised their power and tried to subvert them in every possible way. Hitler was a painter himself, but he hated the modern styles and described them as 'degenerate art'. At the same time one of his generals, Von Waldheim tried unsuccessfully and at the cost of his

own life, ordered a train which was loaded with the crates of precious modern art works taken away from the world-famous Louvre Museum in Paris, to go to Berlin.

Communists, who fought bloody revolutions to uproot the monarchies, capitalism and bourgeoisie, became so enamoured by the art collections they stumbled upon in the palaces, castles, museums and private collections; that they took them into their possession, both publicly and secretly, instead of destroying or ignoring them. Quite a lot has already been discovered in unexpected quarters and much more is expected to show up after the collapse of Soviet Union.

Sir Herbert Read, the well-known British art critic, who lived through both the world wars and was monitoring the ensuing changes, declared in strong words; that there would be no place for formal art education in the new world order. He exclaimed "The whole system of academic education of art is geared up to obsolete standards. The Royal Academy Schools, the Royal College of Art, the Slade School and many local art schools are not only perpetuating a defunct tradition; they are luring thousands of young men and women into an obsolete vocation, where they can only experience poverty, disillusion and despair. From this kind of point of view they are criminal institutions and ought to be abolished forthwith."

This did not happen. As for example, the Royal College of Art in London, grew both in quality and size over the years to become one of the leading art schools in the whole world. — BUT WHY?

In 1976, I attended a conference of American art educators in Chicago, USA. America has the largest number of art schools with enviable facilities. In one official session, I inquired about the percentage of its graduates who perceive to become creative artists. I was told that it was not more than two per cent. My next question was about the selection of students in the colleges of Fine Arts. I was told that on average, only one applicant out of ten could be admitted. Similar is the case, regarding admission in other developed countries and under the Communist regimes, as well as in the 'underdeveloped' countries like, India and Pakistan.

In 1984, I was told in Moscow that about 2500 students graduated in Fine Arts every year, most of whom worked as artists with the support and under dictation of the state. In 1985, I saw in China that in addition to the regular art schools, the rural communities sported art clubs which provided work places and materials for the local artists. They were producing art works in hundreds, mostly traditional, which were sold through co-operative societies to national and international clients.

In Seoul, the capital of South Korea – an affluent country, there is a large area called Culture Street. It has numerous art galleries which exhibit and sell both traditional and modern art works. They are obviously doing good business. Besides, their presence in the heart of capital city, expresses with pride the aesthetic cultivation of their country.

In Finland, in the summer of 1990, I had dinner with a local painter who lived in a remote cottage, situated on the edge of dense forests in the Arctic Circle. He told me that painting natural scenes in water colors was a passion for him, and he loved what he was doing.

During the intense ferocity of the second World War, Sir Winston Churchill, as the Prime Minister of England, at one of the most demanding times in history; relaxed by dropping everything to go outdoors, and paint landscapes. They were actually exhibited publicly and admired.

Even the most ferocious warriors, monarchs, dictators and tribal chiefs, as we have known through the world history, admired creative artists; and according to their need and resources, patronised them. Such patronage has also continued with increasing vigour in the present-day democracies. Foundations and state academies have

been set up to recognise, promote and help the creative artists in every field. In private sector, business houses and corporations are giving large funds for the promotion of arts. National and international exhibitions, cultural fairs and other such programmes are held regularly. Any number of awards have been instituted and given to the artists. Almost all the agreements signed between countries have clauses for cultural exchange, which provide travel grants and hospitality to the artists. Many scholarships are given to the talented artists in every field of creative arts. Facilities like medical care, allotment of houses, land and studios are also provided at subsidised rates from the state exchequer. The politicians, administrators and capitalists who generally do not have time or understanding for the arts, are seen at their smiling best in the company of artists. It is another matter, that they may find it convenient to ignore the humane impact of aesthetics and culture; when they deal with the hard core business of politics, administration and finance.

Intrinsically, the Creative Arts are neither capable of providing the bread, butter, shelter and security, nor they can solve any of the numerous problems, faced by each and every country in the present-day world. It is so, irrespective of whether the countries are developed, under-developed, third world, north and south – the classifications which are based on their geographical position, economic and military power; and not on their culture and cultivated aesthetics. After decades of dedicated efforts and progress achieved internationally in the fields of science, medicine, agriculture, education, communication and technology – many of the governments and societies have not been able to provide yet, even basic amenities like water, food, housing, education and medical care to millions of people around the world who are in desperate need. Despite that, money has been found to support both the arts and artists in some way or the other. The Communists in Russia, for instance, provided fancy Dachas (country houses) for their favoured artists. But the question remains, — WHY?

Well, well, I am sure with such tit-bits, it must be accepted that the Fine Arts continue to be a part of our life and culture.

There is a definite need for them in the contemporary society; despite the shocks and challenges which they have faced, specially in this century. Their intrinsic value is not diminished; but augmented by slogans of practical use, social relevance and nationalism etc. It has enhanced by all means possible, so that the Arts can continue to fantasise and project their magic to enlighten, surprise, entertain and even shock. The Creative Arts continue to be debated, which in itself is valuable because the social ethos and standards of their cultivation are thus appraised for the present and also for the future. A meaningful life essentially depends on the experience and nourishment of values. Arts alone can express the values in all their vividness.

*But do we know  
what art is in the created  
works of art?*

## CHAPTER 2

### EVALUATION OF ART

Over the centuries, much has been written about the magical phenomenon of Creative Arts by eminent scholars, philosophers, art historians, critics and artists. Every culture in different periods of history, evaluated the Arts of their times in its own distinct way. Even certain rules and regulations were prescribed for that. For example, Greek Art, around 4th century BC; laid the foundations and provided broad guidelines for aesthetic expression in terms of perfect balance between the representation and idealisation of form. Representation of form dealt with visual reality and Idealisation was achieved by exalting it to perfection.

Aristotle, the Greek Philosopher, student of Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great, professed that man is a rational animal. It enabled him to extend the Greek aesthetic ideal, embodying it with a rational ethic and ordered reality. As a physiologist and psychologist, he knew that the health of a function resides in energy. Plato however, dealt with the ethical effect of art, its importance to culture and its place in the formation of a character. He stirred in the soul of man a desire to know the connection between Truth and Beauty; and the place of Beauty in the moral and intellectual order. However, the formulations in Western Visual Arts were, by and large, confined to the Theory of drawing, painting and rendering of visual perspective.

In India, scholar Bharata prescribed the principles for evaluation of Art in *Natya Shastra*, dating back to 2nd century AD. Later, according to legend, the instructions given by sage Markandeya to King Vajra, around 6th century AD, were compiled in the *Vishnudharmottaram Purana* as a culmination of the developments since the *Vedas*. In one chapter called *Chitra Sutra*, precise details about painting, proportion, anatomy and expression were given. In the *Natya Shastra*, knowledge of dance was stated to be essential to depict the movements. For dance, one had to know poetry; and for poetry, it was essential to learn music. The cycle of creativity was thus beautifully imbued with such feedbacks and mutual interactions to achieve the classical standards.

There are nearly five hundred other *Shilpa Shastras* (texts on art) including the well known *Birhat Samhita* (6th century AD); which prescribe not only the formulations for Visual Arts, but also for Architecture, Design, Astrology and Astronomy. For example, in the *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayan, principles for Painting, famously called the *Sadanga* 'Six Limbs', were prescribed. They are explained as under :-

1. *Rupa Bheda* — *Rupa* means FORM and *Bheda* means DIFFERENCE. It enables the identification of different forms through variation. For example, the geometrical forms; such as the square, circle and rectangle, not only related with each other but also differentiated.
2. *Pramana* — the EVIDENCE, i.e. correct portrayal of the image; as perceived with relative measurements and proportions which create different emphasis. For example, in the Ajanta frescoes, the figure of Buddha was drawn larger than the other characters.
3. *Bhava* — the EXPRESSION of Ideas and Emotions i.e. depiction of the gestures, action and expressions through different parts of human body. They were classified in detail, as for example in portraying of the eyes, *Kamal Nain* (lotus-like eyes), *Mrigya Nain* (deer-like eyes) and *Meenakshi* (fish-like eyes) etc.

4. *Lavanya* — the Sensuous GRACE i.e. presentation of a subject matter with beauty in a sober and subtle way, even if it was considered to be ordinary. For example, in Painting – the 'Dark princess' in Ajanta frescoes; and in Sculpture – the '*Nayika* picking thorn from her feet' as sculpted in carved stone on the exterior wall of Khajuraho temples.

5. *Sadrishya* — the VISUALISATION and SIMILITUDE i.e. depiction of a totality both in terms of the physical reality and conceptual imagination. For example, if a cityscape is to be painted; then its presentation would include what it is, what it should be symbolically and even what it can be according to the interpretation of the artist. This indeed infused a high level of abstraction into Indian Art.

6. *Varnika Bhanga* — meaning the METHODOLOGY of preparing, mixing and proper application of colors. It incorporated the technical process of making colors and other materials; and the method of using them in different stages for the execution of art works.

Such principles have been reinterpreted time and again, depending on the demands which are continuously made by the evolving nature of Creative Arts and the imposition of changing social norms. And yet, the confusion and ignorance have persisted, rather adamantly.

The confusion is not a problem, mostly because the Creative Arts have been recognised with due respect, to be highly individual pursuits which allow the fostering of personal claims and counter claims. I believe this to be conducive for the growth of creativity in every field, notwithstanding the confusion they create. But ignorance is a real problem – and a big one. Because it breeds indifference, impertinent criticism and misplaced judgements which can easily suffocate the creativity.

There has been a line of thinking that the quality of Creative Arts cannot be evaluated by any kind of formulated yardstick, mainly because people by and large, respond to them in a highly personal way. Therefore, all sorts of things are projected, demanded and also accepted. Extravagant claims, usually loud and louder, are even supported at times, by the media. They are fuelled by the individuals, art critics and experts with their own personal preferences and biases. This in return, brings more attention which results into a windfall of fame and money for the artists. Meanwhile, the quality of their work tends to become secondary. Comparatively, such a situation is more evident in the field of Visual Arts – which is my main area for probing. It therefore, calls for a comprehensive review.

I do not subscribe to the point of view that there cannot be and should not be, the gauges to evaluate the art works beyond individual perceptions. Although, prescribed formulae for such an evaluation may not only be insufficient, but also out of context. However, certain fundamentals should be examined which in turn would serve as useful guidelines.

A parallel can be drawn with Indian Classical Music; which has distinct scales, main notes and rhythmic time beats to support the creation of a mode called, Raga. Every musician is free to improvise and develop his / her individual identity and style (*gharana*) but, within them. Contrary to the general belief that such a rigid structure of a *Raga* would curb the 'freedom of expression' – it actually helps the musicians to recognise their capacities and progress by distilling out the superficialities; which are present even in the nuances (*shrutis*) of each musical note, when expanded to its full span. Similar would be the case, when it is applied to either a color with respect to its range, a dance posture or the use of his/her face and body by an actor.

As a matter of fact, in the field of Visual Arts, I have yet to find an artist who has not formulated his own way of working, both in terms of technique and concept. It develops as the artists progress with their works over a period of time. Generally it comes on its own and at times, it can be achieved by a selective planning. In 1965, I had a long conversation about this with Mark Rothko in his studio in New York City. He was born in 1903 in Russia, and started painting in his twenties after settling down in America. He is highly respected for his abstract works and was known internationally, before he committed suicide in 1970.

He looked at my paintings and said that he digged my kind of freedom of doing what I wanted to, while he was confined to work within his own formulations. He elaborated and told me that he felt like a prisoner surrounded by the high walls which were erected by himself. I said that I greatly admired him because he had found a way to express everything he wanted to, by formerly reducing his images to a rectangle -- the least symbolically loaded form. I aspired then, to explore the capacities of a medium by taking it to its very extreme.

The Fine Arts or Visual Arts are also termed as the Plastic or Pictorial Arts. They deal with the creation of an image which Communicates, Expresses and Documents. The making of an image may appear to be simple, but is actually very complicated. It is becoming even more so with increasing contributions from artists around the world. Nowadays, they are easily transported; thanks to the fast modes of communication. What an artist creates in New York in the morning, can be seen in any part of the world in the same afternoon. This is helpful but at the same time challenging. Nevertheless, it has helped in breaking down regional and national barriers which in any case, has been the main objective of Communication through arts. For example, we have witnessed the spread of Pop Music and Pop Art with regional variations all over the world. Artists can therefore, take the credit for bringing people together as much if not more, than most other efforts being made to achieve the same.

This has brought forth the need for the artists to be aware of what is happening right now in addition to what has been achieved in the history of Visual Arts. The hours of isolation which an artist needs to carry out his own creative work are necessary, but keeping in touch is also important. They must also find their place in the present and create for the future. This should be one of the important factors for consideration when the art works are evaluated.

Contemporary Art cannot be isolated from the work done by the artists of previous generations. Nobel prize winning Irish dramatist, critic and novelist, Sir George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was once asked who was greater, he or Shakespeare. In his characteristic style he said, "Me, of course." After a pause he added, "Because I am sitting on his shoulders."  
— Such



continuity is a beautiful core of creativity which nourishes a sense of belonging. It provides a platform for the artists to take stock of the forms, inherited from the past and distil his/her concepts and images as well as to derive the inspiration for going ahead. In this context I refer to what Frank Stella, the well-known American contemporary artist has said, "I see my work as being determined by the fact that I was born in 1936."

One does not have to hold on to the parachute of tradition to look at the classical inheritance, but to interrogate it actively as dynamic self expression rather than a dogma which should be rejected in order to be alive. And tradition also lives. Contemporary American Pop artist, late George Segal said, "if you are too original, you are crazy, you have to be connected to some kind of tradition."

Lately, we hear about a new slogan that artists learn more from other artists' works than nature. Versatile German Expressionist painter, born in Russia, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) stated, "In my mind, the collapse of the atom was the collapse of the whole world. Science seemed to have been annihilated. It seemed as if I saw art steadily disengaging itself from nature." While Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) had already concluded that nature follows Art.

On the other hand, Tantric philosophy which is a synthesis of opposites, *Bhoga* (enjoyment) and *Yoga* (liberation); confirms that the Tantric artist is not alienated from nature, but is very much in unison with the order that constitutes it. In the dynamism of Tantric imagery, abstraction is not 'gestural', but is generated by and strives for a geo-metrical order which gives transcendental quality to the psychic improvisations. Whereas more than a hundred years ago, Post-Impressionist painter, Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) commented, "The laws of nature are not the laws of art." Susanne Langer, eminent American aesthetician, said, "Art is the objectification of feeling and the subjectification of nature"

Nature or no nature, its importance and continuous role in the creative arts cannot be denied or ignored. The creative artist in every field have been observing nature and learning to depict with romance, the individual responses to it in their works. Whatever position nature finds in art, an extremely helpful and desirable thing would be a healthy interaction between the Visual, Performing and Literary Arts in order to comparatively find their essence. It would also help in proper evaluation; because their creation emerges from the similar fundamental sources.

In 1989, most eminent *sitar* maestro and composer, Pt. Ravi Shankar (born 1920) came to the College of Art, New Delhi, to institute an award in his name for the best post-graduate level work with 'musical sensibilities'. Addressing the audience, he confided that his ambition was to become a painter. His elder brother Uday Shankar, who became a famous dancer, had in fact graduated with distinction in Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art in London. Ravi Shankar joined his brother's dance troupe in Paris and later took to *sitar*. He said that whenever he played it, he always visualised an image in colors to correspond with the mood of a particular *Raga* – Many examples of this empathy can be found among artists who 'saw music and heard art', which contributed to their creative work. For example, Paul Klee (1879-1940), Swiss painter and thinker, who also taught at Bauhaus in Germany, was a good violinist. He particularly admired Bach and Mozart. Kandinsky painted music and tried to break down the barrier between the two forms.

Then there is the theory of SYNAES-THEsia. Although, related more to human psychology than aesthetics, it deals not only with the specific sensations but also with the additional subjective sensations which are characteristic of another modality. It was extensively discussed in the times of Voltaire (17th Century, AD). Later, the Theory of Synaesthesia became mathematical by recording the frequencies of vibrations which are related to sound and color. The analysis of sensations and their impact confirm that the effect of music is too subtle for words to explain; as is that of a painting.

In India, existed a long tradition of interaction between different Arts, which provided mutual nourishment. There are sculptures which are found in its temples and caves, showing the authentic poses as prescribed for different styles of Indian dance along with the multitudes of deities, specially Shiva and Parvati. In the schools of Indian Miniature Painting which flourished between the 17th and 19th centuries AD, there are many fine examples, in which *Ragas* of Indian Classical Music were painted along with the hand-written verses to narrate a particular *Raga*. They are called *Ragamala* paintings. Even if their painters were following the prescribed iconographies, we can very well acknowledge that it was also mandatory for them to have at least the basic understanding of music and *Ragas*. Similarly, the sculptors working on dance needed to thoroughly imbibe the many postures, as described with details in the *Natya Shastra*. I am sure many decades of research, visualisation, discourse and cross-examination were needed to complete the process. Actually, the sources for resultant formulations were available in the Creative Arts themselves.

Ancient Indian scholars and visionaries, known as *rishis* and *munis*, progressed to the extent that they named appropriate and sympathetic colors and expressions for all twelve notes of the musical scale which were invented and used even then, in the octave of Indian Music. They are given as under :—

NOTE	COLOR	EXPRESSION
<i>Sa</i>	Yellow	Heroic, Undaunted
<i>Re flat</i>	Blue	Peace, Worship
<i>Re</i>	Red	Might, Anger
<i>Ga flat</i>	Violet	Glory, Suspicion
<i>Ga</i>	Green	Devotion, Humility
<i>Ma</i>	White	Humour, Pristine
<i>Ma sharp</i>	Black	Argument, Confusion
<i>Pa</i>	Orange	Love, Adornment
<i>Dha flat</i>	Cream	Separation, Detachment
<i>Dha</i>	Blue Black	Disgust, Frightening
<i>Ni flat</i>	Brown	Playful, Mystic
<i>Ni</i>	Grey	Compassion, Attachment

J.W. Goethe (1749-1832), German philosopher and writer, was fascinated and so also several other western intellectuals, by the Indian theory of colors and the interrelation of sound and music. Like Aristotle, he dealt with art primarily in its concrete manifestations.

Abe kan-ichi is a well known contemporary Japanese poet and theoretician of Haiku poetry, and derives his symbols from Chinese classical poetry. He named colors for different seasons, as, Autumn – White, Winter – Black, Spring – Blue/Green, and Summer – Red.

In the West, research in the use, effect and expression of colors has continued to explain the phenomenon of colors, since the Renaissance period. It crossed the domain of painters, to understand its intricacies and use by the masses. According to the ever-broadening spectrum of color therapists, psychologists and education counsellors,

colors color life. Those who believe in their power which has been harnessed for centuries, claim that in the next millennium, even the blinds can benefit from the vibration of colors.

The world of commerce and advertising has used the knowledge of colors and their impact, to a great advantage and success. For example, yellow is most effective in passing on factual information such as 'Yellow pages' in a telephone directory. Green is related to life forces and environment and therefore linked with their rejuvenation. This is why it is used by a lot of cosmetic companies. Darker Blues are good for safety, security and authority; and therefore, they are the usual colors for the uniforms of security forces. Brown expresses a rustic ambience and thus good for those interiors which prefer to express it. Purple complements with reds and blues and contrasts with yellows. Being a neutral color, it generates ideas. Black absorbs everything. White reflects purity and highlights other colors which are placed around it.

Witches are traditionally associated with black color and they use it extensively for their healing arts. Thousands of color therapists worldwide, use colors for healing purposes. Auras are viewed in different colors which are identified and then different healing steps are recommended. For example, too much Red in one's aura can be the cause for irritation. Some tests have shown that Red color raises our pulse rate; while Blue lowers it and relaxes us.

The works of Fine Arts can also have the quality of sound, both outer and inner. "Sound is the source of form, which comes to life through the sound from the inside out." – W. Kandinsky. Sounds are differentiated in relation to the pitch, rhythm, volume, frequency, speed, contrast and harmony. Vibrations which create a musical note are also caused by it. For example, the vibrations of note 'Sa' which travel both ways towards the higher and lower notes, would bounce back to its original position. Similar is the case with colors and forms. Like in a painting, the color green would bounce back after vibrating with red. – Besides, there is also the potential of alliance through symbols which are created for expression by music and art. For example, the sound of thundering clouds produced by a musician shall evoke the romance of rain; and similarly, clouds can be painted in a manner to depict the same. Such interactive attempts help the artists to enrich their works.

In Germany, the Bauhaus school was founded at the beginning of this century to bring together the different fields of Plastic Arts. This allowed for an exchange of ideas and comprehensive thinking through work experience. If one begins with different genes and cross-breed them with synthesis, a primordial unity is achieved. Such interactions were common in Indian culture, and they achieved remarkable creativity. Pressures of the British colonial culture and resultant changes gradually under-mined this tradition.

The situation has sadly not improved, even though India became independent in 1947. In this connection I like to refer to my meeting in 1964 with Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, one of the most eminent vocalists of North Indian Classical Music, for whom I had a great regard. A paralytic stroke had immobilised him. He and his son Munawar Ali were temporarily staying in New Delhi. I went to see him with an architect friend, late Satish Dawar, to pay him our regards. He was as usual warm and affectionate, and even sang a couple of small compositions for us. I took the opportunity to ask him whether he was aware of the miniature paintings on music, called *Ragamala*, and what he thought of them. He forthrightly stated that they were bogus and the only real thing was present-day photography.

In modern times, more and more emphasis has been laid on specialisation in every field of endeavour, scholarship and practice. While it has provided the expertise, it has on the other hand adversely affected the extensive orientation. Also a lack of proper and continuous exposure to culture with its variety from all parts of the world, creates misunderstandings. People come to think in terms of stereotypical observations about other

people, societies and nations. Extensive exposure to all cultures and different points of view, help to form the right image.

However, since the second World War the situation is getting better through the projections of different cultures in the media, as well as the interactions between different arts. Cinema has contributed in a big way by bringing different faculties of expression into one fold. Of course, dance and music in India, like everywhere else, have always been together like a beautiful married couple. Theatre, ballet and opera have been traditionally incorporating the different art mediums in their presentations. The younger generation (thanks to cinema), is positively becoming curious and articulate with regard to the meaningful relationships between different creative and professional fields; facilities for which are increasingly available nowadays.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMMUNICATION

We know that the Visual Arts COMMUNICATE, and communication is the fundamental need of mankind. It started with the beginning of civilisation much before the advent of languages and scripts. The meaning of different sounds were given forms by linear drawings, through which the objects were identified. Thus, it would not be out of place to say that drawing is the precursor of all visual means of communication. Scripts were in fact, developed from the indicative linear drawings which over the centuries took the shape of different calligraphies and type-faces.

– Communication, over the millennia of world civilisation has progressed in many different ways. Letter-writing has developed to perfection over the centuries. Recent inventions such as; photography, radio, telephone, film and television provide more instant and graphic methods of contact. But then, there is a different kind of communication made through the creation of images by the Visual Artists which can be seen in their drawings, paintings, sculptures and graphics. They provide another kind and quality of communication, which we shall probe into.

In this connection, it would be interesting to note what has been said about the written and spoken word. Psychologist Albert Mehrabian, has calculated that only 7% of a message's effect is carried by words while 93% reaches the listener through non-verbal means. And Visual Arts are one of the most effective among them. Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), author and Nobel laureate from Germany, evinced that words are not competent to express the intensity of one's thoughts. Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961), another Nobel Prize winner, recommended to "Look at paintings, if you want to write well."

Progress made in the various fields of science has also established the value of logic and rational thinking by rejecting the myths, cults, mysticism, fantasies and superstitions; which believe it or not, have been nourished in some way or other by the creative artists of all genres. For that, one can look at the support of artists taken by the leaders of different religions to promote all these elements in order to communicate with the masses and spread their faith. Despite the challenges, need for the Visual Arts has persisted through the different facades of our history.

We should respectfully recognise the ever-growing power of communication. Its devices have become amazingly accurate and efficient, thanks to the technological advancements made in this field. From optical reality, the information has become conveyer of reality. The aesthetic of moving image is becoming 'Techeathetic'. In the digital world, direct connection with the outside world is broken. The conventions of realism are often more powerful than the reality itself. Think about sound in the movies, completely unrealistic but it works. – Every nation has been conscious about such developments. They have set up systems to use or misuse it for the purpose of aggressively supporting their ideologies. Every government has a Ministry of Information with the constantly updated technology to monitor all kinds of messages and information. Consequently, communication which is basically meant for the service of mankind has also become a tool in the

hands of the powerful for spoon feeding. “Where is wisdom that we have lost in the knowledge? Where is the knowledge that we have lost in the information”, wondered the poet critic, T.S. Eliot (1888-1964).

Although the initial doubts continue, as much if not more, than ever before as to whether such rapid progress is good for the mankind and capable of improving the quality of life; most indications are to the contrary. Doubts and uncertainties have multiplied as fast as the progress itself, to the extent that even the existence of the planet Earth and its inhabitants is being threatened; what to say about the fate of an individual. Although the application of science and its achievements has produced fantastic potentialities in the field of communication; what we are getting because of their criminal misuse, is the heavy dose of dangerous slogans such as, Star Wars. These have already pushed the world to the brink of disaster.

'Ananda' (bliss), which is the primary objective of any progress for the mankind, is the first casualty. In comparison to material progress, *Ananda* is not even a respectable subject of debate any more, although according to Gautama Buddha, "*Ananda* is not the half of holy life, it is whole of the holy life, in friendship, association and communication with the beautiful." – This is what creative artists can provide to counter the aura of shame, hate, fear and violence. Society in general needs the artists now, more than ever before, to help in cutting such knots and to provide the necessary balance.

The revered insight, thought and refine-ment concerning the human condition and aspirations are rooted in the pheno-menon of inner vision which comes through wisdom and not just by acquired knowledge. The Creative Arts not only nourish the inner vision but recreate it by providing thousands of variations and possibilities. What is abnormal in life, stands in normal relation to Art. Artists can make the visible grow beyond itself and extend it into the realm of the invisible. Oppositely, scientists convert the covert and unknown to a visible reality. But artists point out and even identify the invisible and unknown.

For example, today's popular fantasy of 'Superman' as created by the artists, who knows, may become a reality tomorrow. Science is constantly advancing. It starts with a search to achieve results in defined territories. For the Creative Arts the boundaries are unknown and hypothetical and call for multifarious interpretations. Nevertheless, they have the potentials to lead the mankind to experience *Ananda* without creating shattering problems and disasters. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), Swiss psychologist and one of the eminent thinkers of the century, has commented that contemporary man is blind to the fact that with all his rationality and efficiency, he is possessed by powers that are beyond his control.

Both artists and scientists have deep reverence for the mystery. Laws can be judged by miracles, as reliably if not as frequently, as miracles can be judged by laws. If it was not so, then science would not be what it is now. For example, the fantasies which were visualized in the ancient Indian epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, became real in the Gulf War in Iraq where Patriot and Scud missiles were fired like *Agni Bans*. The *Pushpak Viman* which transported Lord Rama and his escorts from Sri Lanka to Ayodhya, also became a reality in the beginning of this century when flying machines were successfully developed. French novelist, Jules Verne (1828-1905) describes a nuclear submarine in his famous novel 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea' with astonishing details. The ubmarines as effective war machines appeared in reality, during the First World War, although small underwater boats had been patented in England as long ago as 1727.

It may sound to some like a corny argument but it explains my point i.e. if science extends its logic too far, then it may become guilty of curbing new ideas. The fast progress made in science and technology has provided comforts and pleasures out of context with the human capacity to earn them. – Mystic wanderer, thinker and speaker of the early 20th century, Georges Gurdjieff has aptly analysed this apocryphal race. He said, "Pleasures acquired without earning can-not be kept and would turn into suffering." We are witnessing this all around us in various shades of meaningless man-made disasters and violence. Man's development goes wrong if knowledge gets too far ahead of wisdom; which if not totally corrupted or put to sleep, would not allow any sort of harm done to the mankind and the universe. Therefore, an equilibrium is needed and the Creative Arts provide that.

The only weapon against catastrophe is the call for individual consciousness. Although Carl Jung has pointed out, "Consciousness is a very recent acquisition of nature, and it is still in an experimental state. It is frail, menaced by specific dangers and easily injured." Creating unconsciously is not possible. A musician sings because he chooses to sing. There is no fine art without self-consciousness. Art depends on style. The unity in expression through art is created by the individual self-consciousness and critical spirit which work together.

Science discovers universal elements, while art deals with the private and communicates what is otherwise incommunicable. Each and every scientific and technological advancement has gone a long way to help the mankind. For example, the invention of transistor and the silicon chip has revolutionised the entire field of communication; and thus enriching the lives of people around the world. – On the other hand, the artists deal with communication through life experiences and private feelings. They spread them to express the ethos of entire mankind. The artist is a link between art and life, stretched to a point between life and cosmos.

Communication is one of the fundamental right of every human being and therefore, they would like it to be trust-worthy and truthful. Entertain – yes, even if it means to be told about the kind of detergent one should use; brain-washing – no. But the fact is that most of the modern programmes of entertainment do not really entertain; they merely provide a diversion, packed with all kinds of highly attractive gimmicks. People get captured in their trap. Truth is thus put on sale, and in the process; it disappears.

Some artists are lucky to inherit affluence or born in creative families, which helps substantially in facilitating their journey. However, creativity does not care whether it should belong to an artist born in a rich, poor or an artistic family. So is the case with age and gender. Recently we have been hearing about the grouping of women artists, homosexuals, young talents and veteran artists etc. They may be good to form categories in order to get attention and communicate specific varieties. But the artists belonging to them can easily get biased in favour of their issues which would adversely affect the sustainability of communication. Moreover, those artists who do not belong to such categories, can also express their concerns by getting the relevant information and experience.

Oscar Wilde, celebrated Irish writer and critic, has gone a few steps further to grade the influence of arts via communication of life's experiences. He has said, "Paradox though it may seem, and paradoxes are always dangerous things – it is nonetheless true that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life." He reiterated, "Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil."

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPRESSION

We know that the Creative Arts EXPRESS the reality, ideas and feelings, both individually and collectively and that they affect people according to their own individual chemistry and social upbringing. The ability to express is a natural and fundamental necessity of human beings. – In order to avoid misunderstanding and subsequent misinterpretations, Italian aesthetician, Benedetto Croce (1860-1952) who had synthesised the definition of Expression said, "Expression when it is not successful is not expression."

The totality of expression in art works does not usually show up in the first encounter. They will expose themselves in terms of their quality, the meaning and uniqueness in their own time – sometimes instantly, sometimes gradually and some-times in fits and starts; depending upon the perception and quality of cultivation possessed by the onlookers and reviewers. The natural instinct of fast lane hardwired critics is to get an immediate grip, a rapid summarising glance and to slot works into a known frame work prior to slow digestion. That would consciously or unconsciously render the art work to become passive. However, the expert critic would recognise the amplitude of hidden qualities in the successful works of Creative Arts.

Moreover, good art works specially of the twentieth century express a totality which encompasses wider spans. Croce elaborated on it further, "Art is expression of impressions and not impressions of expression." And that provides the onlookers, a kind of hint for proper evaluation of art works. They can also be judged by the quality of execution and through the pointers, which are generally given by the artists nowadays, in their manifestoes and catalogues. Unbiased media coverage, art reviews, and reports from the academies, institutions and galleries can also help as a first step.

In the past, eminent scholars initially described art as imitation which gradually changed to representation and then to expression. Some aestheticians hold the view that expression does not mean self-expression. Susanne Langer observed, "Artists express not their own actual feelings, but what they know about human feelings". However, a work of art should enlighten the person who makes it and so also the one who views it, but it may not necessarily be on the same wave length. Looking at art needs instinct and culture which support every interpretation. Some scholars have said that expression and feeling go together, and in order to express one has to feel. The image created by the artist in cognition of human feelings is actually dominated by the visualisation of his/her own feelings.

"Eye is the window of human body through which it feels its way and enjoys the beauty of the world," said the Italian genius and famous Renaissance painter, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Artists have to see more through this wonderful window so that they can express in their works what they have 'seen'. Leonardo further said about seeing, "It should not be hard for you to stop sometimes and look at the stains on walls and ashes of fires, or clouds, or mud, or places in which you may find really marvellous ideas." And, "Observe how the movement of the surface of water resembles that of hair. The water has its turbulent curls, a part of which follows the force of the main current and another obeys the movement of incidence and reflection."



Seeing is experience, experience leads to vision and both of them feed each other. People like to look at art from their own perceptions, which may overrule the intentions of artists and sometimes even the expression which is projected in their art works. Artists themselves have been talking and documenting what they have tried to target in their works, more so in this century. Many a time, that does not click with the perceptions of the onlooker. – Some artists keep examining and getting back to their finished works even after months. Others would turn their back immediately after they are finished, because they do not want to disturb the spontaneity of their expression, even if they forego longer dialogue with their own works.

The problem lies in instant appreciation or criticism which is not conducive for proper assessment of art works. We know that a novel, a short story, an article or essay does require a careful reading before one can comment upon it. Onlookers' quick decisions and observer paradigms can be enviable but also insufficient. Because the sensitivities and insights that a good work of art presents, originate from a unique set of experimental factors and involve several psychological levels, which demand intensive looking and experiencing from the viewers.

One of the fundamental factors for Expression in art is Abstraction. Every creative work has been abstract, right from the beginning in the entire history of art. To call abstraction new or modern is wrong. What is modern today would be passed tomorrow and become an antiquity, while abstraction in art is an ongoing process.

"The one and only way to say what art is, is to say what it is not." said Ad Reinhardt, well-known American abstract painter. Abstraction literally means conceptualisation which is mostly drawn from the concrete realities, specific objects or actual instances. It also means the act of taking out, separating or extraction, like perfume is extracted from flowers. Even the best realist artist can not draw, paint or sculpt each and every leaf on a tree or hair on the model's head. Therefore, abstraction in art has been an inevitability rather than a choice, irrespective of styles and periods. Furthermore, it is absurd to call non-figurative works – Abstract Art, because an image can be figurative, such as a human figure, a flower, a mountain; and also non-figurative, like a square and circle etc.

Abstraction has gone through many transformations which have been labelled as, schools, styles and isms depending on the metaphors, as provided for Expression in the particular periods of world history of art, such as – Impressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism. Giorgio de Chirico, the well-known Surrealist painter, made an observation to explain the elements of abstraction in Surrealism, "Every object has two aspects: the common aspect, which is seen by everyone and the ghostly and metaphysical aspect which only rare individuals see at moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical meditation. A work of art must relate to something that does not appear in its visible form." Although, the Surrealists have not yet been able to produce any evidence to confirm the 'movement of clairvoyance'.

If a painter doubts the inherent existence of abstraction in the works, depicting human content or social relevance, then one has to paint in the other kind of instant way which does not require the painters to go through the process of distillation, as much as the makers of creative art works do. These are conflicting paradigms, one whose vision goes in and the other whose vision is on the way out. People apply the characteristics of objective art to subjective art and therefore, objective works of art are also seen rather prematurely on the same level as subjective works of art. The American artist, Frank Stella said "God damn it ! If you are going to make an abstract picture, make an abstract picture." Abstraction is art and art is Abstraction. To create sublime art, one has to live in the abstract.

Symbolism has been used, misused and turned around by the artists to meet their individual needs for expression. Abstraction has led to symbolism and vice versa, like the interplay of nut and bolt,

to express even the most complex thoughts of an artist. Graphically, Symbols were used since the ancient times to denote the form which would be understood only by the initiated, in context of the religions, primitive rituals and folk arts. Such mysterious but highly meaningful creativity which is present in the symbols, acquired a status in the terminology of contemporary art. It was followed by intensive psycho-analytical studies to give new meanings to the myths and forms which support the making of symbols. Carl Jung said, “Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously in the forms of dreams. As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbol.”

Most of the Western Art movements in the 20th century have some way or other embraced Symbolism. Color, which was mostly slave to the naturalistic effects since Renaissance, came into its own and was valued for its symbolic strength and expression. However, in India and most of the eastern countries, Color and Symbolism in Expression had already achieved refinement and significance through graphic manifestations which include all forms of Visual Art. They might not have been supported by ancient texts because in actual life, the symbols were created to depict constantly changing social, religious and mysterious ideas for expression and identification, and continue to do so.

Nobody should confuse a sign, a slogan or an idea to be a symbol. Carl Jung said, “The SIGN is always less than the concept it represents, while a SYMBOL always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. However, the symbols are natural and spontaneous products. No genius has ever sat down with a pen, a brush or a chisel in his hand and said, *Now I am going to invent a symbol.*” Thus symbols have their own principles of construction. To explain further, a SYMBOL typifies or represents an idea or the selective aspects of social life. An INSIGNIA is a badge or sign, that officially represents a particular group. And an EMBLEM is a design or object, which has been chosen to represent an organisation.

Expression in art means to transmute and express the personal experiences and feelings. The exploitation of personality is essential for art. Good art work in itself has the parameters to rule out crudeness, obscenities and cheap sentiments. – Expression is created and achieved in many ways and on many levels. However, they can be grouped into four distinct categories.

1) **Physical**, 2) **Intellectual**, 3) **Emotional**, and 4) **Spiritual** Levels, put in the ascending order.

In the Indian system of Yoga they are prescribed as under :-

*Karma Yoga* i.e. physical  
*Gyana Yoga* i.e. intellectual  
*Bhakti Yoga* i.e. emotional  
*Raj Yoga* i.e. spiritual

Every artist’s work, right from the beginning of creative cultures, can safely be put under one or more than one of these levels, depending on his/her individual capacity and distinctive involvement. The excellence in creativity can be achieved by compounding all these levels. In particular cases, any one of the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual levels may dominate. Any kind of effort made for the Spiritual Level does not ensure spirituality, because it shows up on its own; if it ever shows up.

## CHAPTER 5

### PHYSICAL LEVEL

The PHYSICAL level deals with sense perceptions of things which exist and can be seen to exist. Every race, every country, every epoch, every class and profession has its own identity with their particular features, postures and characteristic gestures. They are permanent, but change if they can, only with an enormous effort and over a long period of time. They generally combine the body and soul – any difference between them can end up losing both. They also control the shape of thought and the form of feeling. When the creative artists use them as a base for their expression, then their works can easily achieve the physical

quality. Physical level gives us regional and national arts with their unique sensitivities. Such artists find their roots and identity without much problem. Consequently, they are easily recognised and admired.

The public and the media find it easy to promote the projection, complexes and even prejudices of physical level art. It relies on sampling techniques that reveal the trend of collective attitudes, which encourages artists to form groups. They are also able to create dramatic sensations which they relish with visible gusto. However, eminent aesthetician of the Eastern Visual Arts, Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), stated, “To reduce art and speak of it exclusively in terms of sensations is to do violence to the inner man.” And that cannot be the objective of any creative art.

Many artists have done extremely good and meaningful works in the genre of physical level. For example, the large body of famous Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso’s (1881-1973) work of tremendous creativity, includes dominating ingredients of physicality; as in a different context, do the works of Indian painter, M.F. Husain. As a matter of fact, every country has at least one such contemporary artist, who is publicly adored like a hero.

This category of artists have also claimed, with some pride, to deliberately ‘shock’ through their works in order to impress and draw attention. However, to make a point, it is not desirable to convert the physical quality into aggression.

There is already a lot of violence which has unfortunately seeped into all types of societies around the world, and the artists do not have to fuel it. A subtle touch can be much more effective than a big slap. An artist can get much better mileage in his expression by seduction rather than an all-out assault.

I learnt about this much earlier in my career; when as a student in 1958, I went to Orissa on an educational tour conducted by the Delhi Art School. We had chartered a bus. On our way to Puri from Konark, we stopped for snacks at a roadside village, late in the evening. A stranger boarded our bus with the permission of the conductor. This was resented by some of my fellow students. It was reported that one of the students had even manhandled him and yet, he refused to leave. Eventually, better sense prevailed and he was allowed to travel with us, but he would not talk to anyone.

We reached Puri around midnight and checked into a *dharamsala* (inn) opposite the famous Jagannath Temple. After a whole day’s travelling we were, asleep in no time. Early in the morning, we were woken up by

the shouts of about a hundred students who had surrounded our *dharamshala*. It transpired that the unknown person who boarded our bus was actually a professor of English at the University College of Puri. The seriousness of the situation slowly dawned upon us, as we found ourselves trapped. The police was called and thanks to its efforts, a meeting was held. The agitated students did not want to harass or harm us. They simply wanted our team member who had struck their professor to go to him and offer his sincere and unconditional apology. Fair enough, but was easier said than done. The identity of the student who assaulted the professor was not known since it was dark inside the bus, and the culprit did not volunteer it.

Dhanraj Bhagat, a highly admired sculptor, was accompanying us as teacher-in-charge. After some discussion, one student volunteered to accept the charge and go to the professor to apologise. Some of us including me, finally reached the home of the aggrieved professor in the afternoon. He was sitting on his bed, waiting for hours without eating anything. Our teacher Bhagatji, as we affectionately called him, was a highly emotional person. During our discussion he started crying which brought a similar response in the professor and the students who were present there. The tension dissipated and warm affections were exchanged. Although I did not care much for such public display of emotions, I was nevertheless, happy to see the end of the disturbing affair which had already wasted a day.

Before leaving, I told the professor that we were all extremely sorry for the unfortunate incident and asked if he had suffered any injury. He said that he did not care for physical assaults, even if they would hurt or kill him. He was devastated by the fact that a student, that too from the capital of India, had manhandled an unprotected stranger. He said, "A subtle touch with a sincere and true feeling, as you have offered me now, is always more powerful than any kind of violence."

Art cannot be defined correctly, if its value is judged only by the yardstick of pleasing others. Some people believe that what is justified and fundamental in life must also be so in art. The subject matter in art is generally derived from the experiences of life; which are much richer than the light falling on one's retina. The Physical Level has the capacity to express that profoundly. It can also have a good measure of drama which ideally, should be totally spontaneous. However, dramatic treatment can entice initially, but tends to lose the quality of retention. Cynicism is not just a tenable critical position. It is not surprising to find that many such works of art come in with a bang, but fizzle out at the same speed.

Physical Level sensations and drama generate participation and understanding which ultimately help in filtering out the ordinary. Popular music entertains but it also makes people aware of the power of sound. It helps them to gradually build up an interest and understanding of the aesthetics of creative music. Because, Pop Music has the basic ingredients of *Sur* (the musical note) and *Tal* (the rhythmical beat). It is necessary therefore, to have the grammar of *Sur* and *Tal* also in the Visual and other arts, so that they can survive with credibility. Good works of art on the Physical Level should bring unity and question separatist ideas and activities. Their presence even in a technically weaker work can find merit, although excellence in technique and mastery of mediums are mandatory to support the physical quality.

The act of creation in itself is physical which varies from artist to artist. As a painter, I have found the physical action to be extremely intriguing. There is an on-going tussle between the technique and image (figurative or non-figurative). At times technique would provide fantastic results but the image is not in accordance with what I really wanted. It leads to an argument with my own painting, which sometimes may go on for days. I am sure it happens with most artists. Some, who are in a hurry, would succumb to the attraction of the instant technical effects. Others would end up overdoing and thus weaken their

work. However, with experience one should be able to strike a balance between the two. Ultimately, it is a matter of deciding when to stop. “To search means nothing. To find is the thing.” Pablo Picasso.

Each medium of expression has its own limitations inherent even in the materials and techniques employed by the artists. Their internal relationships are beyond perceptual experiences. Whatever, the Physical Level provides graphically the take-off point and all else follow accordingly.

The Physical level involves participation of the spectators in the arts in a de-particularised way. To explain this I look at the different Creative Arts from a generalised point of view. I specify four elements in each of them to form a square. For example,

THEATRE, has 1-playwright and the director, 2-the actor, 3-the character, and 4-the audience.

In PAINTING, the artist, the painting, object/subject of the painting and the viewer make the square.

Similarly, in MUSIC we have, 1-the composer/conductor and the musician, 2-the music, 3-the theme, and 4-the audience.

In ARCHITECTURE there is, 1-the designer/architect, 2-the space and building, 3-type/style of the building and 4-the user and visitor.

In DANCE there would be, 1-the composer/choreographer, 2-the dancer, 3-the theme or item, and 4-the audience.

And LITERATURE has 1-the writer, 2-the subject, 3-the style of writing and 4-the reader.

To summarise the ‘equation of the square’, the question is, which one of the four elements in particular is directly responsible for the kind of effect and quality, any of the created work projects? In Theatre, the director or the playwright is not, because he is not seen in the presentation. Not the actor, because he is playing a character and thus personifying somebody other than himself. The spectator is merely watching without participating in it and gets involved according to the quality of the performance, in spite of knowing that nothing as seen is actually happening to the actor.

Similarly, in the case of Painting after the work is finished, the artist does not come between it and the viewer. The painting itself represents the objects /subjects which are only representations. The viewer does not know for sure, which one of these has really moved him – the painter and his style, the painting or the subject matter.

Therefore, in the Creative Arts, it may be concluded that not one element in particular is able to produce the desired effect. Each one of the elements of the ‘square’ is important. Thus the participating response to a work of art of any genre is not a particular one, but is de-particularised.

Participation leads to EXPERIENCE which is generally of two kinds.

1 – Ordinary experience in which a painting is different from the painter, a poem from the poet, and music is separated from the musician. 2 – Altered state and immersive kind of experience in which these distinctions are abolished and the painter becomes the painting, the poet becomes the poem and the musician the music.

It is indeed remarkable to find that even the non-physical presence and non-participating invisible elements; generally called negative space, illusion and unseen extension of background in visual arts can become variously important in creating the desired effect. In Indian philosophy, it is called *Shunya* (void) which is essential to provide the springboard for *karma* (action). In theatre, several invisible elements, suggestive indications and indirect acts can become hugely meaningful. Such a tactful mastery can be produced in all creative arts.

# CHAPTER 6

## INTELLECTUAL LEVEL

The INTELLECTUAL Level in Art includes thinking, inherent wisdom and acquired knowledge. Thinking, which requires the ability of the mind, enables one to understand and determine what things actually are. Carl Jung made a provocative observation, saying, “I have always been impressed by the fact that a surprising number of individuals never use their mind if they can avoid it, and an equal number of who do use their minds, do so in amazingly stupid ways.” It is important that the artists use their minds, not only to think seriously about their works but also to understand their own feelings. They cannot avoid the process of thinking going into their works, which would reflect their intellectual level.

Wisdom is a natural phenomenon and every human being has it. It is an inherent property and barring afflictions, remains with us for life. It may be suppressed but it cannot be killed. It is there even if one does not understand or recognise it. Moreover, it cannot be taught by rote. Artists can always depend upon it, but for that they must respect it and not ignore it, which can happen because it is an unearned asset. Wisdom can activate the intuition and there-by inspiration. Benedetto Croce said, “Knowledge depends on thoughts of other men, while wisdom attends to their own minds.” And, “Knowledge has two forms, it is either intuitive knowledge or logical knowledge : knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect, knowledge of the individual or knowledge of the universal, of individual things or of concepts”.

The acquisition of knowledge is an on-going process, especially for artists, for whom it is a life-long routine. Even the prominent artists claim to be forever students eager to learn, absorb and formulate the minutiae within the parameters of their own works. Picasso, even in his sixties, went to studio classes to draw from life models.

So, what should an artist do? Create, or keep acquiring knowledge? There is a catch here, a conundrum that turns art on its head, and that is to learn intensely and consequently unlearn. This should be an on-going process throughout an artist’s life. Leading Fauvist painter, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) observed, “Obviously it is not necessary to have all of one’s experience behind one, but to preserve the freshness of one’s instincts.” Unlearning which facilitates that is actually as important as learning, if not more.

Artists must monitor the emerging difference between the learning and unlearning as carefully and as persistently as possible, otherwise it will invariably bring confusion and even frustration. For them, the key lies in their own identity, usually achieved by the process of un-learning which helps to eliminate what is not required – in spite of all kinds of pushes and pulls, brought in by their own selves and forced from the outside. Although, I have yet to find an artist, known or unknown, who has not gone through confusion, depression and frustration. Some have even committed suicide, which I suspect happened because they could not handle courageously the low and down profile periods. Being regarded as geniuses by later generations is no consolation.

The learning process, whatever the source may be, includes not only the techniques, the concept of image and theory of composition, but also the style. All of which cannot apply to the students’ own psyche, experiences and individuality, unless they wish to become super imitator disciples. Art schools all over the world impart

knowledge to their students, most of which should be un-learned after graduation. Learning is only a means to an end, for they must then start their own journey in the creative field. Not unreasonably, I have heard artists, mostly self-taught, condemning formal education which is given in art schools because it does not guarantee the production of creative artists. Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, commented, “The reason why no ‘artist’ comes out of our art schools is that the students slog within strict rules and do not get a chance to enjoy their work. In training to be painters and sculptors, their hands get mechanically adept but their minds starve and rot.” Yet, all recognised artists have been identified with some pride, in one way or the other, by the place of learning and persons who taught them.

Expression, intellect, emotion and creativity as well as the ability to communicate come separately, but after physical training. Value judgements in terms of talent, gift, excellence or genius are determined later. The core lies in proper initiation, inspiration and timely guidance which should be provided as soon as possible. With such support, lots of talented students could have done infinitely better. The students of fine arts must also be aware of the history and should interact with other creative fields, like music, dance, theatre, literature, poetry and architecture etc. in order to broaden their horizons. Greek philosopher, Plato believed that aesthetic education, especially in the formative years of life would cultivate the habit of seeing things in their unity and inward coherence.

Regardless of dedicated efforts, artists would suffer gaps, when things just do not happen. Most artists find this ‘dwell’ period both frustrating and depressing. I would rather consider it to be a wonderful opportunity for reinforcement and to seek inspiration from and interact with other disciplines of art. Successful artists have used such gaps by working in different media. For instance, a sculptor making drawings and paintings and vice versa, as the Swiss artist, Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) and Picasso did to good effect. Such ‘hibernation’ periods are extremely crucial and if not handled properly can lead to instability. As observed on occasions, the artists would thereby become reckless, behave strangely and do things which they would not do otherwise.

In India, there has been an on-going tradition of learning by living with the teacher (*Guru*) and serving, following and observing him/her for years. It is known as the teacher-disciple tradition (*Guru-Shishya Parampara*) which continues in some form or the other, especially in the Performing Arts. Such arrangements have also been found in other cultures. It has helped in providing the tutorial quality of personal attention which is essential for the learning and teaching of the Creative Arts. – The traditional Indian system has produced great artists in every field with mastery of a particular style. Furthermore, it has also preserved the values of Indian Creative Arts and provided a meaningful continuity to its culture. However, no *guru* can claim that every one of the student taken for tuition to his/her home or school, would become a genius. For every successful example, there may be several failures.

The problem in learning and teaching of the Creative Arts is that even the carefully planned formulations may not produce the desired results. We have examples of well-known painters copying old masters. I was amazed to learn this in a credit course which I took as a post-graduate student at Columbia University in New York, during 1964-65. (I remember it particularly because it required commuting around midnight)

For example, the French Impressionist painter, Renoir copied Flemish painter, Paul Rubens. Edouard Manet, in the late 1850s copied French painter, Delacroix. He then painted himself and his mistress as Rubens had done. Degas, the French Impressionist copied so much that eventually it became difficult to place the comparisons. Ingres, the French painter carefully copied Renaissance painter, Raphael and Classical French Painter Poussin; while Delacroix was himself a very enthusiastic copyist of his twin idols – Spanish painter Goya and Rubens.

Van Gogh used to copy woodcut prints and illustrations from the news-papers. All through his life he suffered from a complex of not having studied in an art school. He admired and copied Millet, the French painter who opposed the elite romanticism. Millet also inspired the French Pointillist painter, Seurat and later Pablo Picasso.

Picasso was the master copier of all times. His fantastic appetite for visual experiences was fuelled by a galaxy of sources. In his 'blue period' under the influence of Spanish painter El Greco, he painted his 'Mother and Child' canvases alongside those of prostitutes. He claimed in his statements that he belonged to the whole of the 20th century's preoccupation with object d'art. Paul Cezanne recognised the importance of looking at the works of old masters, only when he went to the Louvre museum in 1870 and copied Delacroix's painting '*Jewish Marriage and Morocco*'. – The art world is full of such examples. Such copying has helped the artists learn more concretely. But there were not an imitation, impersonation or plagiarism. At the most, they copied as a musician does in interpreting a composer.

Nevertheless, imitation is a natural tendency among people. Aristotle said, "Essentially the form of art is an imitation of reality, it holds the mirror up to nature. There is in man a pleasure of imitation. Yet, the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things but their inward significance." Centuries later, German master painter/engraver, Albrecht Durer (1471-1528), in enigmatic support said that, "Art lies in nature and he who can wrest it from her, possesses art."

Knowledge can guide the artists how to properly use the natural tendency of imitation and to avoid it. Most successful artists have adapted to it without compromising or losing their individuality. – The artists of the great age of Japanese art changed their names many times during their careers. This they did, to safeguard their status as well as to mark the different stages of their professional life.

I have never been able to comprehend the inhibitions which are supposed to curb the sensibilities of artists and impair the quality of their creativity. As a matter of fact, an artist always starts with some kind of constrain, whether it comes from the size of the canvas he has chosen, the piece of stone he has to sculpt, the subject he wants to write about, or the music he has to play. The architects and designers are restricted by all sorts of parameters even before they draw the first line. Film making has all kinds of inhibiting constraints, even in getting a project started which at times get multi-plicated by the individual complexes of the team members. Despite that, we have wonderful examples of highly artistic and creative works produced in the fields of film, theatre, music, architecture and commissioned art projects.

The only possible explanation of the genius lies in its ability to reach the subconscious in order to generate new thoughts and creative ideas and then to translate them effectively in any field; whether it is the performing and visual arts, literature, philosophy or science. As explained earlier, the intellect with all its ingredients provides the necessary inputs. Although, Carl Jung stated, "No matter how far man extends his senses, limits to his conscious perception remain." If we accept this, then we must also accept that the constraints imposed on the creative artists should not become inhibitive. They have inherited them anyway, in their own consciousness.

We have all grown up with the saying, "Where there is a will there is a way." We have also believed in it with aplomb. As a teacher of art for forty years, I used it to criticise, provoke and inspire the young students of art. But I have always suspected it as an artist. How can it be possible really? After all, every artist I have known personally or otherwise, has aspired to create the masterpieces. Can they do it merely because they have the will to do so, which I am sure they have? This led me to seek an equitable equation and question several knowledgeable people. Of course, no one cared to contradict the saying and support my suspicion. Except for Carl Jung,



who made an interesting observation, “The motto: where there is a will there is way, is the superstition of modern man. The individual is the only reality.”

A most intriguing aspect about artists, perhaps more than others, is the speed and malleability of their thoughts, feelings, moods and perceptions. A big problem indeed. You may start your creative work with one mood, thought, feeling and perception, and then find them changing several times during your work and push you somewhere else. The Cubist painter, Picasso said, “Our heads are round so that thoughts can change direction.” This can be frustrating and even leave you tottering. Here the intellect helps you out. It will provide the capacity to accept, control, as well as gain-fully convert the changing moods.

I have already talked about wisdom being different from knowledge and that it is commonly misunderstood. In the same vein knowledge is one thing, understanding another. Knowledge is not a guarantee for understanding and vice versa. For a creative artist, knowledge and understanding are like background music. It is better to leave them at that, otherwise the creative works can become too literal and stand stripped naked. Equally I suppose, someone can argue, ‘What is wrong in a striptease show.’

Art, which is understood totally does not leave anything to look at or experience and thus it is bound to be forgotten totally. Georges Braque (1882-1963), who pioneered Cubism with Picasso, said, “There are certain secrets in my work that not even I understand and I have no intention of trying!” Picasso went ahead by saying, “Yet we have no idea of how a painting lives, or how it dies.” And Paul Klee observed, “Paintings come into existence without conscious control, sometimes also with conscious control; you do not know exactly what they are going to be like. Perhaps you want them to turn out like this or like that. In any case the best pictures cannot be willed, they just come into being.” He liked to grade his own works.

The tension between what to create and how, should not bother the artists in spite of convincing arguments in each one’s favour, because both are inseparable. Actually, successful works of art cannot be disjointed, as far as the subject matter and the technique are concerned. They create an organic unity at all levels in order to express.

“The Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci was ordered by the Duke Ludovico for the church of Santa Maria della Grazia. It fully deserves its appellation as one of the greatest paintings/murals of the Renaissance. For three years (1495-98) Leonardo laboured, but dallied at the task. The head of the monastery complained to Ludovico of Leonardo’s apparent sloth. His complaint was that the painter would sit before the wall for hours without painting a stroke. Leonardo patiently explained to his patron that the artist's most important work lies in conception rather than execution.

"One paints not with the hand, but with the brain." — observed Renaissance maestro, Michelangelo (1475-1564). And German novelist and critic, Thomas Mann (1875-1945) said, “Art would like to stop being pretence and play, it would like to become knowledge.”

# CHAPTER 7

## EMOTIONAL LEVEL

The EMOTIONAL level includes all kinds of feelings. They begin with personal expressions, initiating from the private feelings and are referred to as micro level. They are natural and show spontaneously, but they can be suppressed, camouflaged and also enhanced by some effort. The emotions of a person interact with others, starting with the family and then spreading to the social milieu. They graduate to become national and international, depending upon their relevance and communicability. Thus the expression of emotions achieves a wider span (macro level). The creative artists from all fields, specially those who portray the human emotions, have to constantly learn about this in order to authentically express their content with relative variations. All this may sound to be simple but emotions are difficult to comprehend because they have unlimited range of nuances which differ from person to person.

The expression of emotions in human beings starts from their first cry immediately after birth. As the body grows, emotions start showing through the limbs and of course, the face which express most of them. Physical features develop gradually according to the genes and the character shows and matures through the expression of emotions. The intellect joins in to enhance the personality, as one grows older. Children are therefore, considered to be innocent and loved universally for that.

It is curious but true that the expression of emotions easily gets transferred. For example, if one laughs in the company of friends, then he/she would get an automatic response of at least a smile in others. Similarly, if one cries in pain or suffer some tragedy then that can easily bring the expression of sorrow on the faces of other persons who are around. Such emotional responses have been extensively exploited by theatre with good dividends. The creative artists can successfully narrate all types of emotional expressions by keenly observing them. They do not have to personally experience them for depiction.

Acceptability can be achieved in a work of art by giving full vent to the emotional expression. But it can happen only when the artist is sound on both the physical and intellectual levels. Even though he/she may have the dexterous faculty of creating only through a climax of emotions; they must have the capacity of using or more importantly not using instinctively or knowingly, both the physical and intellect. Vincent van Gogh's works are excellent examples of it. In spite of the physical and intellectual qualities which are evidently present in his works, he did not allow them to supersede his emotions.

There are two distractions, which are generally found in the depiction of emotions in art works. One is, when the emotional artists feign the physical and intellectual qualities which are not there. The second is, when they use the sentimentality camouflaged as emotions. While the melodrama in art can be digressing and intellectually inhibiting; the sentimentality is definitely base, because it drains the strength out of art works and takes away their intrinsic value. Worst of all, it breeds hypocrisy which is indeed a poison for the art works and makes the artist weak and mawkishly susceptible.

There are creative people, who instead of countering it by their works, use sentimentality as an easy way to impress and get attention. These artists take great pride in catering to the facile tastes and continue to create sentimental rubbish. Referring to them, Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), the doyen of Modern Indian Painting, did not hesitate to declare, “Bad art based on its cheap effect, appeals immediately to the artistically underdeveloped mind and there-in lies its danger.” Most artists are well-equipped to understand the wafer thin line between emotions and sentimentality, and to avoid it, by not using certain elements which can disturb the balance. When such a point is reached in a meritorious work of art, it comes closer to accomplish sublimity.

The search for the truth in emotions is a deep one. It directs one to conscious, subconscious and even unconscious levels. It requires the artists to have conscious perceptions of completely unknown and unknowable phenomena, both in the inner and outer world like the auras, visions and vibrations. Psychologists in general have already proved that different levels of consciousness are not only able to associate and combine but even make judgments. All successful artists have possessed such power/insight in good measure and it shows through their works. Gurdjieff said, “The evolution of man is the evolution of consciousness, will and his power of doing. And ‘consciousness’ cannot evolve in-voluntarily. And ‘doing’ cannot be the result of things that happen.”

To achieve excellence in expression of emotions, artists require the ability of detachment. Detachment is a highly respected quality according to the Indian philosophy and one of the ten principles of the *Vedas*. I believe that in order to understand and activate it, one has to experience attachment passionately. If there are no attachments in life, then what is it that one needs to be detached from? A work of art should move towards that degree of detachment which separates the mind from the heart and experience.

Artists have to be passionately attached to every element which interests them. Thereafter, or even simultaneously, the process of detachment should start by careful distillation even before they launch their creative work. Popularly this is called ‘Abstraction’ which subsequently led to the term ‘Abstract Art’. Mark Rothko said, “I want to say less than I know.” On the other hand, Picasso revelled in stating more and more. Both views are absolutely correct in their pursuit for abstraction because such a crucial decision can only be dictated by the artist’s individual psyche.

Moreover, the constant struggle for an artist to say yes to some things and no to others creates a kind of friction which inspires one to obtain the Univision. This also determines the quality of creation. The business of ‘yes and no’ is explained here by an interesting example: Oscar Wilde was once asked what he had been doing all morning. He replied, “Putting in a comma.” To the next question as to what he intended to do that afternoon, he replied, “Taking it out.”

“Even logical thought could not arise without the poetic kind of imagination (if not poetry) which gives contemplative form to the working of feeling, intuitive expression to obscure impressions and thus becomes representations and words, whether spoken or sung or painted or otherwise uttered. Further, every man, however much he may seem to be all logical thinker, critic, scientist, or all absorbed in practical interests or devoted to duty, cherishes at the bottom of his heart his own private store of imagination and poetry.” – Croce. It justifies the generally observed tendency among people to straight away search for feelings in the creative works and not bother about the physical content, intellect and spirituality.

Intuition is an important part of the emotional level of expression. Although it is considered to be a trifle irrational, it has enabled artists to perceive and conceptualise their ideas. Intuition cannot be separated from expression and it actively relates with perception and breeds intuitive knowledge which gives form to the images present in all levels of consciousness. The haziness of impressions, mysteries and obscure spirits is clarified by

intuition in order to concretise the images and their emotional content and expression. Because the moment a concept is formalised, the expression takes over. The intuition emerging from emotion can also act as a support to the inspiration, which of course, is the source of all creative works. The intuition helps by identifying where the inspiration comes from and where it is going, because it can precede concepts which leads to inspiration.

In Indian aesthetics, an emotion (*Rasa*) was considered to be more important than the physical (*vastu*) and embellishment (*alankara*). *Rasa* is taste, emotion and aesthetic delight. The expression of emotion (*rasa bhava*) was Sanskrit poetry's soul (*atma*). According to *Vedanta*, the primordial Indian philosophy, expressed through the *Upanishads*, *Brahman* (ultimate spiritual level) can be achieved through *Ananda* i.e. Bliss. *Ananda* provides an absolute harmony within oneself and the outer world, and can be achieved by the unification of both, at all levels.

The ancient visionaries of India formulated the theory of Nine Rasas (*Kama Sutra* by Bharata – 2nd century AD); not only to identify the qualities of different emotions but also to provide the creative artists with a wide spectrum through which they could express every possible emotion. However, there was no place in them for sentimentality. They are listed as under:-

*It is not easy to translate these into English, however, I have tried to imply the appropriate meaning.*

1. *Shringara* Love, Erotic
2. *Karuana* Sorrow, Compassion
3. *Hasya* Humour, Laughter
4. *Raudra* Anger, Undaunted
5. *Vibhitsa* Disgust, Horrifying
6. *Vir* Heroic, Valour
7. *Bhayanak* Fearsome, Frightening
8. *Adbhuta* Wonderful, Miraculous
9. *Shanta* Peace, Serenity

India has lived through the centuries, in which it was ruled by foreigners who brought in their own customs and aesthetics. This has contributed to the intermingling of different cultures and their values. It has created enormous diversities by enriching its unified vision as well as achieving profound progress in creative fields. Its values and systems of evaluation went through the phases of reassessment. But somewhere down the line they got corroded and degenerated; because the supportive patronage became corrupt. However, blindly following the various interpretations of Indian aesthetics as depicted in the creative works of the past can also become counter-productive. Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1966), an eminent painter of the Bengal School, commented, "Art is not made to justify the *Shilpa Shastras*, but the *Shastras* are made to elucidate Art". Rabindranath Tagore warned, "I strongly urge our artists to vehemently deny their obligation to produce carefully something that can be labelled as Indian art by conforming to some old world mannerism." Despite that in contemporary India the tradition is not only misused but abused repeatedly, because it is easy to market tradition.

Emotions are serious business and cannot be fooled around with by falling in the trap of rhetoric, cliches and the bizarre interpretations of their value and expression.

## CHAPTER 8

### SPIRITUAL LEVEL

The fourth step of expression is the Spiritual Level. This is the most complicated of all. Any claim of it is questioned, suspected and misunderstood. The *Rasikas* (connoisseurs) find it very confusing. Some would reject any claim of it instantly and some would be seduced to accept it.

Right from the beginning of civilisation, people have been venerating the art works adorning their places of worship. Symbolic icons have been created for the purpose. Paintings, murals, sculptures and art effects have been put up for worshipping and for communicating spirituality by the personification of different gods. The Hindus for instance, both rich and poor, buy decorative and pretty calendars and small painted clay pieces of gods and goddesses. They bring them to their homes on some religious festivals and place them on the altars to worship them. The same facsimiles are also put in the offices, shops or workplaces, cars and trucks – as art effects and also used as calendars. I wonder if somebody has placed one in the cockpit of a jumbo jet. These ritualistic objects, as they rely primarily on the faith of the beholder, do not need an aesthetic base. They depend on social acceptance which accelerates the motion of faith.

So, Spirituality lies in the eye of the beholder and therefore, the artists should not bother or struggle to recreate it in their works. They should do their work as they want to (which probably most of them do anyway) and better leave the business of spirituality for others to find or better still, let the art works show it on their own. However, some specific examples are found in which some elements were painted in order to achieve Spirituality. For example, the unique formats of Mandala paintings in Tibetan Art; painting of the sky with gold leaves in Christian paintings of the early medieval period and the use of gold in Russian icon paintings.

It is curious, but seems to be true that most creative artists, in almost every field, have aspired for Spirituality, privately or publicly. For sure, they have been anxious about it. I also had my share of it. So, I conducted a small study between the years 1965 to 1975. I came in contact with a few internationally known *gurus* and teachers of Spirituality. Apart from being intelligent, learned and articulate, their charisma was such that thousands of people would get attracted to them. Underneath though, they too were human beings with the usual shortcomings punctuating the excellence. They would prescribe different kinds of morals, rituals, gestures, penance, meditation and give mantras, etc., as sure formulae to achieve Spirituality. I found all this highly suspicious, nevertheless, I respected the *gurus* on human level. This helped to have easy communication with them.

I am reminded of a number of personal incidents in this connection. Around *Shivaratri* (a festival for worshipping Shiva) in February of 1969, I was teaching a class with painter Biren De, at the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi. By that time both of us were labelled, as Tantric or Neo-Tantric painters. (Ajit Mukherjee's book 'Tantra Art' had already been in the international market for two years). I received a telephone call from Gina Lali, an American friend who was quite an accomplished Indian Classical dancer. She had been to India on several occasions to learn dance. Being an Indophile, she got deeply interested in Spirituality, and became a devotee of Baba Muktananda of Ganesh Puri near Mumbai. Gina said that Baba

wanted to see me right away, and that I must bring the slides of my paintings for him to see. She had obviously talked to him about me. I was not interested and fobbed her off with an excuse. She however, told me that it was a very special offer from Baba and I should not miss it: blah, blah.

I went back to the class and told Biren De about Gina's phone call. He suggested with enthusiasm that we both should go and it would be an interesting experience. Soon we were on our way to Lodhi Estate in New Delhi, to meet the great man. Surprisingly, he was waiting and was pleased to see us. He began viewing the slides of my paintings and started laughing. I was staggered and asked him what was so funny. He said that my paintings were Spiritual and I had already crossed the '*neelam*' (blue) stage, a very high degree of realisation which could be achieved only after years of deep meditation.

In order to come down to earth from the spiritual heights, I mumbled to him, "Baba that is all very fine, but generally people do not seem to understand or appreciate my paintings, and that can adversely affect their sale which is necessary to meet at least the expenses incurred on making them." It was anyway a rather difficult period for selling paintings in India. He replied, "When people build their houses, they can do so with bricks which can be bought easily and cheaply. But the same house can be built with stones which are costly, but there are people who buy them. The same stones can become diamonds which are difficult to find. That makes them very very costly and yet, there are buyers for them also."

We became friends and would meet off and on until 1976, in New York. He passed away shortly afterwards. I found him to be extremely intelligent, affectionate and of course, deeply committed to spirituality. On several occasions, we debated the meaning and place of spirituality in context of creativity. He was capable of resolving their complexities in concise terms with convincing and earthy logic, which most of his devotees easily understood.

The point I wish to make is that my encounters with Baba Muktananda and other spiritual *gurus* convinced me of the presence of something called 'spirituality' with an umbilical connection to 'creativity', even if it cannot be defined rationally. But in spite of all that, could I find a formula to make Spiritual Art? My answer is 'no'. So, if the 'will' cannot produce a masterpiece, then spiritual achievement cannot guarantee the creation of Spiritual Art either.

Much has been discoursed and written about Spirituality. For thousands of years, the visionaries, philosophers and creative people from all cultures of the world have spent their lives trying to understand its meaning. You cannot touch it, feel it, or understand it. But, neither can it be avoided nor rejected. – According to the Indian thought it requires the cultivation of at least one of the three levels : physical, intellectual or emotional, before one can comprehend it. It is, therefore, considered to be the highest level of achievement, or to put it simply – the exalted state. However, it should be realised that religion plays no role in it; although it is one of the respectfully accepted mediums among several others to reach Spirituality. The great religions of the world provide only the outer structures. Paradoxically, the complexities of theological differences between them evaporate when the Spiritual realisation dawns.

Nevertheless, all religions of the world continue to prescribe their own systems and rituals which can enable one to achieve spirituality. Of course, none of them can guarantee that. If nothing else, such efforts in themselves become similar to the journey of an artist. There is a Zen saying, "If you find Buddha on your way, then you ought to kill him." Meaning, keep on the journey – searching for Buddha is important, not finding him. The infinity is approachable but never achievable. However, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* has suggested that the artist repeats in his own way the process of cosmic creation. He is also a creator, just like God.

Despite such an abstract connection between creativity and spirituality, the astonishing fact is that they continue to exist and feed each other. The rationality of science would not believe in it because it demands evidence which is obviously not there. On the other hand, we also know that there are things for which science has no rational explanation. Unexplained mysteries and irrational doctrines are considered to inspire the journey of spirituality, and so also of creativity. Some thinkers have called them 'super-realism'. However, about the fore-seeable realities, Piet Mondrian, maestro of geometrical abstraction, said in 1914, "In order to approach the Spiritual in Art one employs reality as little as possible; because reality is the polar opposite of the spiritual".

In this context I specify that spirituality in creative arts does not depend on the religious subjects. Painters, searching for spirituality do not need to paint either the 'Krishnas' or 'Madonnas'. The spiritual visage does not come from the outer skin but is attained from the inside. That actually requires the artists to cross the physicality of the outer limits and enter the inner world. But that makes their works difficult to be understood and accepted because they do not supply what people want, and their works usually do not entertain or shock.

In 1969, an American Buddhist monk came to see me in my studio and asked my help to buy a Spiritual Buddha. He spoke very little and had the habit of going into meditation at the snap of a finger. The monk had already seen several Buddhas but did not respond to any of them. I told him to continue his search and according to my information, the possibility of finding one would be in the shops selling art curios and antiquities. Next day, I was called by a gallery to meet the monk. He was sitting on the floor and looking at a bronze Buddha which he had found; one which he approved only after a long and deep meditation by staring at its face, as he was doing then. When he saw me, he jumped up in excitement, smiling with happiness and bliss. "Oh, I've found it!", he exclaimed. "What?", I asked. He replied, "The Spiritual Buddha!". I could not understand all that. I thought about it and then put it aside as one of the inexplicable happenings.

Following are some of the art works out of hundreds, well-known and not very well-known, which I have found to possess the sublime i.e. the Spiritual quality.

PYRAMIDS AT GIZA (Khufu or Cheops) — I saw them in 1966. My first reaction was of amazement, and I was overwhelmed. As I came nearer the Khufu pyramid I felt myself becoming smaller. I entered the tomb and I was lyrically mystified. There seemed to be a fusion of all kinds of forms which changed as I walked in the interiors because of the mysterious play of natural lights. When I climbed the steps, I felt I could walk into the open sky. A spectrum of thoughts were coming to me. Who conceived it thousands of years ago, and why such a form? Who built it and how? (It would be repeated in glass in 1989 as a grand piece of modern architecture at the Louvre in Paris designed by I.M. Pei).

Even as I went back by the tourist bus to Cairo city, I could not take my eyes off it. I looked back to see it standing alone in the desert, as it has for thousands of years. It looked to me like a god, whoever or whatever he may be. I can safely call it a Spiritual creation. Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873), was a great admirer of the pyramids; but on the physical level. He calculated that with the stone used to build the three pyramids at Giza, he could make a wall ten feet high and one foot wide, to encircle his empire, the whole of France.

MONA LISA — painted by Leonardo da Vinci, had been travelling with him until King Francis I purchased her from him in 1517. She was housed in the Louvre museum in 1794 in which she moved a few times from the 400 feet long vaulted corridor. She is now displayed in a new gallery under non-reflective glass case, completely airtight with correct temperature and best of security. — I saw Mona Lisa in 1966, on my first visit to Paris. I had already read and heard so much about her that I had become kind of allergic, and was determined not to join the bandwagon of her admirers from all over the world. I shifted for a

while but when I was finally face to face with her, I was shamelessly spellbound within minutes; not only by the famous smile but also by the overall effect, which I found instantly to be a Spiritual one. I saw her again in 1976 and in 1989; and my admiration increased with each viewing. For me, the important element in Mona Lisa is the mysterious transparent background, painted on a poplar board which helped to achieve the exalted quality.

NATARAJA (Dancing Shiva in Bronze) — I have seen quite a few of these South Indian bronzes, both in India and abroad. They are Spiritual right from the conceptual stage which is transmitted forever in time and space with an unending cycle of birth, growth and decay. Shiva is engaged in the dance of the universe, embellished with the icons of demons, fire and protection. The drum in his right hand is there to produce the *Nada* – the primordial sound of creation. All of this has been described by some eminent scholars in precise details. Shiva becomes Nataraja, the Lord of dance and the dancers, and he dances to portray the existence of the whole cosmos. He raises his left leg with perfect anatomical balance to show the idea of Liberation; while his right foot is crushing the demon which personifies Evil. What enchanted me most in the Nataraja was the aura, both sublime and mighty in addition to the perfection of form with inconographic details.

RADHA — is a miniature painting of the Kishengarh School near Ajmer in Rajasthan, which produced one of the most beautiful series of paintings on the Radha Krishna theme. She was painted around 1750 AD by Nihal Chand. He was inspired by the poet king Savant Singh's romantic interpretation of the divine love between Radha and Krishna. Savant Singh fell in deep love with a common girl who eventually became his mistress. He named her '*Bani Thani*' which means dressiness and smartness. – *Bani Thani* portrays Radha in a profile, abstracted to a perfectly balanced linear composition. She was painted in warm colors showing an elongated face with receding forehead, arched eyebrows, lotus-eyes, sharp-pointed nose, sensuous lips, two locks of hair naughtily trickling down her face, pointed chin, and embellished with beautifully designed jewellery which enhances the overall effect. Radha has indeed haunted me, mostly because of the elongated eye which transcend it to attain a highly abstract and Spiritual quality.

BLACK SQUARE — Kazimir Malevich (Russian born in Poland, 1878-1935), one of the most creative artist of this century, painted 'Black Square' in Moscow during the years 1914-15. It is a prime example of 'Suprematist' art which I saw during my first visit to the USSR in 1984. When asked about it, Malevich said, "Black Square cannot fuse with any other artist or any other time. Right? I have not needed my predecessors and I don't resemble them. I am a step. In art one has the duty to realise its essential forms, regardless of whether one likes them or not." He concluded, "In my desperate struggle to liberate art from the ballast of the world of objects, I took refuge in the form of square." I therefore, thought that there would be little to discover in this work. But I was wrong because after seeing it closely, I found that geometrically it was not a perfect square, and its dense blackness seemed to possess supernatural powers and cosmic energies.

Throughout the 20th century, despite the industrial and technological revolutions and progressive faith in rationalism, there have been several artists in the West who gave much importance to Spirituality in art. One of the main reasons for that was the enlightening influence of Eastern thought and philosophy which was filtering into the West, by the dedicated efforts of several eminent scholars. Greater material comforts and increasing use of technology, generally under-scores the spiritual content in the thought process and life styles of people in the affluent Western countries. In the East, living with spiritual metaphors continues as an inheritance in some way or the other.

Amongst those artists who imbibed the spiritual flavour of Eastern philosophy, were Kandinsky and Paul Klee in Germany. – Dutch painter Mondrian and Turkish painter Arshile Gorky (both of whom founded the



New York school in 1940s) – Kazimir Malevich in Russia -- Rumanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi in Paris (who also spent about a year in India) – Mark Rothko in America – and Nicholas Roerich, Russian painter and highly respected scholar who came to India and lived in Kulu valley and painted Himalayas. They opened new horizons and demolished the established norm that only religious subjects could make the Spiritual Art.

Morality, has been somehow accepted as a solid step for the attainment of Spirituality in almost all cultures of the world It is greatly influenced by religion and has also intruded into different schools of aes-thetics. Truly speaking, it has no relevance to the Creative Arts. To elaborate more, I quote American philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952), who made a significant observation about morality by saying, “The truth is that morality is not mainly concerned with the attainment of pleasure; it is rather concerned, in all its deeper and more authoritative maxims with the prevention of suffering.” To figure that out, D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) commented, “Puritanism takes many forms, it changes its appearance. Work of art does something special to the artist who makes it – and something for who views it”.

In spite of all kinds of efforts made through the centuries, morality has not been or could not be defined with any kind of definite parameters which can be accepted universally. Moreover, morality which is imposed by either punishment or awards is neither good nor moral. Something which is declared to be immoral in one social structure can be perfectly all right in another. The definitions of evil and good have also gone through various interpretations which have been constantly changing, historically and geographically. For example, the fantastic and sublime but erotic sexual action poses which are found in many Indian paintings and temple sculptures of the medieval centuries, easily shocked most of the western aestheticians and missionaries who came to enlighten the ‘barbaric’ Indians.

If Spirituality in the Creative Arts cannot come through the established moral values, it does not come either by the asceticism or by being aloof from the realities of life. In fact, abstinence from all kinds of worldly pleasures even when they bring welfare for all has been considered to be a virtue by most religions. The artists can demolish such dogmas through their works. The Creative Arts are ideally competent to expose the reality of social and moral values.

*“All true arts are an expression of the soul, the outward forms have value only in so far as they are the expression of the inner spirit of men” – Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).*

# CHAPTER 9

## DOCUMENTATION

The Visual Arts have been depicting the incidents, stories, ideas and messages from time immemorial. It has been labelled as the Narrative, Documentary and Illustrative Arts. The artists carrying out such documentation worked on commission, and also on their own. There are innumerable examples of fascinating art works in this category which have fortunately survived all around the world, from the beginning of civilisation to modern times.

When Photography was invented more than a hundred years ago, it was thought to be the end of academic, realistic representation and documentary art. But after the initial shocks, the Visual Arts have survived and fortunately found their distinct identity, despite the threat of getting wiped out in the competition. This happened because Photography could only capture a frozen stance, a solitary moment; whereas the artists had the time and opportunity to comprehend the whole story and recreate it in their own individual styles by selectively focusing, abstracting, adding and eliminating. In other words, they continue to give a totally new image to its documentation, besides recording all the relevant details, as they were able to do in the past. For example, ‘*Coronation of Napoleon*’ by French Classical painter, Jacques Louis David (1748-1825), which hangs in the Louvre Museum, Paris. And the story of Buddha’s life, as painted in the frescoes of Ajanta Caves.

Documentation by the artists is also done to record the important events. But there is no way that they can have the instant quality and speed of photography and video filming, which have been further revolutionised by the computers. Some artists have competitively acquired speed formulae to create Documentary Art. Some even claim to possess an extraordinary talent and comparative superiority when they do so. They may be loved and respected by the present-day society which is constantly gearing up to fast and faster speed. But such works are intrinsically of an instant nature and therefore, may not have lasting values.

Some artists use the dramatic events including natural and man-made disasters, in order to promptly depict them in their works. They call themselves artistically spontaneous and socially relevant; which is debatable. Such works generally lack substance and become superfluous; because they do not go through the essential chemistry of distillation on the physical, intellectual or emotional levels. To call them spontaneous would be misguided, because spontaneity comes from the mastery of control and not from reckless speed. Matisse, Picasso, Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Lithuanian painter Chaim Soutine, and many of their contemporaries proved that amply in their works.

With reference to spontaneity, I would like to tell a story. – In old time Japan, there was a ruthless warrior king. He had heard about the genius of an artist, an excellent painter of nature. He expressed a desire to visit the artist and acquire one of his paintings. His minister took him to the painter, who was told about the purpose of their visit. He respectfully requested them to come after a year. The king being restless and intolerant, as they usually were, did not like the idea of waiting that long. However, his minister consoled him diplomatically by saying that if he wanted to acquire a good painting from a great artist, he had no choice but to wait, which in any case was not that demanding enough to warrant such impatience. So they left after declaring that they would come back after a year.

Twelve months elapsed and they duly returned. The painter was very courteous again and respectfully asked them to sit down and have tea which in Japanese style is known to be a lengthy affair. The king was not amused but settled down. The painter went to his studio in the next room, sat down on his desk and started painting. The king was watching all that while drinking tea. After a while, the artist finished the picture and reverently presented it to his royal visitors.

It was too much for the king. He pulled out his sword and roared with anger, “How dare you kept me waiting for a year for something you just painted between our declared arrivals and finishing our tea. You should be slaughtered on the spot for such obdurate behaviour.” The artist replied, “Your Highness, do not be angry with me. It is true that I have painted this picture just now but bestow me with your grace in kindly understanding that it took me one year to think about it”.

Another incident which comes to my mind is what I was told about Pierre Bonnard, the well-known Post-Impressionist French painter. Some of his works done before the 1930s were acquired and put in a Chateau as a private collection. Sometime, during the Second World War, he was caught by the guards of the deserted but protected Chateau. He was secretly working on his own paintings to improve upon them. The guards thought he was a vandal.

The advanced technology of X-rays and lasers used on art works has revealed, how some of the well-known painters worked. It has shown that they corrected, changed and re-changed several times between the start and finish of their paintings. We also know that the eminent writers, poets and composers have been doing the same thing over and over again. It seems therefore, that the whole idea of spontaneity is misplaced; if it links technique and spontaneity with speed.

To further elaborate on this point, we can look at the American Abstract Expressionist paintings between the years 1945 and 1970. It was also labelled as ‘Action Painting’ for its fast and spontaneous appearance. Retrospectively, Willem de Kooning had been considered to be a key figure in the ‘action area’ of Abstract Expressionism. His contemporaries were the likes of Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Philip Guston and Robert Motherwell. Interestingly, anyone who watched or studied the progress of de Kooning’s paintings, cannot fail to see the long hours of work in preparing, considering and reconsidering, painting and repainting the so called spontaneous improvisations. Nevertheless, Action Painting did rely on the expressive application of paint, heavily loaded to reproduce rough and textural finish. They charmed not only physically but also emotionally and intellectually. However, Abstract Expressionism, the basic component of which were spontaneity and action, also included painters such as; Ellsworth Kelly, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt, whose works had a smooth finish with resonant colors with thinner application and devoid of textures. Thus the idea of spontaneity was further expanded.

The function of the Creative Arts is not to solve the problems and avoid disasters – simply because they cannot do it. Moreover, there are enough categories of people in present-day societies who are engaged to deal with such eventualities and are paid rather handsomely to do their job. For example, on international level we have the United Nations Organisation. Of course, the documenting art and artists have an instant appeal for the leaders of society, because through such commercial art works which are easily understood, they can publicly show their compassion for the tragedies. Never mind, if they are caused mostly by their own actions or non-actions.

The job of the creative artists is to develop awareness, especially for those values which can go to the core of the matter and help to nourish the sanity, truth, enlightenment, beauty and happiness for

all. In India, it is called *Satyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram* i.e. the truth, godliness and beauty. These hallowed and well-known words were put together by the eminent poet, Rabindranath Tagore, based on the interpretation of our ancient philosophical thoughts, as well as their application to the ethics of social life and religion. If artists can do so, then they should react spontaneously or otherwise to those events which hurt and harm the mankind in any manner and provide sensibilities which can help to destroy them at their roots. However, if one can draw a social message from any artistic creation then it would be a bonus, but nobody likes to be punched in the face with it.

“Art is so dominated by the single problem of actively converting chaotic into clear intuition, that we recognise the propriety of ceasing to call it the work of fancy, and of calling it an act of poetic or creative imagination.” – Croce.

Picasso, Braque and Matisse amongst other contemporary artists had direct experience of the horrors and tragedies of World War I & II. But none of them painted to illustrate them. They were at the same time not indifferent and could not afford to be so. Several of them actually held strong opinions. It is much more sensible to question the foundations of those systems, which are responsible for such horrors against humanity. Up to this day in all societies and communities around the world, such laudable efforts fortunately continue to flower.

In this connection, one of the greatest examples which comes to my mind is ‘Guernica’ by Pablo Picasso. It depicts the emotional anger aroused by an event, but distilled by the process of art to make it eloquent for the whole world. This mural (11'5" x 25'5") was painted in 1937 for the Spanish pavilion in the Paris Exhibition. It was inspired by a personal anguish at a disturbing happening in his native country, specifically the destruction of the small Basque town by German bombers, flying for General Franco, ruler of Spain.

‘Guernica’ was painted with great speed, though no signs of haste are seen in the finished composition. Picasso made a series of preliminary drawings and studies before painting the final work in black, white and grey colors to express the horrifying reality. It was painted on normal canvas and the work proceeded with some radical alterations. The icons he used, like the dying horse, image of the bull, Minotaur and a young girl holding the light, were taken from his earlier works. Such images and their visual impact had already originated in his own Cubism.

Creative artists through their works should force the people to stop, relax and think about who they are and what they are doing and for what? Artists are not the messengers or agents to convey messages of others, but creators of them. They distil the social realities and produce creative works, like trees do with the supply of their nourishment to produce fruits and flowers.

Artists do not follow or copy the images, they create them. This of course, does not imply that the preceding art works and styles are rendered out of date. On the contrary, they become eternal according to the degree of their own integral qualities. The Creative Arts go through the changes not just for the heck of it or for the sake of changing fashion, but because of the changing conditions and developments which would affect society. And also, because of the growth of artist’s individually in terms of his/her vocabulary and style.

“Every true artist, so far as his art went, has always got out of himself – has forgotten his personal interest and became Man, thinking for the whole race.” – H.G. Wells (1866-1946), well-known British novelist and historian.

The Folk Arts all over the world are beautiful examples of narration and documentation of events. They become part of folk people’s collective life, as well as meaningful rituals for the cultural, religious and social activities which have continued for generations. The created signs, symbols and icons for narration and

documentation were then copied so much by the sub-sequent generations, that they became crafts, depending repeatedly upon the standard formulations. From the time India became independent in 1947, all kinds of Folk Arts, both visual and performing, have been revived with gusto. The cultural impresarios from the urban elite have worked devotedly to find and promote them by opening channels in cities for their commercial marketing. They are easily bought with pleasure by the fashionable who look for ethnic glamour. But can we call these Creative Arts?

There are committed people who debate for the traditional folk arts and their recognition as Creative Arts. They argue that the often repeated forms which characterise all kinds of Folk Arts must have had a beginning, the originality of which could satisfy all the requirements needed for making creative works. Furthermore, the repetition of forms and images does not rule out the possibility for innovations both in terms of technique and content. The efforts made in promoting the poor and neglected natives with attractive copy-writing provides good mileage. Some contemporary artists belonging to different creative fields specially the visual arts, music and theatre have also imbibed with good results, the folk and tribal ideas, symbols and narrative qualities in their work.

Then there are others who oppose such a trend vehemently. F.N. Souza, the well-known Indian Expressionist painter, has said, "The difference between fine art and kitsch of folk art is that fine art has a great number of nuances which the popular arts do not have. The relative order of magnitude measuring from infinity to infinity is structured in nuances, the ultimate nuance of nature is beauty. Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder, but in the cultivated eye."

The development of Visual Arts has been institutionalised to produce definite movements and 'isms' from time to time. Dadaism is one of them. Its leader, Marcel Duchamp and his like-minded friends during the First World War years used ready-made urinals and hat-racks and other similar objects which until then were not noticed, admired or used in art works. They were referred to as 'documentation of expression through objects'. Such a fascinating exposition got the attention of not only the spectators, critics and artists but also the philosophers of art. What the artists made through those objects may not be valuable; because they were neither invented nor created as they were already there. However, they found their role in the theory of art mainly because they were able to document.

The trend of using objects for creative expression has continued vigorously and produced the powerful movements of Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Assemblage, Installation and Environmental Art. Even if they were purely experimental, opinionated and instructional, they could be valued according to their usefulness. Since the 1970s, inter-national exhibitions which prominently showed the objects used in documentation are held in Germany. They are actually called 'Documenta'.

# CHAPTER 10

## CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

Beauty is one of the most illusive things to define. Philosophers and aestheticians from the ancient times have been making elaborate observations to explain the phenomenon, called Beauty. Different cultures and races have their own parameters to define its endless variations. However, something that is beautiful in one place and for one person may not be so in another place and for another person. The definitions and prescribed yardsticks do help in identifying the characteristics of Beauty, but they have not been able to pinpoint those definitions which can be conclusive.

It is ultimately the creators and the appreciators (*Rasikas*) who discover it in their own individual ways by the generation of interest and attraction. The beauty in art works may remain hidden and unexplored until someone's interest is aroused. Such a process therefore, becomes highly subjective. In spite of the intensive scholarship which is available to identify beauty and what makes something beautiful, there are as many opinions as there are heads, and each one of them may very well claim to be an authority. That is indeed the beauty of Beauty.

Some people go crazy about the beauty of opera and there are others who cannot stand it. Some people love to listen to *Dhrupad* of Indian classical music while others do not have any interest in it, and would rather listen to popular music. Some people love the beauty of the color blue, and there would be others who hate it. Some people prefer the dramatic expression and some abhor it. Some people like the ornamentation and romance—*Shringar Rasa*, and others admire a peaceful renderings – *Shanta Rasa*. For genderwise response to Beauty, Oscar Wilde made a provocative observation, “Most women are so artificial that they have no sense of Art. Most man are so natural that they have no sense of Beauty.” The variations in response to the beautiful are endless. For some people, Beauty is simple and for others, Beauty is what beauty does.

In the Creative Arts, the concepts of Beauty have been dealt with mainly from two different philosophies. One is the Greek theory of Beauty, expanded to the Greco-Roman theory which professed Idealised Realism. For example, the idealised beauty which can be see in the Greek sculptures of Apollo, Venus de Milo, Diskobolus (discus thrower) and in many other similar examples. In Painting, the visual perspective was based on the mathematical formula. It matured to achieve the high standard in the Renaissance period.

The other is Symbolic Iconography which emerged for the practical use of explaining the invisible realities. It was achieved by enhancing the sensuality of forms, both figurative and non-figurative. It was generally practised in cultures of the East. For example, we have the iconographic Beauty which is found in the Indian sculptures of *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Durga* and others, which became symbols in them-selves. In Painting, the perspective was not depicted on the basis of visual reality or the mathematical formula; but on the demand of composition and style, which emerged from the use of space distribution and generally painted in flat colors.

Plato's (427-347 BC) theory approved the representational Art which did not have room for Symbolism. Aristotle (384-322 BC) talked of the moral purposes of art but omitted Symbolism. Although, he went beyond

Plato in contextualising that and gave the hint. “Art is a vision which accepts imitation; although straight imitation and copy of objects to represent only the outward appearance is not agreeable.”

Selective observations made by some of the most eminent Western philosophers and aestheticians are given below. They indeed vindicate the idea that Beauty can be viewed from various angles.

Romanian philosopher, Plotinus (205-270) said, “Man believes the world itself to be over-charged with Beauty, he forgets that he is the cause of it.”

French philosopher, Rene Descartes (1596-1660) claimed that Beauty is related to pleasure. Experience of Beauty is intellectual joy accompanied by a passion or emotion.

Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) opined that the qualities of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, are subjective and personal terms which if flung at the Universe, will be returned to the sender unacknowledged. He elaborated, “I would warn you that I do not attribute to nature, either beauty or deformity, order or confusion. Only in relation to our imagination can things be called beautiful or ugly, well-ordered or confused.”

German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) said categorically that, "There was no objective rule of tastes and concepts by which Beauty can be defined. Beautiful is that which pleases beyond a concept.”

Another German philosopher, G.W. Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) refused to consider nature as strictly beautiful. According to him all Beauty, whether natural or man-made is the product of the human mind. Art is the presentation of truth and spiritual reality in sensuous forms.

But Jean Paul Sarte (1905-1980) the French thinker, retorted, “Reality is never beautiful”.

Benedetto Croce (1860-1952) preferred art in comparison to metaphysics and science. He believed that science gives us utility but the arts give us Beauty. He said, “The Beauty belongs to the inward image than to the outward form in which it is embodied. The Beauty is the mental formation of an image (or images) that catches the essence of the thing perceived. It is always our own intuition we express when we are enjoying a beautiful work of art. Both in the artist creating and in the spectator contemplating Beauty, the aesthetic secret is the expressive image. Beauty is adequate expression, Beauty is expression.”

For the on-going query, why artists should be so concerned with the creation of Beauty, the German composer and conductor Richard Strauss (1864-1949) replied, “I thought artists were for providing Beauty.”

*“Beauty is truth, truth Beauty That is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.”* John Keats (1795-1821), British poet.

We thus find that most of the Western aestheticians, some of whom are quoted above, have not only acknowledged the relationship between the creativity and Beauty, but also gave their own assessment about what Beauty is and should be.

The Indian thinkers and aestheticians from the ancient times, have also talked about Beauty in a similar vein, but their aim was to symbolise and not idealise. They spoke about Symbolism in a mysterious way, which does not conform to its connotations with the western thought. The concept of Beauty in Indian aesthetics is based on a metaphysical approach to *Ananda*, which is pure delight (blissful joy). According to the *Upanishads*, cosmic creation, its being, its life and sustenance is derived from *Ananda*.

“Who indeed could live, who breathe; should not this ‘*Ananda*’ be in *Akasa* (sky, nature, universe)” – *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

“*Ananda* is the beginning and the end of the world, cause as well as the effect, the root as well as the shell of the Universe.” – *Aitareya Aranyaka*.

The *Upanishads* proclaim that the aesthetic sense pervades in the minds of both the creators and connoisseurs as the divine light of the universal soul, *Brahman*, through which one can experience Beauty. Such doctrines were dominating the concept of Beauty in Indian aesthetics, and have continued to do so as a backdrop.

However, around the 2nd century AD, a major development was achieved in Indian aesthetics through the introduction of *Rasa* theory, propounded by Muni Bharata in his *Natya Shastra* after profound analysis of all the related factors. It covered different moods and feelings which were classified under nine heads famously known as *Nava-Rasas*. They are already mentioned in the chapter ‘Emotional Level’. The specific aesthetic quality as expressed in the works of art, which could be distinctly identified, was designated to a particular *Rasa*.

The *Rasa* theory encompassed practically every nuance of the entire range of human expressions. The success of the creator was acclaimed as Beauty and judged by the response of the audience which included experts who were respect-fully called, *Rasikas* or *Rasvantas*. They were equally knowledgeable, if not more. Such meaningful interactions based on the supportive and versatile foundation of the *Rasa* theory were not only confined to any particular art, but were applicable to all of the creative arts such as : painting, sculpture, music, dance, poetry, theatre and literature. It provided sumptuous possibilities for the artists to expand their span in order to create different shades of Beauty. It enabled them to reach sublime heights and achieve the most glorious period of Indian aesthetics, enriched by excellent creations in every field.

The *Rasa* theory also inspired the depiction of nature and its relation with human emotions. *Bara Masa* (twelve months of the year) paintings, made during the 17th and 18th century AD in the schools of Indian miniature paintings are one of the best examples. However, nature was not accepted by all of the thinkers as the epi-tome of Beauty. According to the *Samkhya* aesthetics, Nature is not all that beautiful but also has ugliness. On the other hand, in the *Vedantic* thought Nature is beautiful and there is nothing in the Universe which can hurt the internal harmonious core that is the *Atma*.

Unlike Western philosophy, the ultimate goal in Indian philosophy was to go beyond life and its general knowledge – that is to achieve ultimate freedom (*moksha*). In India, philosophy was a way of life, besides being a thought process which dealt with the practical problems of life. Nature has a mysterious basis and Beauty can be found in the realisation of Nature's diversity and its secrets. The Beauty of the supernatural powers which created nature would be something more, something superior to it, although obscured.

Kalidasa, the famous poet (around 5th century AD) said, “The beautiful is a manifestation of the secret laws of nature without which their presence would have remained concealed for ever.” He also included the human experience and said in his play ‘*Shakuntala*’, “Empirical beauty is such, where nobody can compel the tendency of perceiving senses to experience what is called new, nor can we replace our senses into something else to find out newness in Beauty. It is like replacing an object with another, as for example, after too much of sweet we would be inclined to eat tamarind. That would be called the new aesthetic taste of empirical category.”

Thus Kalidasa went a step forward within the *Rasa* theory by pointing out ‘newness’. The hall mark of the 20th century is also ‘newness’ with a label of uniqueness couched in the singular individuality of the artist. However, the difference is that the newness of Indian aesthetics evolved from the expression of different moods (*Rasas*) while the contemporary aesthetics in the creation of Beauty, does not depend upon them. In it, the individual uniqueness is supreme and the elements hitherto accepted as concepts of Beauty from



the East or West are superseded. In the contemporary scene the variety and change in the works of artists are determined mostly by the market forces; and not because of their creative yearnings or by the demand of their consciousness. Some artists even get stuck at one point and repeat themselves.

The core of Indian aesthetics which was synthesized in the early centuries of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cultures, was followed by a new concept of Beauty which emerged during the Muslim period, between the 10th and 17th century AD. It was dominated by a decorative ornamentation with mathematical precision and stylisation of all types of human, flora and fauna forms; besides the panoramic views of nature. Such artistry was patronised by the powerful establishment of Muslim rulers.

However, the sensuousness of the *Rasa* theory continued as a backdrop which was deeply etched into the Indian psyche, which at times, not only mingled beautifully with the Muslim concepts but even dominated them. Numerous unique examples in almost every field of the Creative Arts extending to architecture, design and crafts can be quoted in this regard. For example, the freedom in the *khayal* style of north Indian classical music, which was wonderfully developed mostly by the Muslim musicians and composers through many decades of intellectual and creative interactions with the Hindu musicians. They derived from the *Raga* based and rigidly structured *Dhrupad* style which had already achieved the peak of refinement.

Different schools of Indian miniature painting, like the Mughal, Rajput and Pahari which originated from the medieval Persian, Jain and Buddhist manuscripts, are other fascinating examples. Hindu and Muslim design elements, when combined, produced gems of architecture all over the country -- the crowning glory being the Taj Mahal in Agra. Design and manufacture of objects for daily use, such as, pottery, utensils, furniture, hand-fans, dresses and jewellery, achieved an excellence which has been duly admired all over the world.

The Muslim period in Indian Art history was followed by the British Colonial rule of nearly 200 years, ending in 1947. The Britishers brought in a western concept of Beauty and promoted it in whatever way they could. By their time, the Indian psyche was already adapted to the ancient Hindu and Buddhist aesthetics, Muslim aesthetics and combination of both. The western concepts coming mostly through England, which of course, was not the best of sources; also managed to find room in the Indian subcontinent and somehow mingled with Indian concepts to create a hybrid culture (in painting, called Company School). The British contact also helped India to correspond increasingly with the inter-national scene.

On the one hand, the Indian identity firmly continues to be a part of its cultural scene, while on the other hand, there is a drive for the newness of Western aesthetics, including their systems which stress upon thorough investigation. Such double direction pulls have created incoherence which generated all kinds of conflicting chaos in every field, as witnessed around in contemporary India specially after independence. It shall continue to be so until the values which have emerged in the past two to three hundred years are rationally investigated, and the proclamation of 'newness' after mandatory distillation settles down to become part of the Indian psyche as a whole.

Artists, have also talked about the concept and creation of Beauty from time to time. I have known some who do not like the word 'beautiful' with respect to their own works and deliberately create something which should not look 'beautiful'. However, by the time they finish their work, it invariably falls into any one of the categories of Beauty whether they like it, want it and accept it or not. On the other hand, the concept of 'Beauty' after decades of disrepute is now coming back in every sphere with a new orientation and rejuvenated gusto.

Objects have form and content and so the ideas, therefore, Beauty in them would have boundaries. The visual artists bring sublimity to them which transcend their creations to go beyond the form, content and all kinds of formal boundaries and make them subjective and universal. For them, art is not only a mode of self-expression but also self-transcendence. Content, meaning and form have to be homogenised otherwise their Beauty will disappear. Abstraction of known forms does not need to hide the objects but reveal them in totality with the elimination, addition and stylisation, almost in the same way as representational art does. Such fundamental principles of creation are similar in all arts.

German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was down to earth while saying that, "in reality man mirrors himself in things, he counts everything to be beautiful when they reflect his likeness. Just because man thinks something to be beautiful, then it is so."

About this I remember an incidence. In 1986, I went to Bhutan and on my way back stopped at Darjeeling. After freshening up, I went for a walk on the market road. There were quite a few curio shops in the market on both sides of the congested road. In one of them, I saw a small gilded Buddha in a showcase which caught my eye. I walked up and down the road in front of the shop and saw it from different angles. The more I looked, the more I liked it. I then went in and asked for the price. It was more compared to even some of the bigger pieces. I asked the shopkeeper, why it was so? He said that the price differed from piece to piece, not because of their size and weight alone, but also for the special creativity of the person who could make them spiritually beautiful. I was not convinced, so I left it at that and went back to my hotel. But the image of that small Buddha started haunting me in between my sleep, which is never sound when I travel to new places. The following morning, I went back to that shop and waited for it to open. I was happy to find my Buddha there and bought it.

"Love of Beauty is taste: the creation of Beauty is Art." – Ralph Emerson (1803-1882), American essayist and poet.

German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) analysed that, "The ultimate good is Beauty, and ultimate joy lies in the creation or cherishing of the beautiful."

Finally, we realise that Beauty can neither be known objectively nor described in words; it can only be felt, in most cases individually. Paradoxically, despite the enormous over-all development in the present scenario, the individual is thoroughly dictated by advertising, print and visual media. They constantly rub in Beauty, beauty and more Beauty in this and that. People tend to believe in them without exercising their own perceptions. Material success, media attention and higher status can also earn the title of being beautiful, while the reality may be far from that.

# CHAPTER 11

## NEW TRENDS

Development of the Arts in this century was comparatively in good health until the beginning of Second World War in 1939. The creative artists were by and large liberated from the stifling bonds of tradition and pre-set norms of dictation. An unprecedented freedom was witnessed in all fields of the creative arts. The cinema was developing faster than expected to quickly become the most important mode of expression and entertainment in the 20th century for the people all over the world. It progressed under the direct influence of Classical and Contemporary painting. The development of wireless technology revolutionised the entire communication system. It led to the use of telephone, radio and television on a mass scale which brought in the facility of information, communication, entertainment and also education to almost each and every home in the world.

The two world wars had shaken the established norms, styles, and values. The mass destruction changed the thinking process of people who were disillusioned as their dreams were shattered. The complacent life style under the monarchies was replaced by the individual participation and new kind of responsibilities, which became necessary under the developing democracies. Royal patronage for the creative arts was dying and the new systems under the support of public were not quite geared up to meet the financial needs of the artists.

Unprecedented fast track development in the fields of science, technology and the production of new materials and equipment became challenging for the creative artists in terms of what to accept, how and when. However, they produced several innovative ideas and forms in every field, specially in painting, music and cinema. And of course, architecture. After the massive destruction caused by both the wars, new construction started and fast. Barring the few exceptions, most of it was of the new kind called, modern architecture. The embellishments in architecture and design gave way to straight and functional forms which were influenced by the geometry of Cubism and the Supermatism.

The creative artists noticed the demanding challenges. In order to assimilate the ensuing aspirations of people, mostly in the European countries, which were directly hit by the wars; they were forced to think differently. What could be the role of creative arts, when the whole world was forced to face its end? Possibly the complete end, which would leave nothing behind. The atom bombs were made and also used, which could finish the whole world. It was indeed a scary situation. Thankfully, the war ended in 1945. The wars robbed people of their hidden terror. It was no more mysterious because Terror became Tragedy. In Art, the subject matter became more important than the niceties of color and forms; even the pure forms became performers despite their sublimity. The entire mankind which was affected, directly or indirectly by the wars, looked forward to a new beginning with a great sense of liberation on all fronts.

But after the second world war, what the world got in the field of creative arts, was not liberation but confusion and even torture for the eyes and human sensitivities. They were greatly influenced by the happenings in the world which lived through a cold war, power blocks behind the iron curtain and outside it, military

dictatorships, selfish democracies and lately fundamentalism. They all claimed attention through exhibitionism, self-promoting upmanship, shock, sensation and even violence.

Art changed into non-art and anti-art. Theatre saw 'anti-theatre' questioning itself. It became 'Waves' to be replaced by 'New Waves' and then by still newer and newest ones. The American composer of avant-garde music, John Cage 'composed' the famous 4' 33" in which he sat immobile before a silent piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. However, the Creative Arts, despite the contradictory pulls and propaganda continued to narrate the myriad experiences of life, inundated by belief and doubt, acceptance and rejections. Nowadays, newness and originality of sorts get instant attention.

Such developments are not even 50 years old. The present is too near. Hence it is not possible to make a rational and objective assessment. Nevertheless, I present a summary of the important trends of this period in the field of Visual Arts, which can be helpful to understand the overall situation.

We may start with MINIMAL ART — which was inspired philosophically by the famous phrase 'Less is More', coined by the eminent architect, Mies van der Rohe. Clement Greenberg, the well-known art critic of New York, who sang praises of the Abstract Expressionism and was widely respected for that, changed his stance and called for the use of essential and inessential elements in Modern Art, after the 'turgidities of Abstract Expressionism'. He said, "The irreducibility of pictorial art consists in two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness." However, Minimal Art finally ended up with the minimum of its own self, almost to a vanishing point which virtually rendered it to become incident-less, inert and boring. Less was no more More – it became Bore. Form without a content becomes meaning-less, and content without a form, blind.

POP ART — meaning Popular Art, flourished mainly in America, in the beginning of 1960s. It quickly spread across the world, both in spirit and content. It was stimulated by the mass production in urban culture, widely spread advertising, science fiction, photo images, etc. Common objects like a lipstick, typewriter, ice cream cone were executed as outdoor sculptures. Such works were a landmark achievement in pro-pounding the Pop philosophy; but also showed a bankruptcy in refinement and internalisation of ideas. However, on social level Pop became a powerful medium to express the aspirations of the youth, many of whom became hippies. It inspired them for promoting the individual freedom and cracking the taboos of sex, family traditions, caste and class status. By the 1980's, the Pop movement fizzled out and most of the erstwhile hippies became 'yuppies'.

OP ART (Optical Art) — a small period movement of 1960s, was exclusively based on optical or retinal illusion, which has been intriguing painters since the Renaissance period. A major exhibition was held in 1964 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, called 'The Responsive Eye'. It extensively covered the development of Optical Art works and kinetics which were made since 1920s. Its exhibits were not easy on the eyes and gave headache to the viewers. To help them, they were actually provided with aspirin tablets attached to the exhibition catalogue. Its patterns, conceived mostly in contrast, like black and white, also inspired the trends in design of that period. It led to EXPERIMENTS IN ART AND TECHNO-LOGY (EAT) which was set up in New York to execute several highly expensive art projects which used all kinds of complicated constructions with electrical lights, sound, movement, computers, TV and video, to produce quite an amazing dramatic effects.

CONCEPTUAL ART — of the 1970s, followed the ideology of Marcel Duchamp who declared in 1913, "Can one make works which are not works of art?" Conceptual artists challenged the definition of art, much more than Pop and Op Art. All kinds of presentations (happenings) were made which were considered crazy by

most people except for the hard core believers. For example, the British artist, John Latham made a sculpture of books in 1958 which was ceremoniously burnt in public. American artist, Joseph Kosuth, exhibited in 1965, 'One and Three Chairs' which included one real chair, a photograph of a chair, and a dictionary definition of the word chair.

In 1976, I saw an exhibition of locked shipping trunks in a gallery in New York, which were for sale, but to be opened only after 30 years. In 1965 Steve Saraf, a sculptor friend of mine in New York City, made large sculptures in ice to melt and disappear. He questioned the traditional idea, that a sculpture should be made for long life. He also made a few similar ones with candies and put one of them each day for about a week on the 5th Avenue and allowed people to pick from it. He got a big kick out of watching his sculpture's rapidly changing form, as the candies were taken away before its *finis coronatopus*. It was a good show for television.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART — started with the dumping of granular matter, bringing a portable fish farm or a dilapidated wooden bridge, on the floors of the art galleries and other public places. It became an earthy extension of Minimal and Conceptual Art. The artist went outdoors to fields, water areas and mountains to create huge forms and images by excavations and cutting the plantations with the help of bulldozers and dynamites. Michael Heizer removed 240,000 tonnes of rock and sand to make his famous sculpture 'Double Negative' in Nevada, USA. The Environmental artists reshape nature, and claim that they are thus focusing on the environmental and ecological issues. Never mind, if their huge shiftings would disturb the ecology and natural beauty.

Conceptual Art took the form of PERFORMANCE ART — which started in the 1970's with New York being its centre. It is difficult to define and is considered to be one of the most avant-garde movements of the contemporary art scene. The Pop musicians, dancers and actors cross-bred it. They put up solo and group performances, and make statements on all kinds of relevant subjects including politics. The performance may last from a few minutes to several hours, and it may be performed only once or repeated several times with or without a script. Its ancestry can be traced to the tribal rituals, religious ceremonies and carnivals from all parts of the world, and also to Greek theatre.

As a matter of fact, every country and culture of the world have such ceremonial, traditional and religious festivities which get exuberant response from the public. For example, the South American carnivals, and ritualistic performances of the South Pacific region, *Kathakali* dance, the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in India, which have been presenting fascinating spectacles of such performances for hundreds of years in a ceremonial way.

Performance Art went into several variations. One of the important take-offs is BODY ART — i.e. painting on human bodies which include intricate tattoo works. It also presents the brutal and obscene ceremonies, including a smearing of human blood etc. Schwarz Kogler, from Vienna publicly killed himself in 1969 at the age of 29 for the serious aesthetics of 'Destruction in Art', a movement which witnessed successive acts of self-mutilation. For art's sake, some artists offered their bodies for torture treatments, including the burning of hair, cuts made on the skin, dropping a concrete block on the toe and hitting their bodies against stone walls. Acconci masturbated in a New York gallery ramp in 1972 as part of the show, 'Seedbed'.

In India and many other cultures of the world, similar activities have been performed for ages as part of their rituals. Selected peoples would go into trance and torture their bodies by hitting against the hard walls and floors. Some would perform the ritual dances on burning embers and on many sharp pieces of glass, some would cut and pierce their bodies with sharp knives, some would slither on their stomachs for miles, and so on and so

forth. Erotic sexuality has not been excluded either. Some performances are known to have it in inexhaustible variety. I would say that PERFORMANCE and BODY ART, despite criticism and abuses flung on them, can find solace in the company of good old, ancient ritualistic traditions.

However, tradition or no tradition, it is apparent that the Performance Art has intruded with gung ho, the high status of Fine Arts. The media loves it because it makes good copies, people love it, because they are entertained. High profile organisations sponsor it generously for publicising their business. Paradoxically, the Performing Artists on one hand, have achieved the label of being ‘avant-garde’ artists; and on the other, they get the credit for preserving, bridging the gap between past and present, sharing and display of old treasures.

Similar to Performance Art is INSTALLATION ART — which started in USA and spread like fire crackers in Europe and the whole world. The speed in itself indicates that its artists were waiting for such a thing to happen. Some observers believe that the Installation artists have failed to compose and deal with the ‘form’. They are running away from the pictorial space without creating it. They have not realised that whenever an object occupies a space, it also creates it, sometimes in multiples. In the field of music, the famous composers have already played with notes to install fragmentation. All architecture has been historically an Installation. Indirectionality in a composition is an accepted fact; For example, Michelangelo in his *Pieta* organised space through a vacuum.

What the Installation Artists cash upon is an idea – any idea, and collection of objects – any objects (Duchampianism). Then they put together the found and man-made objects whose size and numbers are negotiable i.e. they can be increased or reduced, not because of the aesthetic reasons, but for the space as provided for their display. In addition to the outdoors, used by the Environmental Artists, they have entered the galleries and museums, and force them to change their dimensions, architecture and interiors. They use the floors, walls, roofs and all else, without bothering whether the human eye can comprehend them or not; the cameras can, and they are used extensively to project them in the print and visual media.

They, as well as the Performing Artists have been able to do so with the power of words – strong and fancy, such as; the creativity, newness, artistic feast of pure expression, and even tradition and spirituality, high-low cultural exchange, and elite to vernacular direction etc. They also highlight current social and political issues in order to conveniently verbalise more, and thus seduce the confused audience. They have forced the vulnerable art critics to fall in line. Their spectacular presentations provide equally spectacular stories to write about.

It is obvious, that the Installation Artists are trying hard to achieve in their works – the subtle nuances of intellect and emotions which have belonged to all creative arts. But they have opted for a hugely spread out canvas with unlimited supply of objects and materials, which on one hand, is drowning their individuality; and on the other, suppressing their yearnings because of the demanding physical dimensions (by the blast of objects – Malevich). In the bargain, the workmanship and longevity of their creation suffer which should torture any sensitive soul. They are already in no-man’s land because of their dependence on the support of others.

The world is full of objects; too many of them, more or less interesting, but not all of them are utilitarian in the real sense. Consumerism has taken over the ethos, dreams and values of the mankind. With the result, people now want more and more objects in whatever way they can. The artists have the responsibility to shout aloud to contradict the trap of consumerism and stop its fast moving evils. Instead, the creative artists through their projections like, Installation Art, are glorifying it.

Extremely valuable and supportive role of interaction between the different arts, which has been open heartedly sought by the creative artists for centuries, has now in itself become a challenge for them; not by participation but by high profile domination of Performance and Installation artists. Such is the price which is to be paid, when growth becomes reckless. Nevertheless, the vast and unlimited territory of the creative arts should be able to deal with it.

**PHOTO-REALISM** — is an offshoot of Pop Art, and is named so because of its fascination with photographs. They are copied, and also projected through slides on large canvases and then painted. Photographs were also used by earlier artists starting from Degas, Delacroix and others. Photo-Realism has provided a new dimension to the Visual Arts, because the modern hi-tech cameras can record even those details, which cannot be seen by the naked eye and best of the artists. Their creativity depends on the selection from the enormous amount of visual data which is made available by photography. Computers are extensively used to register and transfer the images which are programmed to be printed in different color combinations. This is actually called, **COMPUTER ART**, which provides inexhaustible variations, although it cannot have the intimate, personal, conscious and sub-conscious self of the artist, which is transferred through his fingers.

**GRAFFITISTS** — went around smearing the public places, such as New York subway trains, with a heroic defiance of the criminal law against vandalism. In India and most of other countries, even if their works are not elevated to the status of art, as Graffiti Art, they can be seen around in important public buildings, historical monuments, and even religious places. They bear the brunt of the permanent scars with personal, social and political messages carved, drawn and painted by some enthusiastic vandals. The Graffiti Artists extensively used the freehand calligraphy in black and wherever possible, in other colors. Some people have generously called such graffiti works, a release of suppressed anguish and feelings of the young people through their personal and public messages.

**PSYCHEDELIC ART** — was developed mostly in the underground, specially by the hippies of the mid-1960s to express the aspirations of youth under manifestations of drug culture. It is full of decorative patterns executed on the walls of their exclusive meeting joints with the abstract and figurative motifs, loud and luminous colors and vague spatial handling. They were further dramatized by the strong lights, music amplified to ear-deafening levels, colored smoke, slide projections, and live performances of dancers in trance. Such high key presentations could provide a synthetic trip. The disco culture that spread all over the world, owes a lot to it. Their creations ranged from the hallucinatory paintings to the light shows, posters, graphics, illustrations, cartoons, comic books and also handicrafts and art-effects. Pornography was extensively used.

**THEORETICAL ART** — emerged towards the beginning of the 1970's. It was promoted by John Steaker, a British painter. It emphasised upon the Theory as being superior to Practice, and Means being the source to create ends. History of art has always respected and recognised the 'results' and not the 'cause'. He wanted to reverse it by developing a 'theory for art' in place of 'theory of art' what art ought to be, not what it is; and thus go beyond the concept of 'art for art's sake'.

**SOTS ART** — The development of Communism and Socialism in the world saw the emergence of Sots Art. It claimed to reach the grass-root levels. It portrayed the ethos of farmers and factory workers, and followed the dictum of painters, like the French painter, Jean Millet (1814-1875) in its content and manner of expression. It was entirely narrative to depict in a hybrid and stylised realism, the day-to-day struggles of the common people. Almost all the promoters of Sots Art abhorred, the contemporary art expressions of the capitalist countries which were labelled as, Bourgeoisie Art of the elite. The Communist and Socialist governments

promoted the Sots Art with great enthusiasm. Several monumental murals and sculptures were commissioned to highlight their ideologies. However, Sots Art being highly stylised and illustrative, it side lined the core of creative inputs. It became repetitive and people were not stimulated by it and therefore, it gradually died after the Second World War.

It is not easy to talk in a linear way about the post Second World War happenings in the field of Visual Arts, which emerged in the developed countries; because the various art movements were happening simultaneously and at times, overlapping each other. The 20th century is ending with enormous amount of artistic activity in all kinds of kaleidoscopic directions, which were unthinkable even three decades ago. At the beginning of this century, it was expected that the Visual Arts would be dominated by the two distinctive routes i.e. Expressionism and Geometrical Abstraction. That forecast was challenged time and again and gradually put aside. W. Kandinsky, commented on it thus, "Art of today embodies the spiritual, matured to the point of revelation. The forms of this embodiment may be arranged between two poles 1 – great abstraction 2 – great realism. These two poles open two paths, which both lead to one goal in the end. These two elements have always been present in art; the first was expressed in the second. Today it looks as if they were about to carry a separate existence. Art seems to have put an end to the pleasant competition of the abstract by the concrete and vice versa".

We are now flooded with abundant activities in every possible way. Old and known ones are rejuvenated and inter-mixed. Besides, quite a few unexpected and innovative ideas are created, mostly because of the improved quality of mediums, new materials and technology; whose tactile qualities have greatly supported the final products.

Painters of the 20th century have been able to show not only what they have found in nature, but how it is made; and inspire the viewer to find it for themselves. Such participation of the spectators was not called for before. The dimension of paintings became larger – small one's were to be under command and the large ones allowed one to get in. Nevertheless, despite the high profile propaganda to promote the avant-garde movements, they have brought changes only on the surface. Paul Klee has euphemistically said that, "The work of art is a creation and not a product; and art is something and not about something." Late Clement Greenberg, the eminent American Art Critic told me in 1969 in New Delhi, that he found Rauchenberg's Pop Art collage painting which was in the exhibition of American Art, compositionally following the concept of space distribution of Leonardo's Mona Lisa.



# CHAPTER 12

## CONCLUSION

Regardless of whether it has been fully comprehended or not, the fact is that Fine Arts have acquired a unique status and identity of their own, which is more than simply illustrating the naked eye reality, demonstrative emotion and intellect. Matisse has demanded, "A work of art must carry in itself its complete significance and impose it upon its beholder even before he can identify the subject matter." And for the role of its creator, Kandinsky said reverently "Who really are artists i.e. who consciously or unconsciously in an entirely original form embody the expression of their inner life, who work for this end and cannot work otherwise."

All that has been stated in the preceding chapters, by and large focus upon the elements which determine the quality of art works, artists' psyche and their place in society, country and the whole world; creativity and interaction between different arts; and the contribution of philosophy, inputs of social reality, science and nature; communication and documentation through arts.

In a free society with abundance of personal freedom, nobody can stop people making bad art and calling themselves artists. The honest criticism and investigative evaluation should take care of that. The importance of an artist should not depend upon the amount of exposure he/she gets from the media and other channels. There are two categories of art works. One, which is easy to verbalise and stimulates writing for it extensively. The other is difficult to interpret and write about.

One of the ways to judge the value of art works is by finding out whether the artists are able to make the spectator see the world in their way or not. To explain it, I take the liberty of giving an example from my personal experience. In the years 1991-92, I painted a series called 'On Top of the Clouds', based on my observations of the celestial scenes, from the window seats of the aeroplanes at the height of more than 30,000 feet above the earth. What pleased me more than the sale and admiration of my paintings, was when a couple of my buyers told me subsequently, that after living with my 'On Top Of The Clouds' they have started looking out at the natural scenes differently on their flights.

Some people would ask 'why art' and all its accompanying jugglery because one can find beauty and all else by simply observing and experiencing the nature. I would tell them, "Please go ahead. You will return when you are ready, because nature will send you back after polishing and tinkling your sensibilities and urges to find the higher beauty which is beyond nature." Moreover, nature is not all that beautiful. Besides, its fury has already ruined several advanced cultures in the past. We should therefore, understand that nature is not a sentimental body, because it does not only please you but can also hit back; if you fool around by tampering with its ecology and using its bounties beyond a limit. The beauty of Creative Arts goes beyond nature. For example, when a flower is painted, or described in a poem, or portrayed through a dance, it acquires those parameters which cross the flavour of natural beauty. Moreover, the works of Art reveal their beauty differently and uniquely for person to person, place to place and time to time, because of the psychological inputs and cultural nuances. A painting

for instance, will vary in its appeal to different viewers; even its effect would change depending upon the wall it is put on, and the kind of natural or artificial light illuminating it.

It has been realised, time and again, that the power of Creative Arts and thoughts is invincible, because their essence is retained forever, as it trickles down the annals of history. This is why it is said, that a pen and a brush is mightier than the sword. The history and its events have repeatedly proved it. There is no reason why people should waste their energies to undermine and subvert them.

"The work of art is a value because it is an appeal." – Jean Paul Sartre, French philosopher, novelist and dramatist who declined the Nobel Prize in 1964.

Philosophy provides the orientation to look at the world rationally, lucidly and intensely. The Visual Arts can travel through all of that and even supersede them in their own way. For example, works of modern art, specially, in terms of depicting the Reality, have forced people to see differently and find meanings and expressions which were not thought of previously. Like the scientific inventions, they express the energy of our time.

*It is a curious thing that excellence in the creative fields has always been linked with social prosperity and political tranquillity. I wonder which one comes first.*

Political situations, economic and social fluctuations can adversely affect the arts, by changing, suppressing, and even degenerating and demolishing them. It is so, despite the fact that people from all walks of life love to announce at the top of their voices; *THAT* arts are the source of life. *THAT* artists are creators like supernatural beings; *THAT* they do not distinguish between the national, physical and mental boundaries; *THAT* they evaluate to assimilate the past and record the present to measure the standards achieved by the mankind; *THAT* they create with due concern, the vision for the future, *THAT* they are the torch bearers to project and guide the human ethos, whose value and contribution cannot be measured on production-line principles; *THAT* without arts the human beings are like robots, deprived of the soul and feelings.

Politicians and leaders around the world, have adopted different systems and tried everything possible to serve the mankind. The 20th century is ending with a fantastic and unprecedented progress in every field. The systems of government around the world have also changed, say in every decade, in some country or the other. But the human misery, deprivation and violence do not seem to end. Why not therefore, give a chance to the creative arts and listen to the message of their creators. Do not just purchase or amuse them. Rather pay due attention to the works of artists, writers, philosophers, visionaries and the scientists, as well as to what they say. Who knows some solutions may thus emerge. Some-thing has to be true after all.

Unfortunately, many of the post second World War developments in the field of creative arts seem to be utterly confusing and for many people even disgusting. They have been summarised in the chapter 'New Trends'. It is now inconsequential, whether the Creative Arts bring refinement and improve the quality of life for people, society and the world. What matters is the globalisation and glamorisation and of course, how much money and publicity the artists can get out of their works. They are 'famous for being famous', which enables them to monopolise.

Capitalism, through the power of industry and business, created a mass culture which brought in new kinds of demands for conformity. Centuries-old faith in God has lost its efficacy; traditional morals have become jokes, wisdom a meaningless word and reason an over-rated attribute of the mind. Loss of faith rapped the world. Lack of proper intellect and aesthetics as well as, honest confrontation to project the devastating realities which

feed the Creative Arts; aggravated the overwhelming confusion which is witnessed all around. Instead of taking the stand to confront such a drifting situation, many artists seem to get swayed by it.

Nevertheless, the 20th century is ending on a promising note. And the Fine Arts have survived. Art books are now published in great numbers. Reproductions of art works are printed in thousands as posters and the humble post-cards. Print and visual media are increasingly covering every field of the visual, performing and literary arts to carry their substance and messages to all parts of the world, faster than ever. It is only a small beginning and not really enough; because the whole scene is so active that before one can make a judgment about one thing, there are ten new ones knocking for attention. The small number of art experts, social scientists and programme implementers, have not yet found a way to deal with all of it.

The inner core and fundamental values of creativity continue to be prominently active because the mankind has not lost the urge to create. In spite of all the fantastic progress made through modern idioms; there are strong indications for the revival of academic traditions. It has been positively realised that the spirit lies in progressing and not in claiming to be progressive. I also hope that the open-mindedness and total freedom which can open the doors uninhibitedly, do not lead into no-man's land. Open-ness depends upon closure, as light needs the darkness in order to show itself.

The canvas is wide open for the 21st century. The sense of continuity is flagging a bit. Paintings come out of paintings. What they really mean is a matter of cultured signage. The meditative sublimity has to honour the complexities of life. Inevitable incompleteness and backwardness have to be accepted as inevitable reality, in order to move forward. The modern social life is produced through the successive dislocations, cultural constructions and archetypes. The concept of reality in its totality has changed for the children of electronic age. The creative expression have to account for the continuum between the extremes of social anguish and private life. In spite of the abundance of exposure, there are lesser things now to react to, and yet, reactions continue even if they get phoney. Ideas have become more important than the act of creation. People also prefer to read about art works than looking at them and feel their way.

Modernism has a post-modernism hidden in it which is dominated by theorising and social compulsions with multiplicity gauged into them. In the contemporary situation, only the spiritual in art can produce the best Social Art. The achievements made in the 20th century have already begun to feel like historical than the moment, although the 'progress' continues unabated. In the 21st century, it is open to conjectures, how the world is going to meet the eye, the mind, the human emotions and the progress in terms of true spiritual values.

In spite of all kinds of assaults, people around the world by and large have not lost their sanity, their sense of belonging and dignity. The fundamental sensitivities which help creativity are not discarded. As a matter of fact, there is a growing understanding that they are needed now more than ever, in order to vigorously distil and throw out the chaos, confusion and resultant junk. In the context of different topics as referred to in the earlier chapters, it has been stated that the artists from different fields create the vision to lead the society and highlight the issues which create problems, both before and after they engulf the society. On the other hand, there is the escapist argument, that the arts only portray and follow the demands of society.