

EDITORIAL

Once upon a time, bored with the drudgery of their heavenly duties and cosmic functions, the gods, approached Brahma, the Creator and asked him to make something that is pleasant to look at, lovely to meditate on and enjoyable to be with. The Creator, having considered the seriousness of the request, distilled all the four *Vedas* into *nātya-veda* (dance-drama). This was supposed to be the *Veda* of creative art. Dance-drama, he said, “as creative art, will combine what is best from mind and body, spirit and matter, and will engender joy, love and righteousness in all beings. With its charm and beauty it will convey knowledge of life and after life to all men, it will satisfy their desires for play and pleasure, and will remove life’s sufferings.” This myth of the *Veda* of the creative art with which Bharata, the ancient Indian aesthetician opens his book on *Nātyaśāstra* (the science of dance-drama: a basic classic on Indian aesthetics) really brings to light several aspects of aesthetic experience and its relation to religious experience.

Religion and art have this in common : they create syntheses from the disparate elements of life. Destined to live in a world of war and violence, death and decay man is always struggling to maintain a flowing, yet consistent rhythm of his life. To maintain a harmony between the individual and his cosmos, between body and soul, matter and spirit is the quest of many religions. A harmony between the visualized and the experienced, the subjective and the objective is what is sought in real aesthetic experience. Attempts are often made to work out an ultimate synthesis of all aesthetic experiences, elevating it to the experience of the divine. Indian aesthetics has a special tendency in this direction, because *rasā* (aesthetic experience) is understood to spring from the inner vibrations of the divine within man. Sri Aurobindo explains this in a particularly beautiful way :

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 in matter. . . . Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine, but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual. Beauty is *Ānanda* (bliss) taking form. . . . Beyond manifestation beauty loses

itself in *Ānanda* (*The Future Poetry, Birth Centenary Library, vol. 9, p. 491*).

That which is *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* (being, consciousness and bliss) takes name and form (*nāmarūpa*) in the beauties of nature. Beauty is a form of *ānanda*, is created by *ānanda*, and finds its rest and response in *ānanda* itself. Love and beauty are powers of *ānanda* in the same way that light and knowledge are powers of consciousness. Aesthetically, *ānanda* (bliss) appears as *rasā* and the enjoyment of this *rasā* is the mind's and senses' reaction to the perception of beauty. As love needs a lover and beloved, beauty needs a form to manifest itself. Here comes the relevance of art. Art is the discovery and revelation of beauty. The artist tries to perpetuate that blissful moment of his ecstatic vision, that inner experience by which he imbues an object with life, raises it from "thingliness" to existence (*sat*), from existence to *logos* (*cit*) and from *logos* to *ānanda* (bliss). The artist is in agony until he communicates his vision. He gives himself self-lessly to his creation as the divine in Indian tradition gave of itself as a sacrifice, thus expressing the invisible in visible names and forms. An artist is a *karmayogin*, a person who reflects divine creativity on earth.

In this issue, the *Journal of Dharma* is bringing to its readers reflections on "Religion and Art". We are especially pleased to point out that many of our contributors are artists themselves, who reflect on what they perform or enjoy. We begin with a meditation on the narrative structure in Indian traditional art, by the artist Jyoti Sahi. Carefully going through the different aspects of this narrative structure such as story (*katha*), text (*padya*), music (*gīta*), gesture (*abhinaya*) and *rasā* (aesthetic experience), Jyoti Sahi successfully unveils the dynamics of inner joy or bliss in Indian aesthetics. This is followed by another study of ancient art, namely the iconography of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, by Ursula King. The sculptor Caroline Mackenzie then presents her own personal reflections on the great Indian Epic the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Alienation and reunion are favourite themes in the contemporary world. Caroline takes us to the epic world of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and vividly describes how the heroes in this epic experienced and overcame the loss and alienation in different phases of their lives.

From sculpture, painting and literature we come to music and art. Music combines sound and the sacred, and is often considered to be a powerful means of prayer. True to this tradition M. Amaladoss,

himself a musician, presents his reflection on music as a *sāadhanā* (means) of spiritual self-realization. The rhythm of the body follows the rhythm of sound. Dance complements music. The sound of the sacred in dance is the favourite theme of Francis Barboza. Himself a well known dancer in the Indian classical style of *Bharata nāṭyam* Barboza narrates his autobiographical story of dancing Christian themes in India.

Religion and art are thus intimately related. One enriches the other. John Smith throws much light on this interdependent relationship with special reference to the phenomenon of “conversion” in Religious Art. Finally we present a survey of the new experiments in art done in Dharmaram Chapel of the Centre for the study of World Religions, Bangalore. This Chapel demonstrates the birth and evolution of a new school of art in India : Christian art in an Indian style. J. Nereparampil, a young artist, discusses this in the context of Indian traditional art.

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