

Dancing for The Divine

A photographic journey
By
Dr. Susil Pani

"Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire."
From Savitri by Sri Aurobindo



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Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
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‘Savitri’

Sri Aurobindo

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(Quotes: Sri Aurobindo and The Mother
On art and Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Savitri’)



An offering at the feet of The Masters
The Mother and Sri Aurobindo
On the occasion of 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo
(1872 -2022)

Foreword

Dancing for The Divine by Dr Susil Pani is the newest addition to his growing profile as an extraordinary and innovative author. He already has two interesting books under his cap, having presented the 'Study of Temple Cars of South India' an Introduction in Tamil followed by very elaborate English masterpiece. I have witnessed Susil's passion for Photography which he has been nurturing since our medical school days. This passion has evolved over the years and is truly reflected in this beautiful compilation. His deep interest in the art and culture of the Indian Subcontinent reverberates in his books and is lucidly expressed in this new offering. The book is set in an older nostalgic style of pure art form, presented as black and white pictures captured during live dance performances. One knows that from time immemorial Music and Dance has formed the essence of life, being either in the atomic or larger human version. This book evokes the essence of Rasa, which has been presented in the form of pictorial images, which at times transcends into the realm of live paintings. They appear as Mudras from dance recitals, but some may not fit into traditional definition although still as forceful in their depiction of the visual form. The book construes a mosaic of beauty and artistry while affirming an eye for details by the author. Each picture captures the visible and transports one into a different realm of consciousness, connecting to the Infinite. This art form assumes a spiritual connotation as we turn the pages. The writings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo on the significance and value of art are quite enriching and enlightening. In addition the precious quote accompanying the pictures from the epic Savitri by Sri Aurobindo transports one to a higher realm. These valuable pearls make you ponder at every image before moving on to the next. Susil's artistic works over the last couple of decades have demonstrated a continuous journey from the physical towards spiritual and panache while satiating the interest of viewers and readers. A great deal of effort has gone into this book and can be considered a pure labour of love for the Divine. I am sure the readers will thoroughly enjoy this work of art.

5th December 2024

Consultant Anaesthesiologist, NHS, England

Dr Aditya Pratap Singh

PREFACE

Good day to my readers. This book has an interesting genesis; the pictures in this book are extracted from the original photographs shot during the 'Sree GeetagoVinda Festival' held in 2014. The festival was held in Bhubaneswar at Rabindra Mandap for three days. The festival's main attraction was that it was one of its kind presenting the entire 'Sree GeetagoVinda' in all its 72 slokas and 24 songs in Odissi dance. The music of the 'Sampoorna GeetagoVinda' was composed by Dr Subas Pani in the year 2008. Bits and pieces from this music album were being used to perform in Odissi dance but also in other Indian classical dances. This festival of 2014 was exclusively in Odissi dance with the young energetic but well established Odissi dancers from all over the country participating. The entire festival of 2014 was under the guidance of the music composer Dr Subas Pani. I was one among the many photographers assigned to document the festival. I enjoyed the task thoroughly and returned to my workplace in Pondicherry. Having couple of thousand pictures, it needed few months for completing the editing during my free time. At the end of about a year, I realised that quite a large number of the pictures looked much better and majestic in black and white rather than in color. Thus I presented my work as an exhibition of Odissi dance pictures, all in black and white at the prestigious 'Sri Aurobindo Ashram Exhibition Hall' in the year 2018. While working on this presentation, I realised that many of the postures and poses were actually some form of traditional dance Mudras. Still some of these pictures didn't fit into any specific dance posture, although they were beautiful and expressive. They conveyed something different; though one could call these as 'abstract', there was a profound Truth underneath.

As I went through this particular collection, a little over hundred pictures emerged. I planned for an exhibition of these pictures in 2021 but due to the pandemic it got delayed. Hence I explored the possibility of finding out if these pictures fit into specific names in dance mudras or postures. But things did not move forwards, much of this idea remained dormant, still looking for some sense of direction to move forwards. Then I got an inspiration from my friend Dr Archana to read writings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo that can relate to these photographs. Thus the concept crystalized to present these pictures along with the writings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Thus the readers will not only get inspired by the great writings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo but also individually receive something subtle conveyed through these images. I am ever grateful to Rabi bhai for guiding me select the appropriate quotations from 'Savitri'.

Dr Susil Pani

24th November, Puducherry



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.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art: Art, Beauty and Ananda



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.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art: Beauty



There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer simply because they spiritually are—because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds,—of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it—as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that however,—what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there—his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be the something More that it is....

But there is one thing more that can be said, and it makes a big difference. In the Yogin's vision of universal beauty all becomes beautiful, but all is not reduced to a single level. There are gradations, there is a hierarchy in this All-Beauty and we see that it depends on the ascending power (Vibhuti) of consciousness and Ananda that expresses itself in the object. All is the Divine, but some things are more divine than others. In the artist's vision too there are or can be gradations, a hierarchy of values.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art: Art for Art's Sake

Music, painting, poetry and many other activities which are of the mind and vital can be used as part of spiritual development or of the work and for a spiritual purpose: it depends on the spirit in which they are done.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Himself and the Ashram: General Rules and Individual Natures





*A faultless beauty comes by Nature's grace;
There liberty is perfection's guarantee;
Although the absolute Image lacks, the Word
Incarnate, the sheer spiritual ecstasy,
All is a miracle of symmetric charm,
A fantasy of perfect line and rule. ||31.2|| from savitri*



*Original and supernal Immanence
Of which all Nature's process is the art,
The cosmic Worker set his secret hand
To turn this frail mud-engine to heaven-use. ||5.30|| FROM SAVITRI*



To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim; but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition, so as to wear thin the crude external crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga - II: Creative Activity

*Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire.*





Art, poetry, music are not yoga, not in themselves things spiritual any more than philosophy is a thing spiritual or Science. There lurks here another curious incapacity of the modern intellect—its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth that the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flashes, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light. It is not less true that, looked at from the peaks, there is not much difference between the high mental eminences and the lower climbings of this external existence. All the energies of the Lila are equal in the sight from above, all are disguises of the Divine. But one has to add that all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine. A philosophic statement about the Atman is a mental formula, not knowledge, not experience; yet sometimes the Divine takes it as a channel of touch; strangely, a barrier in the mind breaks down, something is seen, a profound change operated in some inner part, there enters into the ground of the nature something calm, equal, ineffable. One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite. Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what?—a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother. Similar touches can come through art, music, poetry to their creator or to one who feels the shock of the word, the hidden significance of a form, a message in the sound that carries more perhaps than was consciously meant by the composer. All things in the Lila can turn into windows that open on the hidden Reality. Still so long as one is satisfied with looking through windows, the gain is only initial; one day one will have to take up the pilgrim's staff and start out to journey there where the Reality is for ever manifest and present. Still less can it be spiritually satisfying to remain with shadowy reflections, a search imposes itself for the Light which they strive to figure. But since this Reality and this Light are in ourselves no less than in some high region above the mortal plane, we can in the seeking for it use many of the figures and activities of life; as one offers a flower, a prayer, an act to the Divine, one can offer too a created form of beauty, a song, a poem, an image, a strain of music, and gain through it a contact, a response or an experience. And when that divine consciousness has been entered or when it grows within, then too its expression in life through these things is not excluded from yoga; these creative activities can still have their place, though not intrinsically a greater place than any other that can be put to divine use and service. Art, poetry, music, as they are in their ordinary functioning, create mental and vital, not spiritual values; but they can be turned to a higher end, and then, like all things that are capable of linking our consciousness to the Divine, they are transmuted and become spiritual and can be admitted as part of a life of yoga. All takes new values not from itself, but from the consciousness that uses it; for there is only one thing essential, needful, indispensable, to grow conscious of the Divine Reality and live in it and live it always.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga - I: The Intellect and Yoga

Literature and art are or can be a first introduction to the inner being—the inner mind, vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of Bhakti, poems of divine seeking, etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a Bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana,—but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, "It would be easy for you as you are a poet."

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art: Poetry and Sadhana



When you can sing out of your inner consciousness in which you feel the Mother moving all your actions, there is no reason why you should not do it. The development of capacities is not only permissible but right, when it can be made part of the yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's powers to the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga - II: Consecration and Offering



His only sunlight was his spirit's flame.

Of glimmering points in a vague immensity;





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.

**Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art:
Beauty**

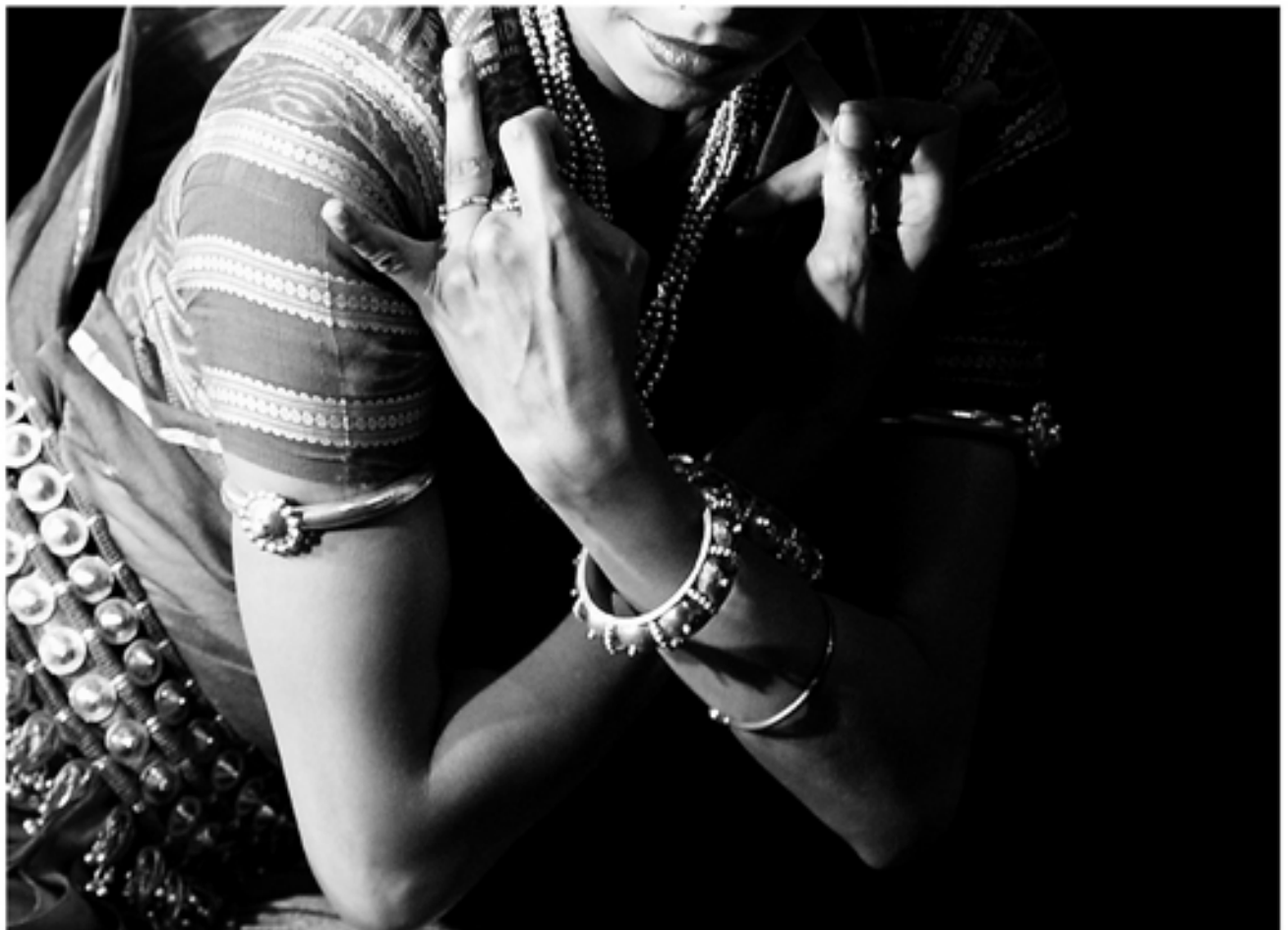


**Beauty is as much an expression of the Divine as Knowledge, Power or Ananda.
Sri Aurobindo, The Mother with Letters on The Mother: The Mother's Attire**



When you can sing out of your inner consciousness in which you feel the Mother moving all your actions, there is no reason why you should not do it. The development of capacities is not only permissible but right, when it can be made part of the yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's powers to the Divine.
Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga - II: Consecration and Offering

They watch the Bliss for which earth's heart has cried





What you write is perfectly true, that all human greatness and fame and achievement are nothing before the greatness of the Infinite and the Eternal. There are two possible deductions from that: first that all human action has to be renounced and one should go into a cave; the other is that one should grow out of ego so that the activities of the nature may become one day consciously an action of the Infinite and Eternal. I myself never gave up poetry or other creative human activities out of tapasyā; they fell into a subordinate position because the inner life became stronger and stronger slowly: nor did I really drop them, only I had so heavy a work laid upon me that I could not find time to go on. But it took me years and years to get the ego out of them or the vital absorption, but I never heard anybody say nor did it ever occur to me that was a proof that I was not born for Yoga
Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art: Poetry and Sadhana

And beauty conquer the resisting world,





Every artist almost (there can be rare exceptions) has got something of the public man in him in his vital-physical parts, which makes him crave for the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity, appreciation, fame. That must go absolutely if you want to be a yogi,—your art must be a service not of your own ego, not of anyone or anything else but solely of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga - II: Sadhana through Work - II

It is your aim to write from the Divine and for the Divine—you should then try to make all equally a pure transcription from the inner source and where the inspiration fails return upon your work so as to make the whole worthy of its origin and its object. All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.





The Mother on Beauty, Art and Yoga

Is it possible for a Yogi to become an artist or can an artist be a Yogi? What is the relation of Art to Yoga?

The two are not so antagonistic as you seem to think. There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga, there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint.

It is no longer the one supreme all-engrossing thing for you, no longer an end in itself. Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature.





In the physical world, of all things it is beauty that expresses best the Divine. The physical world is the world of form and the perfection of form is beauty. Beauty interprets, expresses, and manifests the Eternal. Its role is to put all manifested nature in contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, through harmony and a sense of the ideal which uplifts and leads towards something higher.

The Mother, On Education: Arts



His only sunlight was his spirit's flame.



Alive to the truth that dwells in God's extremes,
Awake to a motion of all-seeing Force,

But does an artist feel at all any impulse to create once he takes up Yoga?

Why should he not have the impulse? He can express his relation with the Divine in the way of his art, exactly as he would in any other. If you want art to be the true and highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from Yoga. But most often the artist has only an indefinite feeling, he has not the knowledge. Still, I knew some who had it; they worked consciously at their art with the knowledge. In their creation they did not put forward their personality as the most important factor; they considered their work as an offering to the Divine, they tried to express by it their relation with the Divine.

This was the avowed function of Art in the Middle Ages. The "primitive" painters, the builders of cathedrals in Mediaeval Europe had no other conception of art. In India all her architecture, her sculpture, her painting have proceeded from this source and were inspired by this ideal. The songs of Mirabai and the music of Thyagaraja, the poetic literature built up by her devotees, saints and Rishis rank among the world's greatest artistic possessions.





But does the work of an artist improve if he does Yoga? The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation? I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had visions and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups and downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, he began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist.





Supreme art expresses the Beauty which puts you in contact with the Divine Harmony.

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The Mother, On Education: Arts





Why are artists generally irregular in their conduct and loose in character?

When they are so, it is because they live usually in the vital plane, and the vital part in them is extremely sensitive to the forces of that world and receives from it all kinds of impressions and impulses over which they have no controlling power. And often too they are very free in their minds and do not believe in the petty social conventions and moralities that govern the life of ordinary people. They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them. As there is nothing to check the movements of their desire-being, they lead easily a life of liberty or license. But this does not happen with all. I lived ten years among artists and found many of them to be bourgeois to the core; they were married and settled, good fathers, good husbands, and lived up to the most strict moral ideas of what should and what should not be done.

There is one way in which Yoga may stop the artist's productive impulse. If the origin of his art is in the vital world, once he becomes a Yogi he will lose his inspiration or, rather, the source from which his inspiration used to come will inspire him no more, for then the vital world appears in its true light; it puts on its true value, and that value is very relative. Most of those who call themselves artists draw their inspiration from the vital world only; and it carries in it no high or great significance. But when a true artist, one who looks for his creative source to a higher world, turns to Yoga, he will find that his inspiration becomes more direct and powerful and his expression clearer and deeper. Of those who possess a true value the power of Yoga will increase the value, but from one who has only some false appearance of art even that appearance will vanish or else lose its appeal. To one earnest in Yoga, the first simple truth that strikes his opening vision is that what he does is a very relative thing in comparison with the universal manifestation, the universal movement. But an artist is usually vain and looks on himself as a highly important personage, a kind of demigod in the human world. Many artists say that if they did not believe what they do to be of a supreme importance, they would not be able to do it. But I have known some whose inspiration was from a higher world and yet they did not believe that what they did was of so immense an importance. That is nearer the spirit of true art. If a man is truly led to express himself in art, it is the way the Divine has chosen to manifest in him, and then by Yoga his art will gain and not lose. But there is all the question: is the artist appointed by the Divine or self-appointed?

The Mother, Questions and Answers (1929 - 1931): 28
July 1929



Supreme art expresses the Beauty which puts you in contact with the Divine Harmony.
The Mother, On Education: Arts



If art is to manifest something in the divine Life, there also a vast and luminous peace must express itself
The Mother, On Education: Arts

Beauty is the joyous offering of Nature. The Mother, On Education: Arts





True art means the expression of beauty in the material world. In a world wholly converted, that is to say, expressing integrally the divine reality, art must serve as the revealer and teacher of this divine beauty in life. The Mother, On Education: Arts

You cannot learn to be an artist with tricks—it is as if you wanted to realise the Divine by imitating religious ceremonies. Above all and always the most important thing is Sincerity. Develop your inner being—find your soul, and at the same time you will find the true artistic expression. The Mother, On Education: Arts





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Try to develop your consciousness, endeavour to discover your soul, and then what you will do will be truly interesting.
The Mother, On Education: Arts

Artistic sensibility: a powerful aid to fight ugliness.





Spiritual beauty has a contagious power.

Beauty does not get its full power except when it is surrendered to the Divine.

The beauty of tomorrow manifesting the Divine: a beauty that exists only by the Divine and for the Divine.





Beauty is not sufficient in itself, it wants to become divine.

Pure sense of beauty can be acquired only through a great purification.

**The ideal of Beauty moves towards its infinite goal.
The Mother, Words of the Mother - III: Beauty**





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.
Sri Aurobindo 19 February 1934

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.
Sri Aurobindo 23 August 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.

Sri Aurobindo 14 December 1936

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.

Sri Aurobindo 19 September 1933





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.
Sri Aurobindo 14 March 1933

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.
Sri Aurobindo 16 February 1935

A rapture and a radiance and a hush,



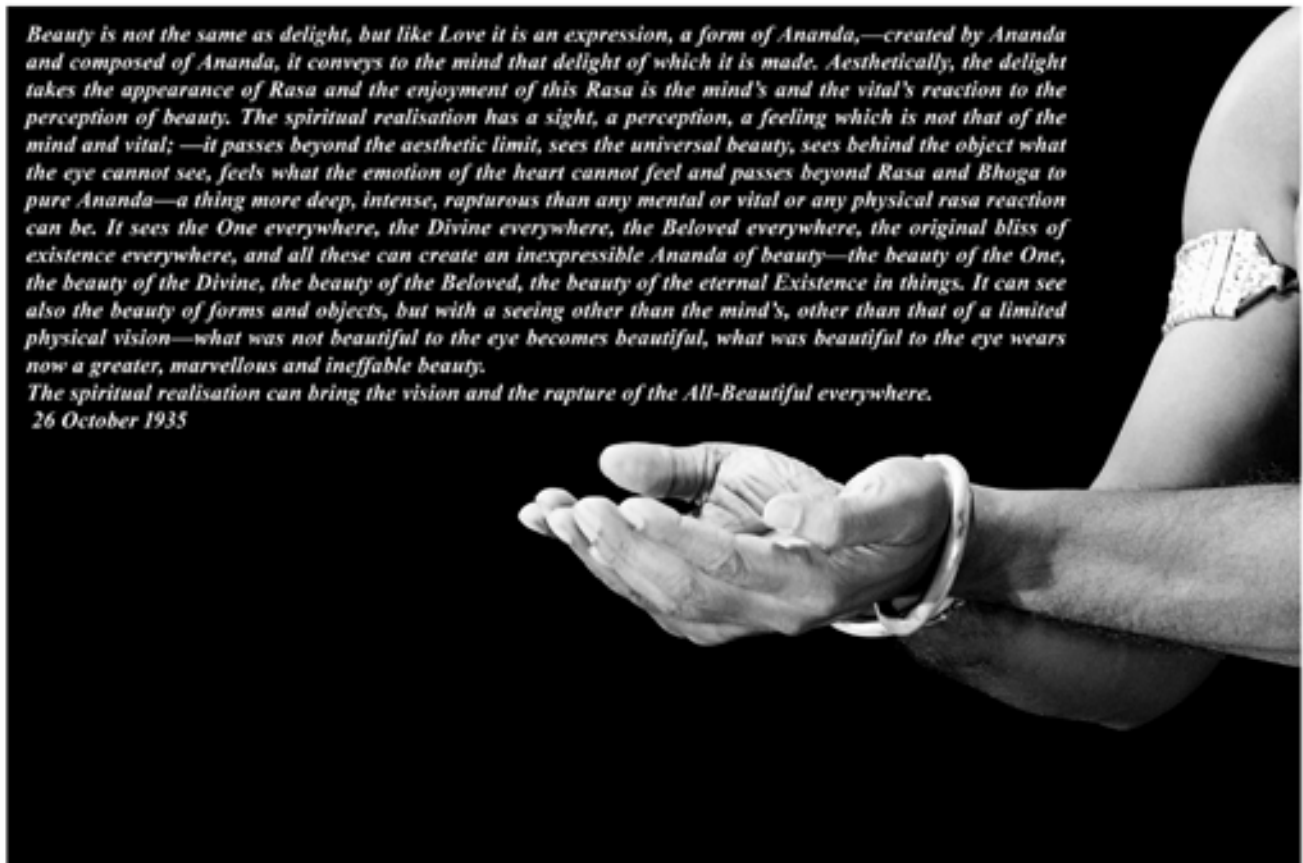


*Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.
This little being of Time, this shadow soul,*

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



*And, flaming with the paradisal touch
In a rose-fire of sweet spiritual grace,
In the red passion of its infinite change,
Quiver, awake, and shudder with ecstasy*



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.

*SRI AUROBINDO
4 November 1935*





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.

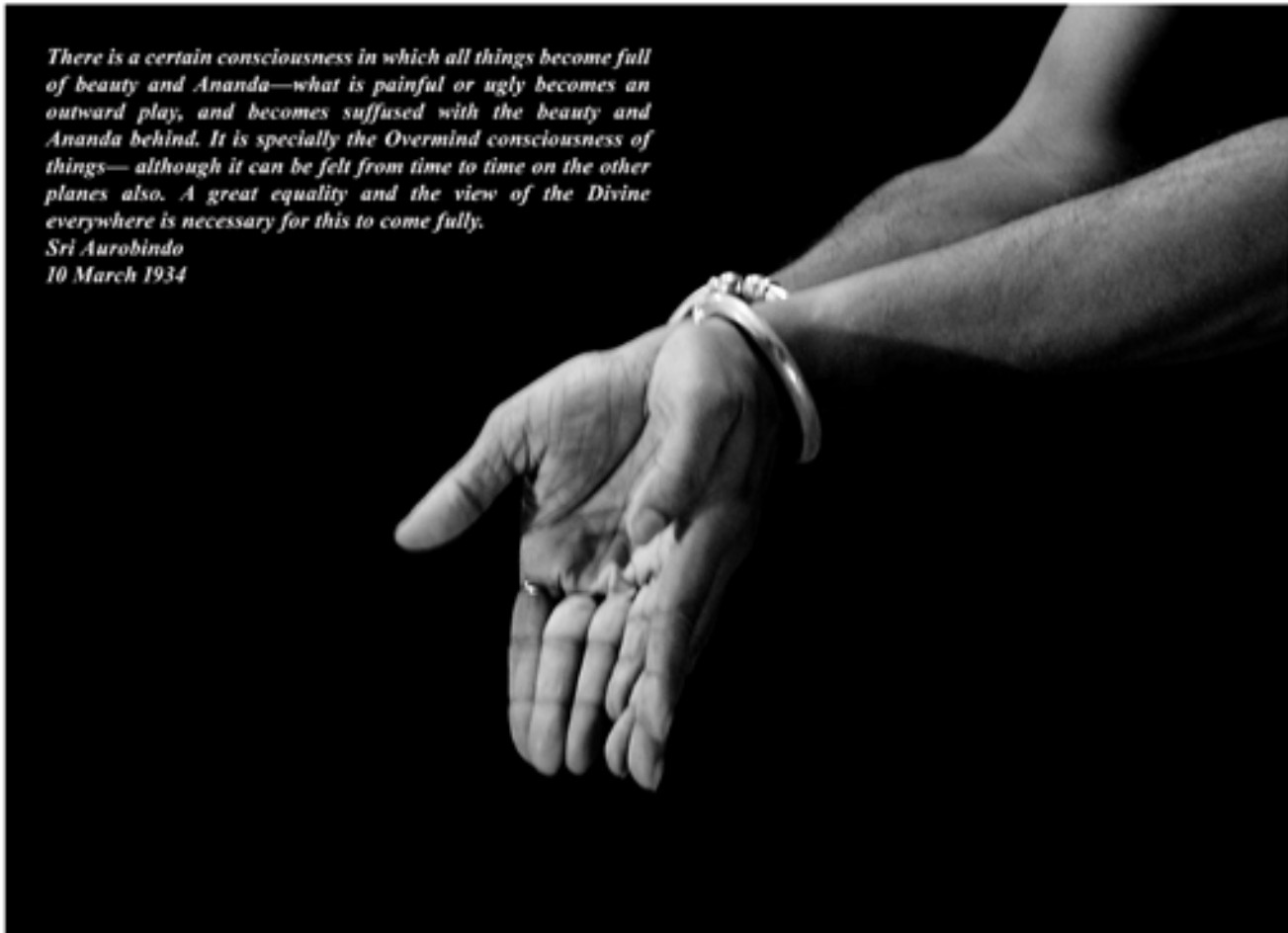
Sri Aurobindo

7 November 1935

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.

Sri Aurobindo

10 March 1934





As you say, there is a truth behind Tagore's statement. (I It is not known to what "statement" Sri Aurobindo is referring here.—Ed.) 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 vi'svarasa 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 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. I
Sri Aurobindo, 0 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.

Sri Aurobindo

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.

Sri Aurobindo 6 January 1937

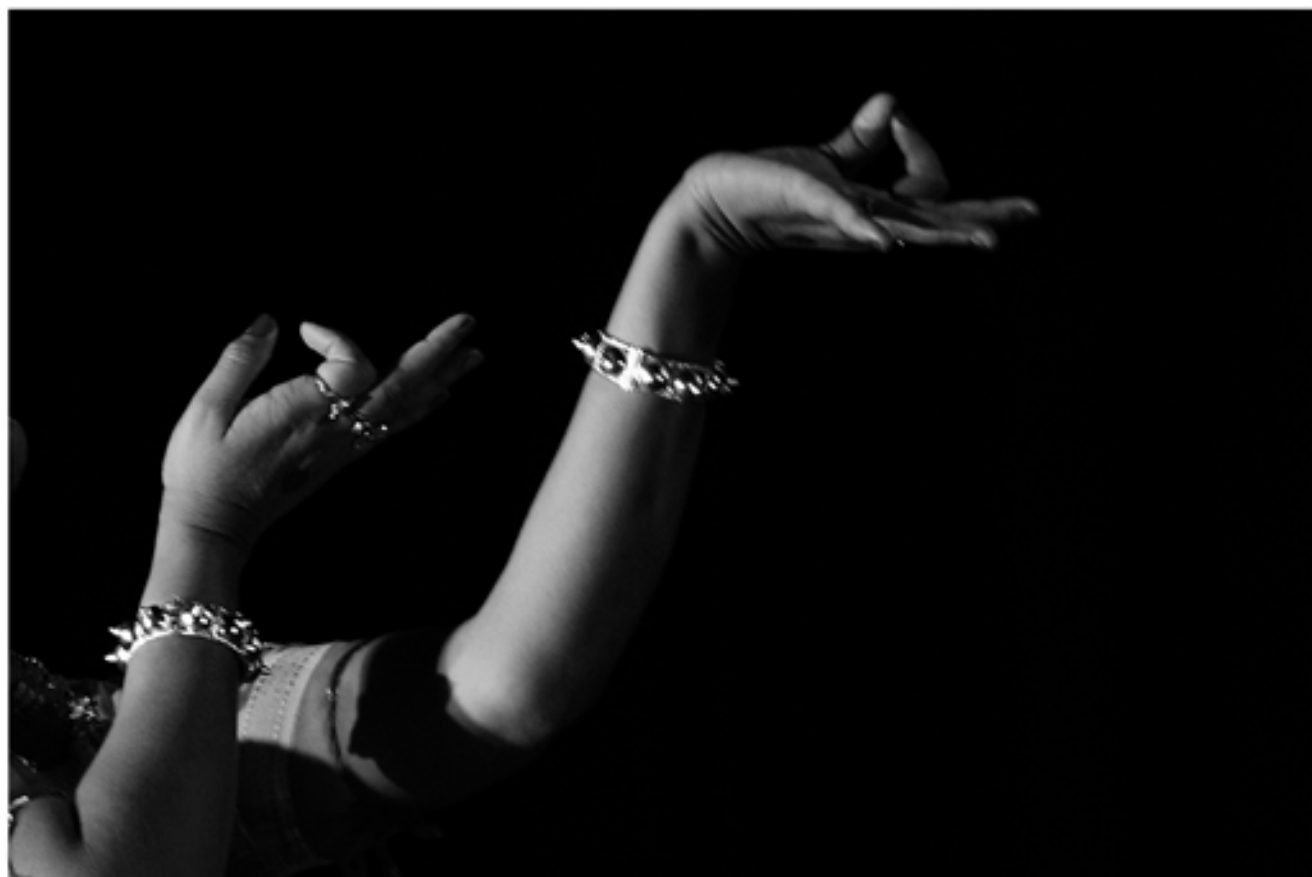


*A phenomenon stands out significant
Against dim backgrounds of eternity;*



The Right Way of Appreciating Beauty

That is the right consciousness, not to desire or to be attached to the possession of anything for oneself, but to take the universal beauty etc. for a spiritual selfless Ananda. Sri Aurobindo, 6 November 1933.



There is nothing harmful in the thing [aspiration for beauty] itself—on the contrary to awake to the universal beauty and refinement of the Mahalakshmi force is good. It is not an expression of greed or lust—only into these things a perversion can always come if one allows it, as into the Mahakali experience there may come rajasic anger and violence, so here there may come vital passion for possession and enjoyment. One must look at the beauty as the artist does without desire of possession or vital enjoyment of the lower kind. Sri Aurobindo 8 October 1933

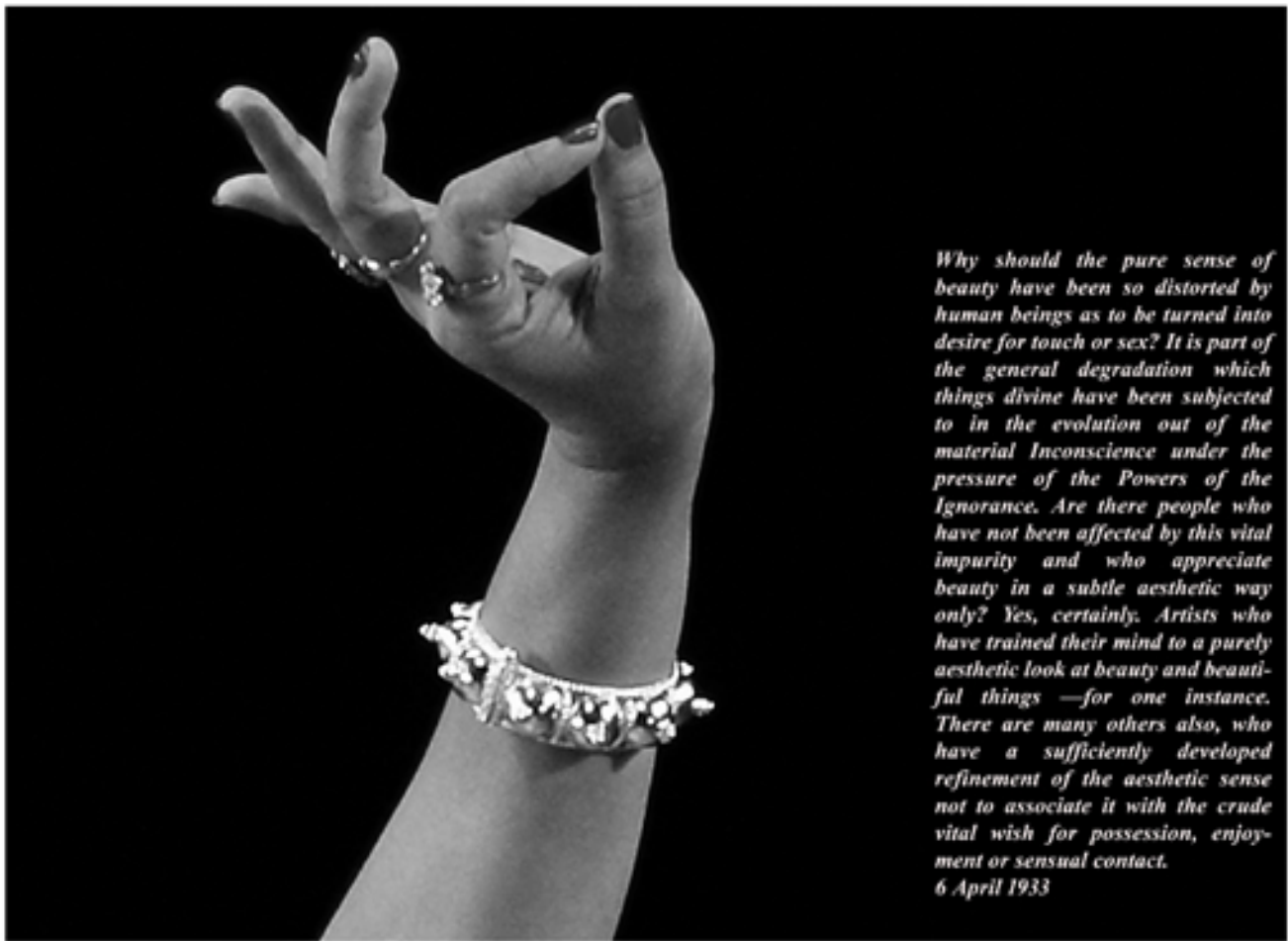




Is it possible to get rid of vital impurities without getting rid of vital enjoyment? How can that be done? The enjoyment you speak of is vital physical, while beauty has to be enjoyed with the aesthetic sense —either human or divinised. 6 April 1933



It is usually a good rule for other inward things beside the appreciation of the beauty of Nature—to keep it for oneself or else to share it only with those who have the same sense or the same experience. 15 March 1934



*Why should the pure sense of beauty have been so distorted by human beings as to be turned into desire for touch or sex? It is part of the general degradation which things divine have been subjected to in the evolution out of the material Inconscience under the pressure of the Powers of the Ignorance. Are there people who have not been affected by this vital impurity and who appreciate beauty in a subtle aesthetic way only? Yes, certainly. Artists who have trained their mind to a purely aesthetic look at beauty and beautiful things —for one instance. There are many others also, who have a sufficiently developed refinement of the aesthetic sense not to associate it with the crude vital wish for possession, enjoyment or sensual contact.
6 April 1933*



The aesthetic and impersonal vision of things can develop into the sight of the Divine Beauty everywhere which is in its nature entirely pure. 19 April 1933

What is the difference between the artistic look and the vital look? In the artistic look there is only the perception of beauty and the joy of it because it exists and one has seen and felt it. There is no desire to possess or enjoy in the vital way. 4 August 1933

Beauty in Women

In regard to beauty in women, is there something inherent in the body that we call beautiful, a well-formed shape, physiognomy, harmony of movements, etc. It seems to most men it is colour + skin + physiognomy. But there are some women who do not have these in the body and yet are attractive. Is it something in their vital that gives them this beauty? It is something vital in some cases, something psychic in others that gives a beauty which appears in the body but is not beauty of shape, colour or texture. Often the vital and mental character of persons who have physical beauty is not good, sometimes it is even repulsive. Many would refuse to recognise it as beautiful. If it is vital in its origin, it need not come from beauty of mind or character; it is something in the life-force which may go with a good character but also with a bad one. Indians hardly appreciate the beauty of the Chinese or Japanese; like Europeans, they cannot appreciate beauty in Negroes. Many Asiatics could not appreciate the beauty of European models or actresses, who are so lacking in modesty according to their conceptions. Modesty is not part of physical beauty, that is a mental-vital element. As for physical beauty, different races have different conceptions. Indians and Europeans like curves, Chinese detest them in a woman. An intellectual would find beauty only in an intellectual woman; an emotional person would call a woman beautiful only if she has refined tender feelings; for a Gandhian a woman would be beautiful only if she spins eight hours a day or works for Harijans. That has nothing to do with beauty in the ordinary sense as it is beauty of intellect or beauty of character or beauty of spinning and Harijani sing.



Perhaps at a certain stage of psychic development one could look at human beauty as one looks at beauty in cats or dogs—recognising the beauty without any attraction. One can recognise and feel without any desire of possession or sexual feeling etc. That is how the artists look at beauty—they delight in it for its own sake. Supposing people developed the faculty of seeing the layers below the skin, would not their whole conception of beauty crumble down? Yes, probably, unless the mind reconstructed a new idea of it. Does not the conception of beauty differ according to race, temperament and level of consciousness? Yes. Are not attractiveness and beauty different? Yes. Is there nothing constant called "beauty"? There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty which is seen by the inner eye, heard by the inner ear etc.—but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions. There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony.

18 October 1935





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.

Beauty is as much an expression of the Divine as Knowledge, Power or Ananda.





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.



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

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer, simply because they spiritually are — because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds, — of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it — as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that, however; what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there, his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be, the something More that it is. . . .



But there is one thing more that can be said, and that makes a big difference. In the Yogin's vision of universal beauty, all becomes beautiful, but all is not reduced to a single level. There are gradations, there is a hierarchy in this All-Beauty and we see that it depends on the ascending power (Vibhuti) of Consciousness and Ananda that expresses itself in the object. All is the Divine, but some things are more divine than others. In the artist's vision too there are or can be gradations, a hierarchy of values.

Music, painting, poetry and many other activities which are of the mind and vital can be used as part of spiritual development or of the work and for a spiritual purpose: it depends on the spirit in which they are done.





To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim, but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition so as to wear thin the crude external crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.



Art, poetry, music are not yoga, not in themselves things spiritual any more than philosophy is a thing spiritual or science. There lurks here another curious incapacity of the modern intellect — its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth that the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flashes, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light. It is not less true that, looked at from the peaks, there is not much difference between the high mental eminences and the lower climbings of this external existence. All the energies of the Lila are equal in the sight from above, all are disguises of the Divine. But one has to add that all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine.... All things in the Lila can turn into windows that open on the hidden Reality. Still so long as one is satisfied with looking through windows, the gain is only initial; one day one will have to take up the pilgrim's staff and start out to journey there where the Reality is for ever manifest and present. Still less can it be spiritually satisfying to remain with shadowy reflections, a search imposes itself for the Light which they strive to figure. But since this Reality and this Light are in ourselves no less than in some high region above the mortal plane, we can in the seeking for it use many of the figures and activities of life; as one offers a flower, a prayer, an act to the Divine, one can offer too a created form of beauty, a song, a poem, an image, a strain of music, and gain through it a contact, a response or an experience. And when that divine consciousness has been entered or when it grows within, then too its expression in life through these things is not excluded from yoga; these creative activities can still have their place, though not intrinsically a greater place than any other that can be put to divine use and service. Art, poetry, music, as they are in their ordinary functioning, create mental and vital, not spiritual values; but they can be turned to a higher end, and then, like all things that are capable of linking our consciousness to the Divine, they are transmuted and become spiritual and can be admitted as part of a life of yoga. All takes new values not from itself, but from the consciousness that uses it; for there is only one thing essential, needful, indispensable, to grow conscious of the Divine Reality and live in it and live it always.





Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for Sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and Sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental development and social contact occupy all the time, then that is not Sadhana. Also the poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact with the Divine through inspiration or of the expression of one's own inner being as it was written formerly by those who left behind them so much devotional and spiritual poetry in India; it does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the western artist or litterateur. Even works or meditation cannot succeed unless they are done in the right spirit of consecration and spiritual aspiration gathering up the whole being and dominating all else.

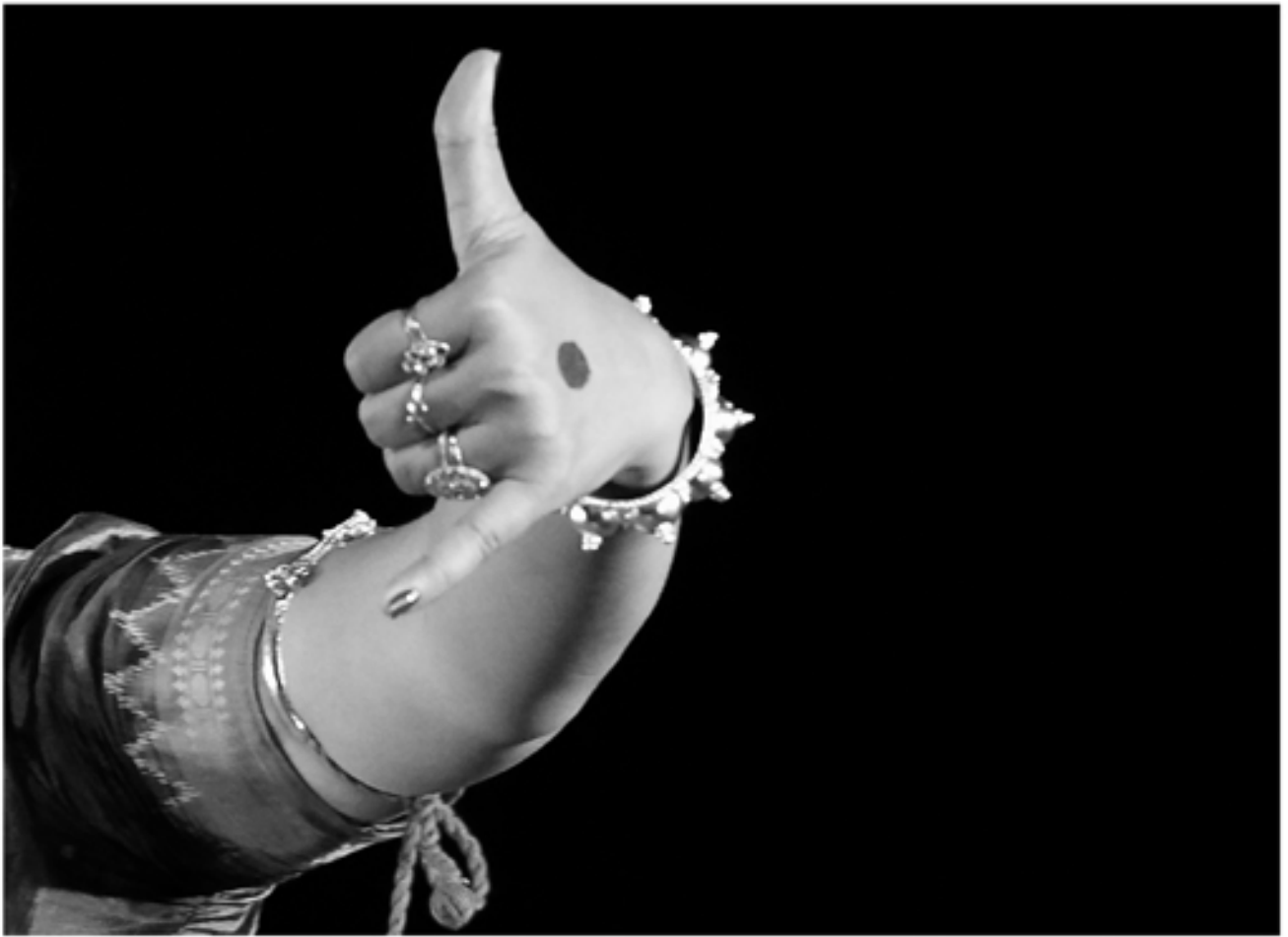




I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. It is a mistake to do so out of asceticism or with the idea of tapasya. One can stop these things when they drop of themselves, because one is full of experience and so interested in one's inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up; for there is no reason why poetry etc. should not be part of sadhana. The love of applause, the desire for fame, the ego-reaction have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself. Your vital needs some activity — most vitals do — and to deprive it of its outlet, an outlet that can be helpful and not harmful, makes it sulking, indifferent and desponding or else inclined to revolt at any moment and throw up the sponge. Without the assent of the vital it is difficult to do sadhana — it non-cooperates, or it watches with a grim, even if silent dissatisfaction ready to express at any moment doubt and denial; or it makes a furious effort and then falls back saying: "I have got nothing." The mind by itself cannot do much, it must have support from the vital and for that the vital must be in a cheerful and acquiescent state. It has the joy of creation and there is nothing spiritually wrong in creative action. Why deny your vital this joy of outflow?

Literature and art are or can be a first introduction to the inner being — the inner mind, vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of Bhakti, poems of divine seeking, etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a Bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, "It would be easy for you as you are a poet."





His boundless thought was neighbour to cosmic sight:

When you can sing out of your inner consciousness in which you feel the Mother moving all your actions, there is no reason why you should not do it. The development of capacities is not only permissible but right, when it can be made part of the yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's powers to the Divine.



What you write is perfectly true, that all human greatness and fame and achievement are nothing before the greatness of the Infinite and the Eternal. There are two possible deductions from that: first that all human action has to be renounced and one should go into a cave; the other is that one should grow out of ego so that the activities of the nature may become one day consciously an action of the Infinite and Eternal. I myself never gave up poetry or other creative human activities out of tapasya; they fell into a subordinate position because the inner life became stronger and stronger slowly: nor did I really drop them, only I had so heavy a work laid upon me that I could not find time to go on. But it took me years and years to get the ego out of them or the vital absorption, but I never heard anybody say nor did it ever occur to me that that was a proof that I was not born for Yoga.



Every artist almost (there can be rare exceptions) has got something of the public man in him in his vital-physical parts, which makes him crave for the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity, appreciation, fame. That must go absolutely if you want to be a yogi, — your art must be a service not of your own ego, not of anyone or anything else but solely of the Divine.





It is your aim to write from the Divine and for the Divine — you should then try to make all equally a pure transcription from the inner source and where the inspiration fails return upon your work so as to make the whole worthy of its origin and its object. All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.

That are but Energy's self-repeating whorls





*A scene was set for Nature's conscious play.
Then stirred the Spirit's mute immobile sleep;*

Awaited life and sense and waking Mind.





*A serpent Power twinned the insensible Force.
Islands of living dotted lifeless Space
And germs of living formed in formless air.
A Life was born that followed Matter's law,*

*Ephemeral in a blank eternity,
Infinitesimal in a dead Infinite.*





A dream of living woke in Matter's heart

Ever inconstant, yet for ever the same,





And purposeful movements in unthinking forms

*Ephemeral in a blank eternity,
Infinitesimal in a dead Infinite.*





Ever inconstant, yet for ever the same,

And purposeful movements in unthinking forms



*Helpless and indistinct came pleasure and pain
Trembling with the first faint thrills of a World-Soul.
A strength of life that could not cry or move,
Yet broke into beauty signing some deep delight:*



Throbs of the heart of an unknowing world,





A godhead woke but lay with dreaming limbs;

Life hid in her pulse occult of growth and power





Charged with world-power, instinct with living force.

The strength in her yearning for sun and light





Absorbed she dreamed content with beauty and hue.

*The magic was chiselled of a conscious form;
Its tranced vibrations rhythmmed a quick response,*





Awoke in Matter spirit's identity

*There too the golden Messengers can come:
A door is cut in the mud wall of self;*





Its reign of heavenly phenomenon.

*The eternal Entity prepares within
Its matter of divine felicity,*





*Compelling, incarnate in a human form
And breathing in limbs that one can touch and clasp,
Its Knowledge to rescue an ancient Ignorance,*

*Our hearts are captured by ensnaring shapes,
Our very senses blindly seek for bliss.*





*To fill this image of our transience,
All shall be captured by delight, transformed:
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a ligh*

*Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.
This little being of Time, this shadow soul,*





*A work is done in the deep silences;
A glory and wonder of spiritual sense,
A laughter in beauty's everlasting space
Transforming world-experience into joy,
Inhabit the mystery of the untouched gulfs;
Lulled by Time's beats eternity sleeps in us.*

*Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.
This little being of Time, this shadow soul,*





Her quiet visage still and sweet and calm,

*And, flaming with the paradisaal touch
In a rose-fire of sweet spiritual grace,
In the red passion of its infinite change,
Quiver, awake, and shudder with ecstasy*





*A foresight comes of some immense release,
Our will lifts towards it slow and shaping hands.
Each part in us desires its absolute.
Our thoughts covet the everlasting Light,
Our strength derives from an omnipotent Force,
And since from a veiled God-joy the worlds were made
And since eternal Beauty asks for form*

*Our hearts are captured by ensnaring shapes,
Our very senses blindly seek for bliss*





*To fill this image of our transience,
All shall be captured by delight, transformed:
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a light*



*Compelling, incarnate in a human form
And breathing in limbs that one can touch and clasp,
Its Knowledge to rescue an ancient Ignorance,*