

General Remarks on Beauty

Beauty

Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine — but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual which expresses itself through the form.

23 August 1933

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What is the meaning of Supramental Beauty? Is it the perception of the Divine as the All-Beautiful and All-Delight?

No, that you can get on any plane, and it becomes easy as soon as one is in contact with the higher Mind. Beauty is the special divine Manifestation in the physical as Truth is in the mind, Love in the heart, Power in the vital. Supramental beauty is the highest divine beauty manifesting in Matter. 19 February 1934

Supramental Action and Beauty

Is the work of supermind direct, as one sees in the lower grades of creation?

Yes — supermind action is direct, spontaneous and automatic like that of inframental Nature — the difference is that it is perfectly conscious. As there is no disagreement or strife within itself, it produces a perfect harmony and beauty.

19 September 1933

Art, Beauty and Ananda

Art is a thing of beauty and beauty and Ananda are closely connected — they go together. If the Ananda is there, then the

beauty comes out more easily — if not, it has to struggle out painfully and slowly. That is quite natural. 14 December 1936

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Beauty is Ananda taking form — but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul. What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one. 14 March 1933

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Your poem expresses very beautifully an aspect of beauty as it is circumstanced in this world. The lines of Keats also give one aspect only which it tries to generalise. In fact, Beauty is Ananda thrown into form — if it casts a shadow of pain, it is because the Divine Bliss which we mean by Ananda is watered down in the dullness of terrestrial consciousness into mere joy or pleasure and also because even that does not last for long and can easily have its opposite as a companion or a reaction. But if the consciousness of earth could be so deepened and strengthened and made so intensively receptive as not only to feel but hold the true Ananda, then the lines of Keats would be altogether true. But for that it would have to acquire first a complete liberation and an abiding peace. 16 February 1935

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Beauty is not the same as delight, but like Love it is an expression, a form of Ananda, — created by Ananda and composed of Ananda, it conveys to the mind that delight of which it is made. Aesthetically, the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty. The spiritual realisation has a sight, a perception, a feeling which is not that of the mind and vital; — it passes beyond the aesthetic limit, sees the universal beauty, sees behind the object what the eye cannot see, feels what the emotion of the heart cannot feel and passes beyond Rasa and

Bhoga to pure Ananda — a thing more deep, intense, rapturous than any mental or vital or any physical rasa reaction can be. It sees the One everywhere, the Divine everywhere, the Beloved everywhere, the original bliss of existence everywhere, and all these can create an inexpressible Ananda of beauty — the beauty of the One, the beauty of the Divine, the beauty of the Beloved, the beauty of the eternal Existence in things. It can see also the beauty of forms and objects, but with a seeing other than the mind's, other than that of a limited physical vision — what was not beautiful to the eye becomes beautiful, what was beautiful to the eye wears now a greater, marvellous and ineffable beauty. The spiritual realisation can bring the vision and the rapture of the All-Beautiful everywhere.

26 October 1935

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The word “expression” [*in the first sentence of the preceding letter*] means only something that is manifested by the Ananda and of which Ananda is the essence. Love and Beauty are powers of Ananda as Light and Knowledge are of Consciousness. Force is inherent in Consciousness and may be called part of the Divine Essence. Ananda is always there even when Sachchidananda takes on an impersonal aspect or appears as the sole essential Existence; but Love needs a Lover and Beloved, Beauty needs a manifestation to show itself. So in the same way Consciousness is always there, but Knowledge needs a manifestation to be active, there must be a Knower and a Known. That is why the distinction is made between Ananda which is of the essence and Beauty which is a power or expression of Ananda in manifestation. These are of course philosophical distinctions necessary for the mind to think about the world and the Divine.

4 November 1935

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You say [*in the letter of 26 October 1935, pp. 700–701*], “Aesthetically, the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty.” I find it hard to understand how beauty, Rasa and delight are connected with one another.

That can hardly be realised except by experience of Ananda. Ananda is not ordinary mental or vital delight in things. Rasa is the mind's understanding of beauty and pleasure in it accompanied usually by the vital's enjoyment of it (bhoga). Mental pleasure or vital enjoyment are not Ananda, but only derivations from the concealed universal Ananda of the Spirit in things.

7 November 1935

Universal Beauty and Ananda

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

10 March 1934

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As you say, there is a truth behind Tagore's statement.¹ There is such a thing as a universal Ananda and a universal beauty and the vision of it comes from an intensity of sight which sees what is hidden and more than the form — it is a sort of *viśvarasa* such as the Universal Spirit may have had in creating things. To this intensity of sight a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the *guna*, the *rasa* which it was meant to embody. But I doubt how far one can make an aesthetic canon upon this foundation. It is so far true that an artist can out of a thing that is ugly, repellent, distorted create a form of aesthetic power, intensity, revelatory force. The murder of Duncan is certainly not an act of beauty, but Shakespeare can use it to make a great artistic masterpiece. But we cannot go so far as to say that the intensity of an ugly thing makes it beautiful. It is the principle of a certain kind of modern caricature to make a face intensely ugly so as to bring out some side of the character more

¹ It is not known to what "statement" Sri Aurobindo is referring here. — Ed.

intensely by a hideous exaggeration of lines. In doing that it may be successful, but the intensity of the ugliness it creates does not make the caricature a thing of beauty; it serves its purpose, that is all. So too ugliness in painting must remain ugly, even if it gets out of itself a sense of vital force or expressiveness which makes it preferable in the eyes of some to real beauty. All that hits you in the midriff violently and gives you a sense of intense living is not necessarily a work of art or a thing of beauty. I am answering of course on the lines of your letter. I do not know what Tagore had precisely in view in thus defining beauty. 3 November 1936

Beauty and Truth

Is it not true that Beauty and Truth are always one — wherever there is Beauty there is Truth too?

In beauty there is the truth of beauty. What do you mean by Truth? There are truths of various kinds and they are not all beautiful. 10 September 1933

The Good and the Beautiful

In one of his recent essays, Rabindranath Tagore says that goodness and beauty are so intimately correlated that they are always found together. “The good is necessarily beautiful,” he says, and “Beauty is the picture of the good; goodness is the reality behind beauty.”

I can't say that I understand these epigrammatic sentences. What is meant by good? what is meant by beauty? The divine Good is no doubt necessarily beautiful, because on a higher plane good and beauty and all else that is divine in origin meet, coalesce, harmonise. But what men call good is often ugly or drab or unattractive. Human beauty is not always the picture of the good, it is sometimes the mask of evil — the reality behind that mask is not always goodness. These things are obvious, but probably Rabindranath meant good and beauty in their higher aspects or their essence. 9 September 1937

Experience of Beauty

In a recent poem, Harin makes the following observation on Beauty:

Beauty is not an attitude of sense
Nor an inherent something everywhere,
But keen reality of experience
Of which even beauty is all unaware,
Adding to it a living truth; intense
And ever living, that were else, not there.

How far is it correct to say that Beauty has no objective existence in itself and that it consists only of the subjective experience of the observer?

All things are creations of the Universal Consciousness, Beauty also. The “experience” of the individual is his response or his awakening to the beauty which the Universal Consciousness has placed in things; that beauty is not created by the individual consciousness. The philosophy of these lines is not at all clear. It says that the experience of beauty is a living truth added to beauty, a truth of which beauty is unaware. But if beauty is only the experience itself, then the experience constitutes beauty, it does not add anything to beauty; for such addition would only be possible if beauty already existed in itself apart from the experience. What is meant by saying that beauty is unaware of the experience which creates it? The passage makes sense only if we suppose it to mean that beauty is a “reality” already existing apart from the experience, but unconscious of itself and the consciousness of experience is therefore a living truth added to the unconscious reality, something which brings into it consciousness and life.

6 January 1937