



LOTUS, DETAIL OF CEILING
Ajanta

INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF EASTERN ASIA

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THAT Asia, in all her diversity, is nevertheless a living spiritual unity, was first and eloquently affirmed by Okakura in 1904. This diversity in unity embraces at the very least one half of the cultural inheritance of humanity.¹ Yet it is still customary in Europe to compile histories of art, aesthetics, or philosophy in general with tacit claims to universality, while in fact such works are restricted in contents to the history of Europe. What has been learned about Asia remains at best a series of disconnected facts, apparently arbitrary, because not exhibited in relation to a human will. It will be self-evident then that the true discovery of Asia represents for the majority an adventure still to be achieved. Without some knowledge of Asia, no modern civilization can come into maturity, no modern individual can be regarded as civilized, or even fully aware of what is properly his own. Not that Asia can have importance for Europe as a model—in hybrid styles, Chinoi-

¹Strzygowski's division of Asia into North and South, and exclusion (ZDMG., N.F....10, p. 105) of the South, seems to me to be based on a mistaken conception of the sources and significance of Mazdaism. It is valid only to this extent, that whereas in India the development of devotional (*bhakti*) theism involved a predominance of anthropomorphic imagery during the last two thousand years, the Far East, had it not been influenced by the iconographic necessities of Buddhism, might have remained predominantly aniconic from first to last. Thus Central and Far Eastern Asia (the "North") may be said to owe their anthropomorphic art to a movement of southern origin: but it has also to be remembered that an aniconic style of animal, plant or landscape symbolism, originated in a long pre-Aryan antiquity and was a common property of all Asia, and that this style has survived in all areas, the Indian "South" by no means representing an exception.

series, authentic forms are merely caricatured, whereas a genuine assimilation of new cultural ideas should and can only result in a development formally altogether different from that of the original mode. What Asia signifies for Europe is means to the enlargement of experience, means to culture in the highest sense of the word, that is to an impartial knowledge of style; and this implies a better understanding of the nature of man, a prerequisite condition of cooperation.

It must not be supposed that we can take possession of new experiences without effort or preparation of any kind. It is not enough to admire only what happens to appeal to our taste at first sight; our liking may be based on purely accidental qualities or on some complete misunderstanding. Far better to begin by accepting for the time being, the dicta of competent authority as to what is great and typical in Asiatic art, and then to seek to understand it. We must particularly remember that no art is exotic, quaint, or arbitrary in its own environment, and that if any of these terms suggest themselves to us, we are still far removed from any understanding of what is before us. It is hard for most people to appreciate even the art of mediaeval Europe. Science and art are nowadays so far confused that we often hear in a museum the remark, "That was before they knew anything about anatomy": handicraft so unfamiliar that we hear still oftener the inquiry, "Was that all made by hand?" Edification and theology are so far from the interests of the majority that the once indivisible connection of religion with art is now conceived as an infringement of human liberty. Modern academic experimental study of the psychology of art² seeks only to discover what kinds of aesthetic surfaces compose the most comfortable environment (it is hardly to be wondered at that tired business men are willing to endow researches of this sort). Moreover, to the modern consciousness, art is an individual creation, produced only by persons of peculiar sensibilities working in studios and driven by an irresistible urge to self-expression. We think of art, not as the *form* of our civilization, but as a mysterious quality to be found in certain kinds of things, proper to be "collected," and to be exhibited in museums and galleries. Whereas Christian art and the arts of Asia have always been produced, not by amateurs, but by trained professional craftsmen, proximately as utilities, ultimately *ad majorem gloriam Dei*.

²"It is lost time to converse with you, whose works are only Analytic."

We approach the essential problem, What is art? What are the values of art from an Asiatic point of view? A clear and adequate definition can be found in Indian works on rhetoric. According to the *Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, I, 3, *Vākyaṁ rasātmakam kāvyaṁ*³ "Art is a statement informed by ideal beauty." Statement is the body, *rasa* the soul of the work; the statement and the beauty cannot be divided as separate identities. The nature of the statement is immaterial, for all conceivable statements about God must be true. It is only essential that a necessity for the particular statement should have existed, that the artist should have been identified in consciousness with the theme. Further, as there are two Truths, absolute and relative (*vidyā and avidyā*), so there are two Beauties the one absolute or ideal, the other relative, and better termed loveliness, because determined by human affections. These two are clearly distinguished in Indian aesthetics.

The first, *rasa*,⁴ is not an objective quality in art, but a spiritual activity or experience called "tasting" (*āsvāda*); not affective in kind, not dependent on subject matter or texture, whether lovely or unlovely to our taste⁵ but arising from a perfected self-identification with the theme, whatever it may have been. This pure and disinterested aesthetic experience, indistinguishable from knowledge of the impersonal Brahman, impossible to be described otherwise than as an intellectual ecstasy, can be evoked only in the spectator possessing the necessary competence, an inward criterion of truth (*pramāṇa*); as competent, the true critic is called *pramātr*, as enjoyer, *rasika*. That God is the actual theme of all art is suggested by Saṅkarācārya, when he indicates Brahman as the real theme of secular as well as spiritual songs.⁶ More concretely, the master painter is said to be one who can depict the dead without life (*cetana*, sentience), the sleeping possessed of it.⁷ Essentially the same conception of art as the manifestation of an informing energy

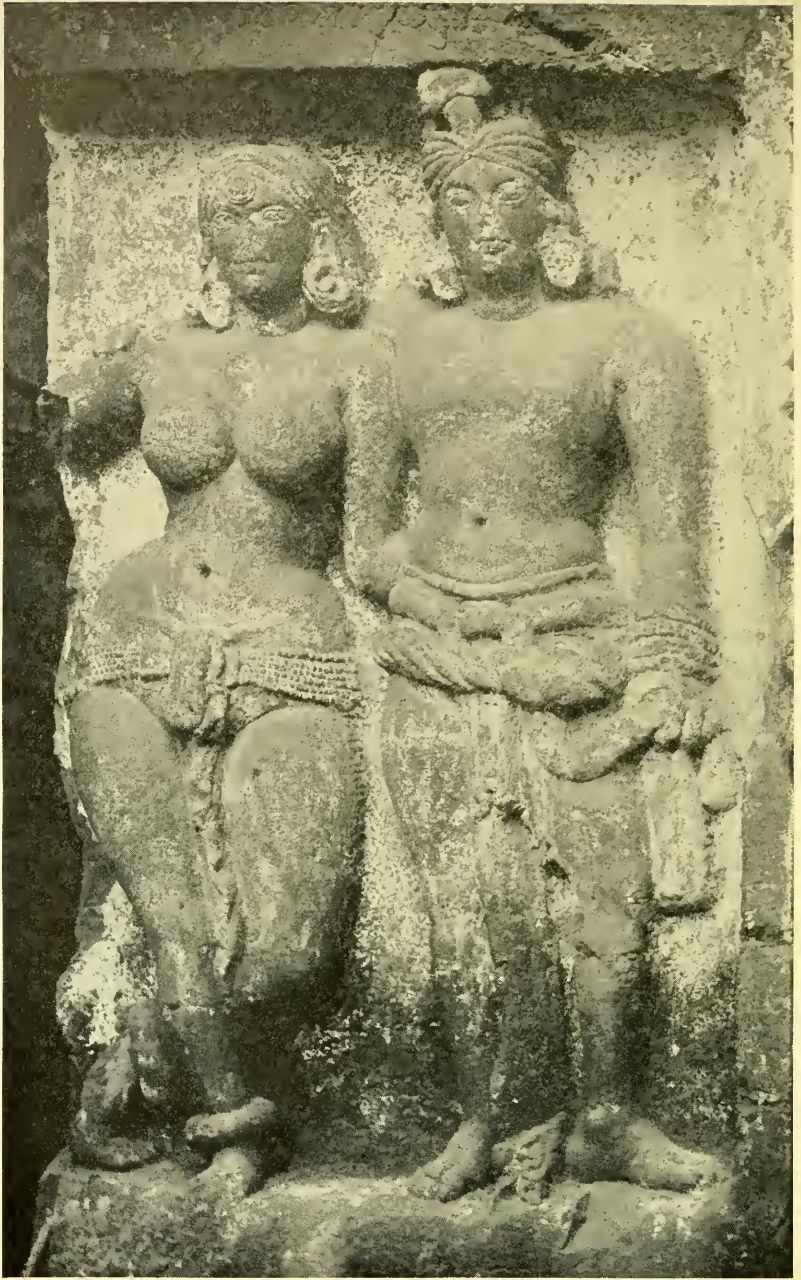
³*Kāvya*, specifically "poetry" (prose or verse) can also be taken in the general sense of "art." Essential meanings present in the root *kū* include wisdom and skill.

⁴*Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, III, 2-3. See also Regnaud, P., *La rhétorique sanskritte*, Paris, 1884, and other works on the Indian *alaṅkāra* literature. It should be noted that the word *rasa* is also used in the plural to denote the different aspects of aesthetic experience with reference to the specific emotional coloring of the source; but the *rasa* which ensues is one and indivisible.

⁵Dhananjaya, *Daśarūpa*, IV, 90.

⁶Commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*, I, 1, 20-21.

⁷*Viṣṇudharmottara*, XLIII, 29.



ROYAL DONORS
Indian

is expressed in China in the first of the Six Canons of Hsieh Ho (fifth century), which requires that a work of art should reveal the operation of the spirit in living forms, the word here used for spirit implying rather the breath of life than a personal deity. (cf. Greek *pnucma*, Sanskrit *prāṇa*.) The Far Eastern insistence on the quality of brush strokes follows naturally; for the brush strokes, as implied in the second of the Canons of Hsieh Ho, form the bones or body of the work; outline, *per se*, merely denotes or connotes, but living brush work makes visible what was invisible.⁸ It is worth noting that a Chinese ink-painting, monochrome but far from monotone, has to be executed once and for all time without hesitation, without deliberation, and no correction is afterwards permissible or possible. Aside from all question of subject matter, the painting itself is thus closer in kind to life, than an oil-painting can ever be.

The opposite of beauty is ugliness, a merely negative quality resulting from the absence of informing energy: which negative quality can occur only in human handiwork, where it plainly expresses the worker's lack of grace, or simple inefficiency. Ugliness cannot appear in Nature, the creative energy being omnipresent and never inefficient. Relative beauty, or loveliness (*raṇya*, *śobha*, etc.⁹) on the other hand, that which is pleasing to the heart, or seductive (*manorama*, *manohara*, etc.) and likewise its opposite, the unlovely or distasteful (*jugupsita*), occurs both in nature and in the themes and textures of art, depending on individual or racial taste. By these tastes our conduct is naturally governed; but conduct itself should approximate to the condition of a disinterested spontaneity, and in any case, if we are to be spiritually refreshed by the spectacle of an alien culture, we must admit the validity of its taste, at least imaginatively and for the time being.

Aesthetic ecstasy, as distinct from the enjoyment of loveliness, is said to arise from the exaltation of the purity (*sattva*) of the *pramātr*, which purity is an internal quality "which averts the face from external appearances (*bāhyameyavimukhatâpâdaka*)"; and the knowledge of ideal beauty is partly "ancient," that is to say, innate, and partly "present," that is to say matured by culti-

⁸Tomita, K., *Art: Far-Eastern methods*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed.; and *Brush strokes in Far-Eastern painting*, Eastern Art, III, 1931.

⁹*Śobha*, for example, is defined in drama as the "natural adornment of the body by elegance of form, passion, and youth" (*Daśarūpa*, II, 53).

vation.¹⁰ This ideal delight cannot vary in essence, or be conceived of as otherwise than universal. Apprehended intuitively, without a concept, that is, not directed to or derived from specific knowledge (Kant), *id quod visum placet* (St. Thomas Aquinas), and consisting, not in pleasure, but in a delight of the reason (*nandicinmāya*, *praharṣa*), it cannot as such be analysed into parts, discoursed upon, or taught directly, as is proved both by the witness of men of genius and by experience. In any case, the ecstasy of perfect experience, aesthetic or other, cannot be sustained. Returning to the world, its source becomes immediately objective, something not merely to be experienced, but also to be known. From this point of view, a real indifference to subject matter, such as professional aesthetes sometimes affect, could only be regarded as a kind of insensibility; the "mere archaeologist," whose impartiality is a positive activity far removed from indifference, is often in fact nearer to the root of the matter, humanly speaking, than is the collector or "lover" of art.

The work of art is not merely an occasion of ecstasy, and in this relation inscrutable, but also according to human needs and therefore according to standards of usefulness, which can be defined and explained. This good or usefulness will be of two main kinds, religious and secular; one connected with theology, adapted to the worship and service of God as a person, the other connected with social activity, adapted to the proper ends of human life, which are defined in India as vocation or function (*dharma*), pleasure (*kāma*), and the increasing of wealth (*artha*). Even were it maintained that Asiatic art had never attained to perfection in its kind, it would not be denied that a knowledge of these things could provide an absorbing interest, and must involve a large measure of sympathetic understanding. It is actually a knowledge of these things which alone can be taught; explanation is required, because the mind is idle, and unwilling to recognize beauty in unfamiliar forms, perhaps unable to do so while distracted by anything apparently arbitrary or capricious, or distasteful in the work itself, or by curiosity as to its technique or meaning. All that man can do for man, scholar for public, is to disintegrate those prejudices that stand in the way of the free responses and activity of the spirit. It would be impertinent to ask whether or not the scholar himself be in a state of grace, since this lies only in the power

¹⁰*Sahitya Darpaṇa*, III, 2-3, and Commentary.

of God to bestow; all that is required of him is a humane scholarship in those matters as to which he owes an explanation to the public. Only when we have been convinced that a work originally answered to intelligible and reasonable needs, tastes, interests, or aspirations, whether or not these coincide with our own (a matter of no significance, where censorship is not in view), only when we are in a position to take the work for granted as a creation which could not have been otherwise than it is, are conditions established which make it possible for the mind to acknowledge the splendor of the work itself, to relish its beauty, or even its grace.

If then we are to progress from a merely capricious attraction to selected works, possibly by no means the best of their kind, we shall have to concern ourselves to understand the character (*svabhāva*) of the art; more simply expressed, to learn what it is all about, to comprehend it in operation. This is tantamount to an understanding of our neighbor; he alone, for and by whom the art was devised, affords a valid explanation of its existence. To understand him, we require not merely a vague good will, but also real contact: "Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss in Dichter's Lande gehen." But the homelands of the Poetic Genius are often remote in time as well as space, and in any case mere travel on the part of those who have neither eyes to see nor ears to hear is rather worse than useless. Generally speaking, one who has not been educated *for* travel, will never be educated *by* travel; he who would bring back the wealth of the Indies, must take the wealth of the Indies with him. We are not making too great a demand; in any case the man of today can hardly be called educated who knows no other literature than his own, can hardly be regarded as a "good European" who knows only Europe. The normal man, without proposing to become a professional scholar, or what is essential for research, to control any Oriental language, can obtain what he most needs merely from the reading of Oriental literature in the best translations (despite their inevitable shortcomings), and certain selected works by more specialised scholars. As Mencius said in giving advice to a pupil, "The way of truth is like a great road. It is not difficult to know. Do you go home and search for it and you will have an abundance of teachers."

"Who paints a figure, if he cannot be it, cannot draw it." These words of Dante (*Canzone*, XVI) utterly alien to the assertions of

those who now maintain that art can be successfully divorced from its theme and from experience, are alone sufficient to establish a fundamental identity of European and Asiatic art, transcending all possible stylistic difference, and all possible distinction of themes. But whereas Europe has only rarely and rather unconsciously subscribed to this first truth about art, Asia has consistently and consciously acted in awareness that the goal is only reached when the knower and the known, subject and object are identified in one experience. In European religion, the application of this doctrine has been a heresy.¹¹ In India it has been a cardinal principle of devotion that to worship God one must become God (*Nadevo devam arcayet: Śivo bhūtṛvā Śivam yajet*).¹² This is in fact a special application of the general method of Yoga, which as a mental discipline proceeds from attention concentrated upon the object, to an experience of the object by self-identification in consciousness with it. In this condition the mind is no longer distracted by *citta-vṛtti*, perception, curiosity, self-thinking and self-willing; but draws to itself, *ākaraṣati*, as though from an infinite distance¹³ the very form of that theme to which attention was originally directed. This form, *svarūpa*, imagined in stronger and better lineaments than the vegetative mortal eye can see, and brought back as it were from an inner source to the outer world, may be used directly as an object of worship, or may be externalised in stone or pigment to the same end.

These ideas are expanded in the ritual procedure which we find enjoined upon the images in the mediaval *Sādhanāmālās*. The details of these rituals are most illuminating, and though they are enunciated with special reference to cult images, are of quite general application, since the artist's theme can only be rightly thought of as the object of his devotion, his *devatā* for the time being. The

¹¹When Eckhart says "God and I are one in the act of perceiving Him," this is not orthodox doctrine.

¹²Yoga is not merely rapture, but also "dexterity in action," *karmasu kāuśalam*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, II, 50. The idea that creative activity (*citta sañña*) is completed before any physical act is undertaken appears also in the *Atthasālinī*, see my *Early passage on Indian painting*, *Eastern Art* III, 1931.

¹³The remote source may be explained as the infinite focal point between subject and object, knower and known; at which point the only possible experience of reality takes place in an act of non-differentiation. (Cf. *One hundred poems of Kabir*, No. XVI, "Between the poles of the sentient and insentient, etc.").



"COWDUST"
Indian

artist, then, purified by a spiritual and physical ritual, working in solitude, and using for his purpose a canonical prescription (*sādhana*, *mantra*), has to accomplish first of all a complete self-identification with the indicated concept, and this is requisite even though the form to be represented may embody terrible supernatural features or may be of the opposite sex to his own; the desired

form then "reveals itself visually against the sky, as if seen in a mirror, or in a dream," and using this vision as his model, he begins to work with his hands.¹⁴ The great Vision of Amida must have revealed itself thus, notwithstanding that the subject had already been similarly treated by other painters; for the virtue of a work is not in novelty of conception, but intensity of realisation.

The principle is the same in the case of the painter of scenic, animal, or human subjects. It is true that in this case Nature herself provides the text: but what is Nature—appearance or potential? In the words of Ching Hao, a Chinese artist and author of the T'ang period, the Mysterious Painter¹⁵ "first experiences in imagination the instincts and passions of all things that exist in heaven or earth; then in a style appropriate to the subject, natural forms flow spontaneously from his hand." On the other hand, the Astounding Painter, "though he achieves resemblance in detail, misses universal principles, a result of mechanical dexterity without intelligence. . . when the operation of the spirit is weak, all the forms are defective."¹⁶ In the same way Wang Li, who in the fourteenth century painted the Hua Mountain in Shenshi, declares that if the idea in the mind of the artist be neglected, mere representation will have no value; at the same time, if the natural form be neglected, not only will the likeness be lost, but also everything else:—"Until I knew the shape of the Hua mountain, how could I paint a picture of it? But even after I had visited it and drawn it from nature, the 'idea' was still immature. Subsequently I brooded upon it in the quiet of my house, on my walks abroad, in bed and at meals, at concerts, in intervals of conversation and literary composition. One day when I was resting I heard drums and flutes passing the door. I leapt up and cried, 'I have got it.' Then I tore up my old sketches and painted it again. This time my only guide was the Hua mountain itself."¹⁷

¹⁴From a Sanskrit Buddhist text, cited by Foucher, *L'Iconographie bouddhique de l'Inde*, II, pp. 8-11. Cf. Śukrācārya, *Sukranītisāra*, IV, 4, 70-71 translated in my *Aesthetic of the Sukranītisāra*, Mélanges Linossier, (Paris, 1932.)

¹⁵For Ching Hao's Divine Painter see below, p.

¹⁶A modern teacher in a school of art would say, when the pupil's forms are defective, "Look again at the model."

¹⁷The extracts from Ching Hao and Wang Li are from versions by Waley. However, the character *i*, rendered as "idea," does not as Waley makes it, refer to an essence in the object, but to the "motive" or "form" as conceived by the artist. The reference of "idea" to the object affords a good example of the misapplication of European (ultimately Platonic) modes of thought in an Oriental environment.

Similarly in literature. When the Buddha attains Enlightenment, in Yoga trance (*samādhi*), the Dharma presents itself to him in entirety and fully articulate, ready to be uttered to the world. When Vālmiki composes the *Rāmāyaṇa*, though he is already quite familiar with the course of the story, he prepares himself, by the practise of Yoga until he sees before him the protagonists acting and moving as though in real life. As Chuang Tzu has said, "The mind of the sage, being in repose, becomes the mirror of the Universe, the speculum of all creation": nothing is hidden from it. Though the idea of literal imitation is in no way essential to or even tolerable to Christian art, it has played a large part in popular European views about art, and further, it cannot be denied that European art in decadence has always inclined to make of literal imitation a chief end of art. In Asia, however, views about art are not propounded by popular thinkers; and decadence finds expression, not in a change of principle, but either in loss of vitality, or what amounts to the same thing, excessive elaboration, rococo. It will be useful then to consider just what is meant in Asia by words denoting imitation or resemblance, used with reference to art, though the discussion will have a familiar ring for students of Aristotle. Just as in Europe, from the time of Aristotle onwards, "imitation" has had a dual significance, meaning (1) empirically the most literal mimicry attainable, and (2) in aesthetics the imitation of Nature *in sua operatione* (St. Thomas Aquinas), or "imaginative embodiment of the ideal form of reality" (Webster's Dictionary): so in Asia, Sanskrit *sādṛśya*, "resemblance", and *loka-vṛtta anukaraṇa*, "making according to the movement of the world," and Chinese *hsing-ssü*, "shape-likeness," are used both empirically and in aesthetics, but with an essential difference.¹⁸

The proper connotation of these words as used in aesthetics can be deduced from the actual procedure of artists, already alluded to, from actual works of art, or from their employment in treatises on aesthetics. As to the actual works, we may be deceived at first sight. When Oriental art impresses us by its actuality, as in Japanese paintings of birds or flowers, in Pallava animal sculpture, or at Ajañtā by what seems to be spontaneity of gesture, we are easily led to think that this has involved a study of Nature in our sense,

¹⁸Sanskrit *loka-vṛtta* and Chinese *hsing* are the equivalents of English "Nature," including human nature an expression often used is "By means of natural shape (*hsing*) represent divine spirit (*shên*)."

too ready to judge the whole stylistic development in terms of degrees of naturalism. Yet, if we analyse such work, we shall find that it is not anatomically correct, that the spontaneous gestures had long since been classified in text books of dancing, with reference to moods and passions equally minutely subdivided in works on rhetoric; and that with all these matters the artist had to be familiar, and could not have helped being familiar, because they formed an integral part of the intellectual life of the age. We may say indeed, that whenever, if ever, Oriental art reproduces evanescent appearances, textures, or anatomical construction with literal accuracy, this is merely incidental, and represents the least significant part of the work. When we are stirred, when the work evokes in us a sense of reality akin to that which we feel in the presence of living forms, it is because here the artist has become what he represents, he himself is recreated as beast or flower or deity, he feels in his own body all the tensions appropriate to the passion that animates his subject.

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Because theology was the dominant intellectual passion of the race, Oriental art is largely dominated by theology. We do not refer here only to the production of cult images, for which India was primarily responsible, but to the organization of thought in terms of types of activity. Oriental art is not concerned with Nature, but with the nature of Nature; in this respect it is nearer to science than to our modern ideas about art. Where modern science uses names and algebraic formulae in establishing its hierarchy of forces, the East has attempted to express its understanding of life by means of precise visual symbols. Indian Śiva-Śakti, Chinese Yang and Yin, Heaven and Earth, in all their varied manifestations are the polar opposites whence all phenomenal tensions must arise. In this constant reference to types of activity, Oriental art differs essentially from Greek art and its prolongations in Europe: Greek types are archetypes of being, *Ding an sich*, external to experience, and conceived of as though reflected in phenomena; Indian types are acts or modes of action, only valid in a conditioned universe, correct under given circumstances, but not absolute; not thought of as reflected in phenomena, but as representing to our mentality the informing energies to which phenomena owe their

peculiarity. Historically, the latter mode of thought might be described as an improvement of animism.

The corresponding Indian theory of knowledge regards the source of truth, not mere perception (*pratyakṣa*), but an inwardly known criterion (*pramāṇa*)¹⁹ which "at one and the same time gives form to knowledge and is the cause of knowledge" (Dignāga, *kārikā* 6); it being only required that such knowledge shall not contradict experience. We can make this doctrine clearer by the analogy of conscience (Anglo-Saxon "inwit"), still generally regarded as an inward criterion which both gives form to correct conduct, and is its cause. But whereas the Occidental conscience operates only in the field of ethics, the Oriental conscience, *pramāṇa*, *chih*, etc., orders all forms of activity, mental, aesthetic, and ethical: truth, beauty, and goodness (as activities, and therefore relative) are thus related by analogy, not by



DURGA
Pallava

likeness, none deriving its sanction from any of the others, but each directly from a common principle of order (*ṛta*, etc.) which represents the pattern of the activity of God, or in Chinese terms, of Heaven and Earth. Just as conscience is externalised in rules of conduct, so aesthetic "conscience" finds expression in rules or canons of proportion (*tāla*, *tālamāna*) proper to different types, and in the physiognomy (*lakṣaṇas*) of iconography and cultivated taste, pre-

¹⁹English "measure," "mete," "metre," etc. are connected etymologically and in root meaning with *pramāṇa*.

scribed by authority and tradition: the only "good form" is *śāstramāna*. As to the necessity for such rules, which are contingent by nature, but binding in a given environment, this follows from the imperfection of human nature. Man is indeed more than a merely functional and behavioristic animal (the gamboling of lambs is not "dancing"), but he has not yet attained to such an identification of the inner and outer life as should enable him to act at the same time spontaneously and altogether conveniently. Spontaneity of action can be attributed to Bodhisattvas "because their discipline is in union with the very essence of all Buddhas." (Aśvaghosa); Ching Hao's "Divine Painter" indeed "makes no effort of his own, his hand moves spontaneously"; but short of this divine perfection, we can only aspire to the condition of the "Mysterious Painter" who "works in a style appropriate to his subject." Or as expressed with reference to the strictly ordered art of the drama, "All the activities of the gods, whether at home or afield, spring from a natural disposition of the mind, but all the activities of men result from the conscious working of the will; therefore it is that the details of the actions to be done by men must be carefully prescribed" (*Nāṭya Śāstra*, II, 5). Objection to such rules has often been made, ostensibly in the interest of the freedom of the spirit, practically however on behalf of the freedom of the affections. But rules such as we speak of, having been evolved by the organism for its own ends, are never arbitrary in their own environment; they may better be regarded as the form assumed by liberty, than as restrictions.²⁰

An admirable illustration of this can be found in Indian music. Here we have an elaborate system of modes, each employing only certain notes and progressions, which must be strictly adhered to, and each appropriate to a given time of the day or particular season: yet where the Western musician is bound by a score and by a tempered keyboard, the Oriental music is not written, and no one is recognized as a musician who does not *improvise* within the given conditions; we even find two or more musicians improvising by common consent. In China and Japan, there are detailed and elaborate treatises solely devoted to the subject of bamboo painting, and this study forms an indispensable part of an artist's training. A Japanese painter once said to me, "I have had to concentrate on

²⁰"Representations become works of art only when their technique is perfectly controlled" (Boas, *Primitive Art*, p. 81).



DEER
Indian

the bamboo for many, many years, still a certain technique for the rendering of the tips of bamboo leaves eludes me." And yet a finished bamboo painting in monochrome, executed with an incredible economy of means, seems to be wet with dew and to tremble in the wind. It is only when rules are conceived of as applied in an alien environment, when one style, whether of thought, conduct, or art, is judged by another, that they assume the aspect of regulations; and those modern artists who affect Primitive, Classical, or Oriental mannerisms, are alone responsible for their own bondage. What we have said by no means implies that anybody else's rules will serve to guide our hands, but rather that in any period of chaos and transition such as the present, we are rather to be pitied for than congratulated on our so-called freedom. A new condition of civilization, a new style, cannot be said to have reached a conscious maturity until it has discovered the criteria proper to itself.

Let us now consider how the doctrine of *pramāṇa* can be recognized in art itself. We have seen that the virtue of art does not consist in copying anything, but in what is expressed or evoked. The conception of a naturalistic art, though we know what it means in



BAMBOO IN THE WIND
Chinese

popular parlance, represents a contradiction in terms; art is by definition conventional, and it is only by convention (*saṃketa*) that art is comprehensible at all.²¹ Oriental art, all pure art, though it uses inevitably a vocabulary based on experience (God himself, using convenient means, *upāya*, speaks in the language of the world) does not invite a comparison with the unattainable perfection of Nature, but relies exclusively on its own logic and on its own criteria, which logic and criteria cannot be tested by standards of truth or goodness applicable in other fields of action. If for example, an icon is provided with numerous heads or arms, arithmetic will assist us to determine whether or not the iconography is correct, *āgamārthhāvaiśāṅgī*, but only our own response to its qualities of energy and characteristic order can determine its value as art. Krishna, seducer of the milkmaids of the Braja-maṇḍala, is not presented to us as a model on the plane of conduct.²²

Where Western art is largely conceived as seen in a frame or through a window, from a fixed point of view, and so brought toward the spectator, the Oriental image really exists only in our own mind and heart, and is projected thence onto space; this is apparent not merely in "anthropomorphic" icons, but also in landscape, which is typically presented as seen from more than one point of view, or in any case from a conventional, not a "real" point of view.²³ Where Western art depicts a moment of time, an

²¹*Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, 11, 4. Dogs and some savages cannot understand even photographs; and if bees are reported to have been attracted by painted flowers, why was not honey also provided?

The conventionality of art is inherent, not due either to calculated simplification nor to be explained as a degeneration from representation. Even the drawings of children are not primarily memory images, but "composition of what to the child's mind seems essential"; and "artistic value will always depend on the presence of a formal element that is not identical with the form found in nature" (Boas, F., *Primitive Art*, Oslo, 1927, pp. 16, 74, 78, 140)

²²See the *Prem-sāgar*, Chap. XXXIV.

²³See March, B., *Linear Perspective in Chinese Painting*, Eastern Art, III, 1931. Cf. also Bachhofer, L., *Der Raumdarstellung in der chinesischen Malerei*...., Münchner Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst, VIII, 1931.

The two methods of drawing, symbolic and perspective, though often combined, are really based on distinct mental attitudes; it should not be assumed that there really takes place a development from one to the other, or that a progress in art has taken place when some new kind of perspective representation appears. The methods of representing space in art will always correspond more or less to contemporary habits of vision. But perfect comprehensibility is all that is required at any given time, and this is always found; if we do not always understand the language of space employed in an unfamiliar style, that is our misfortune, not the fault of the art.

arrested action, an "effect" of light, Oriental art represents a continuous (though as we have seen, not eternal) condition. The Dance of Śiva takes place not merely as an historical event in the Tāraka Forest, nor even at Cidambaram, but for ever in the heart of the worshipper; the loves of Rādā and Krishna, as Nīlakaṇṭha reminds us, are not an historical narrative, but a constant relation between the soul and God. The Buddha attained Enlightenment countless ages ago, his manifestation is still accessible, and will so remain. The latter doctrine, expounded in the *Saddharmaṣuṇḍarīka*, is reflected in the sculptured hierarchies of Borobudūr. It is impossible that the same mentality should not be present equally in thought and art; how could the Mahāyānist, who may deny that any Buddha ever in fact existed, or that any doctrine was taught, have been interested in a portrait of Gautama? The image, then, is not the likeness of anything; it is a spatial, but incorporeal, intangible form, complete in itself; its aloofness ignores our presence, for in fact it was meant to be used, not to be inspected. We do not know how to use it. Too often we do not ask how it was meant to be used. We judge as an ornament for the mantelpiece what was made as a means of realization, an attitude hardly less naive than that of the Hindu peasants who are said to have converted a disused steam plough to new service as an icon.

The Indian or Far Eastern icon (*pratimā*), carved or painted, is neither a memory image nor an idealization, but ideal in the mathematical sense, of the same kind as a *yantra*;²⁴ and its peculiarity in our eyes arises as much from this condition as from the unfamiliar detail of the iconography. For example, it fills the whole field of vision at once, all is equally clear and equally essential; the eye is not led to range from one point to another, as in empirical vision or the study of a photographic record. There is no feeling of texture or flesh, but only of stone, metal, or pigment; from a technical point of view this might be thought of as the result of a proper respect for the material, but it is actually a consequence of the psychological approach, which conceives God in stone or paint otherwise than as God in the flesh, or an image otherwise than as an Avatāra. The parts are not organically related, for it is not contemplated that they should function biologically; they are ideally related, being the elements of a given type, "Ingredienz

²⁴A *yantra* is a geometrical representation of a deity, composed of straight lines, triangles, curves, circles, and a point.

einer Versammlung wesensbezeichnender Anschauungswerte." This does not mean that the various parts are unrelated, or that the whole is not a unity, but that the relation is mental rather than functional.

All this finds direct expression also in composition. Even in the freer treatment of still definitely religious themes, at Ajañtā, in Vaiṣṇava (Rajput) painting, or in Chinese landscape, the composition may seem at first sight to be lacking in direction; there is no central point, no emphasis, no dramatic crisis, apparently no structure, though we are ready to admit that the space has been wonderfully utilised, and so call the work decorative, meaning, I suppose, that it is not offensively insistent. Similarly in music and dancing, where the effect on an untrained Western observer is usually one of monotony—"we do not know what to make of music which is dilatory without being sentimental, and utters passion without vehemence" (Fox-Strangways). The paintings of Ajañtā, certainly lacking in those obvious symmetries which are described in modern text books of composition, have been called incoherent. This is in fact a mode of design not thought out as pattern with a view to pictorial effect; yet "one comes in the end to recognize that profound conceptions can dispense with the formulas of calculated surface arrangement and have their own occult means of knitting together forms in apparent diffusion" (Binyon).

What has been said will also apply to portraiture, little as this might have been expected: here too the conception of types predominates. It is true that in classical Indian literature we frequently read of portraits, which though they are usually painted from memory, are constantly spoken of as recognizable and even admirable likenesses; if not at least recognizable, they could not have fulfilled their function, usually connected with love or marriage. Both in China and in India, from very ancient times onward, we find ancestral portraits, but these were usually prepared after death, and so far as we know have the character of effigies rather than likenesses.²⁵ In the *Pratimā-nāṭaka* of Bhāsa, the hero, though he marvels at the execution of the figures in an ancestral chapel, does not recognize the effigies of his own parents, and thinks the figures may be those of gods. Similarly in Cambodia and Farther India generally, where a deified ancestor was represented by a statue, this was in the form

²⁵True portraiture, as remarked by Baudelaire, is "an ideal reconstruction of the individual" The Chinese term is *fu-shen*, "depicting character."

of the deity of his devotion. It is now only possible from an inscription to tell when a portrait is before us.

The painted portrait functioned primarily as a substitute for the living presence of the original; still one of the oldest treatises on painting, the *Citralakṣaṇa* contained in the Tanjur, though it refers the origin of painting in the world to this requirement, actually treats only of the physiognomical peculiarities (*lakṣaṇas*) of types. Even more instructive is a later case, occurring in one of the *Vikramacarita* stories: here a king is so much attached to his queen that he keeps her at his side, even in Council; this departure from custom and propriety is disapproved of by his courtiers and the king consents to have a portrait painted, to serve as substitute for the Queen's presence. The court painter is allowed to see the queen; he recognizes that she is a Padminī (Lotus-lady, one of the four physical-psychological types under which women are classed by Hindu rhetoricians) and paints her accordingly *padminī-lakṣaṇayuktam* "with the characteristic marks of a Lotus-lady," and yet the portrait, spoken of not merely as *rūpam*, "a figure," but as *svarūpam*, "her very form," is felt to be a true likeness. Chinese works on portrait painting refer only to types of features and facial expression, canons of proportion, suitable accessories, and varieties of brush-stroke proper to the draperies; the essence of the subject must be revealed, but there is nothing about anatomical accuracy.

Life itself reflects the same conditions. At first sight even the most highly evolved Asiatics look all alike to a Western eye, presenting the same aspect of monotony to which we have referred above. This effect is partly a result of unfamiliarity; the Oriental recognizes actual variety where the European is not yet trained to do so. But it is also in part due to the fact that Oriental life is modelled on types of conduct sanctioned by tradition. For India, Rāma and Sitā represent ideals still potent, the *svadharmā* of each caste is an ascertained *mode* of conduct; and until recently every Chinese accepted as a matter of course the concept of manners established by Confucius. The Japanese word for "rudeness" means "acting in an unexpected way." Where large groups of men act and dress alike, they will not only to some degree look alike, but are alike—to the eye.

Here then, life is designed like a garden, not allowed to run wild. All this formality, for a cultured spectator, is far more attractive



FLYING FIGURES
Ajanta, Indian

than can be the variety of imperfection so freely shown by the plain and blunt, or as he thinks, "more sincere" European. For the Oriental himself, this external conformity, whereby the man is lost in the crowd as true architecture seems to be a part of its native landscape, constitutes a privacy within which the individual character can flower unhampered. This is also particularly true in

the case of women, whom the East has so long sheltered from necessities of self-assertion: one may say that for women of the aristocratic classes in India or Japan, there existed no freedom whatever, in the modern sense. Yet these same women moulded by centuries of stylistic living, achieved an absolute perfection in their kind, and perhaps Asiatic art can boast of no higher achievement than this. In India, where the "tyranny of caste" strictly governs marriage, diet, and every detail of outward conduct, there exists and has always existed unrestricted freedom of belief and thought. It has been well said that civilization is style. An immanent culture in this way endows every individual with an outward grace, a typological perfection, such as only the rarest beings can achieve by their own effort (this kind of perfection does not belong to genius); whereas a democracy, which requires of every man to save his own soul, actually condemns each to an exhibition of his own irregularity and imperfection; and this imperfection only too easily passes over into an exhibitionism which makes a virtue of vanity, and is complacently described as self-expression.

We have then to realize that life itself, the different ways in which the difficult problems of human association have been solved, represents the ultimate and highest of the arts of Asia: he who would comprehend and enjoy the arts of Asia, if only as a spectacle, must comprehend them in this highest form, directly at the source from which they proceed. All judgment of the art, all criticism of the life, by measurement against Western standards is an irrelevance that must defeat its own ends.

* * * *

Everyone will be aware that Asiatic art is by no means exclusively theological, in the literal sense of the word. India knows, if not a secular, at least a romantic development in Rajput painting, China possesses the greatest landscape art in the world; Japan has interpreted animals and flowers with unequalled tenderness and sensibility, and developed in Ukiyoye an art that can only be called secular. Broadly speaking, we may say that the romantic and idealistic movements are related to the hieratic art, which is on the whole the older art, as mysticism is related to ritual.²⁶ Allusion may be made, for example, to the well-known case of the Zen

²⁶Perhaps it should be added, as relativity to Euclidean geometry.

priest, Tan-hsia, who used a wooden image of Buddha to make his fire—not, of course, as an iconoclast, but because he was cold; to the Zen doctrine of the Scripture of the Universe; and to the Vaiṣṇava conception of the world as a theophany. But these developments do not represent an arbitrary break with hieratic modes of thought: as the theology itself may be called an improvement of animism, so Zen represents an improvement of Yoga achieved through heightened sensibility, Vaiṣṇava painting an improvement of *bhakti* through a perfected sensual experience.

In a "Meditation upon Buddha" translated into Chinese in A.D. 420, the believer is taught to see not merely Gāutama the monk, but One endowed with all those spiritual glories that were visible to his disciples; we are still in the realms of theology. A century later, Bodhidharma came to Canton from Southern India; he taught, mainly by silence, that the absolute is immanent in man, that this "treasure of the heart" is the only Buddha that exists. His successor Buddhapriya codified the stations of meditation: but Zen²⁷ was to be practised "in a quiet room, or under a tree, or among tombs, or sitting on the dewy earth," not before a Buddha image. The method of teaching of Zen masters was by means of symbolic acts, apparently arbitrary commands or meaningless questions, or simply by reference to Nature. Zen dicta disturb our complacence, as who should say, "A man may have justice on his side and yet be in the wrong," or "to him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath." Logically inscrutable, Zen may be described as direct action, as immediacy of experience. Still, the idea of Zen is completely universal: "consider the lilies," "a mouse is miracle enough," "when thou seest an eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius," illustrate Zen. There are many Indian analogies: for example, our conduct should be like that of the sun, which shines because it is its nature to shine, not from benevolence; and already in one of the Jātakas, (No. 460), the evanescence of the morning dew suffices to enlightenment.

The sources of the tradition are partly Taoist, partly Indian. One might say that the only ritual known to Zen is that of the tea ceremony, in which simplicity is carried to the highest point of elaboration: but Zen is equally demonstrated in the art of flower

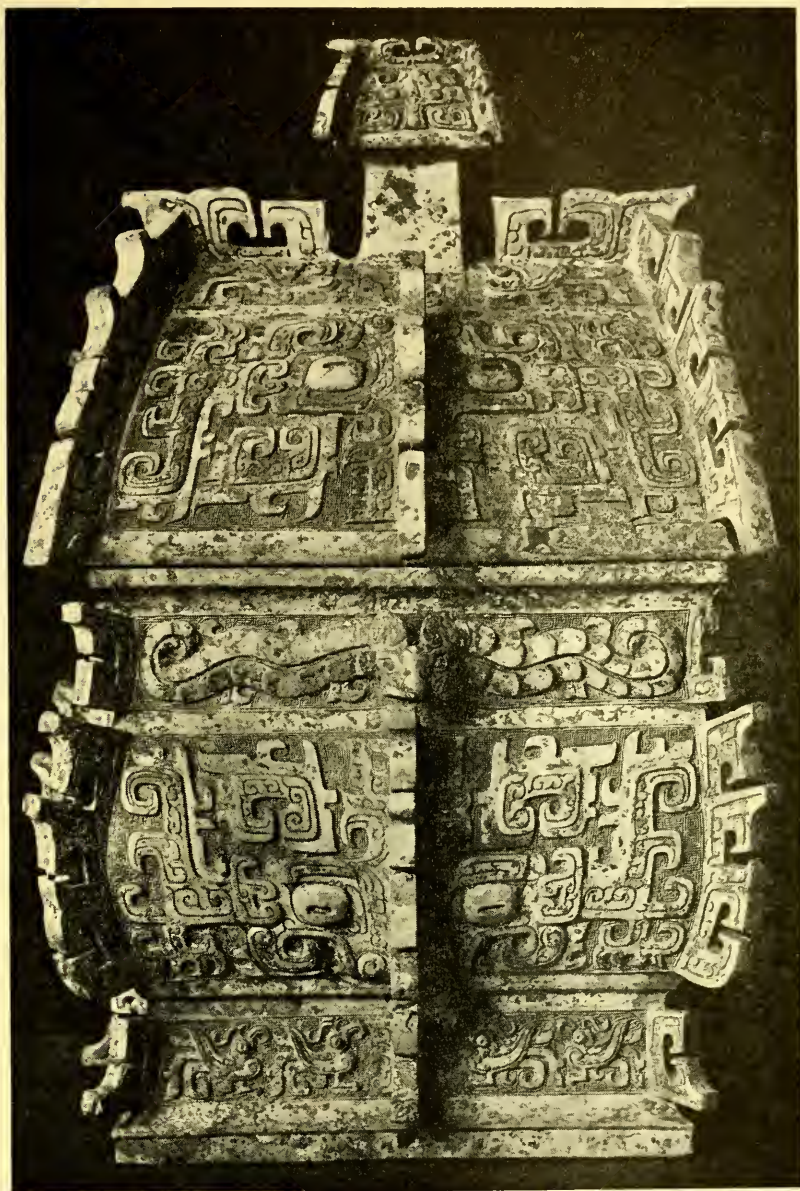
²⁷Japanese *Zen*, Chinese *ch'an*=Sanskrit *dhyāna*, a technical term in Yoga, denoting the first stage of introspection, in Buddhist usage (Pali *jhāna*) referring to the whole process of concentration.

arrangement; Zen priests lead an active and ordered life, and to say, "This is like a Zen monastery," means that a place is kept in the neatest possible order. After the tenth century it is almost entirely Zen terminology that is used in the discussion of art. Perhaps a majority of artists in the Ashikaga period were Zen priests. Zen art represents either landscape, birds, animals, or flowers; or episodes from the lives of the great Zen teachers, of which last a very familiar aspect may be cited in the innumerable representations of Daruma (Bodhidharma) as a shaggy, beetle-browed recluse.

Zen, seeking realization of the divine nature in man, proceeds by way of opening his eyes to a like spiritual essence in the world of Nature external to himself. The word "romantic" has been applied to the art only for want of a better designation; the romantic movement in Europe was really quite otherwise and more sentimentally motivated, more curiously and less sensually developed. In Europe, Christianity has intensified the naturally anthropomorphic tendencies of Aryan Greece, by asserting that man alone is endowed with a soul: the more remote and dangerous grandeurs of nature, not directly amenable to human exploitation, were not considered without disgust, or as ends in themselves, before the eighteenth century. Even then, the portrayal of nature was deeply colored by the pathetic fallacy; Blake had only too good reason when he "feared that Wordsworth was fond of nature."

But from a Zen point of view, every manifestation of the spirit is perfect in its kind, the categories are indifferent; all nature is equally beautiful, because equally expressive, consequently the painting of a grasshopper may be no less profound than that of a man. The use of plant and animal forms as symbols goes back to very early origins in sympathetic magic: even in Asia the full comprehension of animal life represents the result of a long evolution in which the most ancient ideas survive side by side with the expressions of an ever heightened sensibility. The two points of view, symbolic and sympathetic, are clearly seen together in a statement on animal painting made by an anonymous Chinese critic in the twelfth century:

"The horse is used as a symbol of the sky, its even pace prefiguring the even motion of the stars; the bull, mildly sustaining its heavy yoke, is fit symbol of earth's submissive tolerance. But tigers, leopards, deer, wild swine, fawns, and hares—creatures that



BRONZE VESSEL
Chinese

cannot be inured to the will of man—these the painter chooses for the sake of their skittish gambols and swift, shy evasions, loves them as things that seek the desolation of great plains and wintry snows, as creatures that will not be haltered with a bridle nor tethered by the foot.. He would commit to brush-work the gallant splendor of their stride; this would he do, *and no more.*"²⁸

The greater part of this exactly corresponds to Zen; the same point of view is clearly presented in India still earlier, in the poetry of Kālidāsa and in Pallava animal sculpture. Centuries before this the sacredness of animal life had been insisted on, but mainly from an ethical point of view.

When at last Zen thought found expression in scepticism—

Granted this dewdrop world be but a dewdrop world,

This granted, yet. . . .²⁹

there came into being the despised popular and secular Ukiyoye³⁰ art of Japan. But here an artistic tradition had already been so firmly established, the vision of the world so *approfondi*, that in a sphere corresponding functionally to that of the modern picture-postcard—Ukiyoye illustrates the theatre, the brothel, and the *Aus-sichtspunkt*—there still survived a charm of conception and a purity of style that sufficed, however slight its essence, to win acceptance in Europe, long before the existence of a more serious and classical pictorial art had been suspected.

In Vaiṣṇava mysticism, the Indian analogy of Zen, the miracle of human love reveals itself in poetry and art not merely as symbol, but as felt religious experience; the true relation of the soul to God can now only be expressed in impassioned epithalamia celebrating the nuptials of Rādhā and Krishna, milkmaid and Divine Bridegroom. She who for love renounces her very world, honor and duty alike, is the very type of Devotion. Moreover, the process of thought is reversible: in the truly religious life, all distinction of sacred and profane is lost, one and the same song is sung by lover and by monk. Thus the technical phraseology of Yoga, the language of bhakti, is used even in speaking of human passion: the bride is lost in the trance (*dhyāna*) of considering the Be-

²⁸Version by Walley. Italics mine.

²⁹A Japanese *hokku*: in poems of this kind, the reader is required to complete the thought in his own mind: here, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

³⁰*Ukiyoye* means "pictures of the fleeting world"; the Japanese color print is its typical product.

loved, love itself is an Office (*pūjā*). In Separation, she makes a prayer of the name of her Lord; in Union, "Each is both." The only sin in this kingdom of love is pride (*māna*).³¹ In Rajput painting the life of simple herdsmen and milkmaids is denotation (*abhidha*), the Sports of Krishna connotation (*lakṣaṇā*), the harmony of spirit and flesh the content (*vyāñjana*). These, operating in the media available, have made the paintings what they are. If we ignore these sources of the presented fact, the painting itself "unique in the world's art," how can we expect to find in the fact any more than a pleasant or unpleasant sensation—and can we regard it as worth while (*puruṣārtha*) merely to add one more to the abundant sources of sensation already available? "Not bread alone"; is art a mere matter of aesthetic surfaces?

"What is it to God that man should be born and grow and wallow in his own sensations?"

* * * *

If we are to make any approach whatever to an understanding of Asiatic art as something made by men, and not to regard it as a mere curiosity, we must first of all abandon the whole current view of Art and Artists. We must realize, and perhaps remind ourselves again and again, that that condition is *abnormal* in which a distinction is drawn between workmen and artists, and that this distinction has only been drawn during relatively short periods of the world's history.³² Of the two propositions following, each explains the other: viz., those whom we now call artists, were once artisans; and, objects that we now preserve in museums were once common objects of the market place.

During the greater part of the world's history, every product of human workmanship, whether icon, platter, or shirt button, has been at once beautiful and useful. This normal condition has persisted longer in Asia than anywhere else. If it no longer exists in Europe and America, this is by no means the fault of invention and machinery as such; man has always been an inventive and tool or machine-using creature. The art of the potter was not destroyed by the invention of the potter's wheel. How far from

³¹Not *māna*, "measure," referred to above, but etymologically related to *mens*, mental, mind, etc.

³²Cf. Groslier, *Notes sur la psychologie*, p. 125, "la différence que nous faisons entre l'artiste et l'ouvrier d'art—toute moderne d'ailleurs—ne semble pas être comme en Cambodge."



HARIHARA
Cambodian

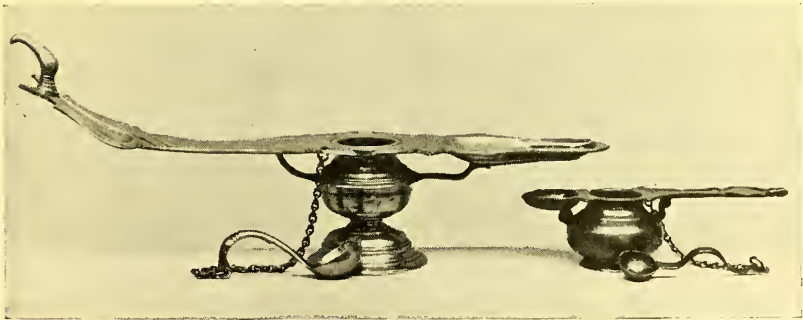
reasonable it would be to attribute the present abnormal condition to a baneful influence exerted on man by science and machinery is demonstrated in the fact that beauty and use are now only found together in the work of engineers—in bridges, aeroplanes, dynamos, surgical instruments, the forms of which are governed by scientific principles and absolute functional necessity. If beauty and use are not now generally seen together in household utensils and the business man's costume, nor generally in factory-made objects, this is not the fault of the machinery employed, but incidental to our lowered conception of human dignity, and consequent insensibility to real values. The exact measure of our indifference to these values is reflected in the current distinction of Fine and Decorative art, it being required that the first shall have no use, the second no meaning: and in our equivalent distinction of the inspired Artist or Genius from the trained

workman. We have convinced ourselves that art is a thing too good for this world, labor too brutal an activity to be mentioned in the same breath with art; that the artist is one not much less than a prophet, the workman not much more than an animal. Thus a perverted idealism and an amazing insensibility exist side by side;

neither condition could, in fact, exist without the other. All that we need insist upon here is that none of these categories can be recognized in Asia. There we shall find nothing useless (Fine Art) on the one hand, nothing meaningless (Decorative or Servile Art) on the other, but only human productions ordered to specific ends; we shall find neither men of Genius nor mere laborers, but only human beings, vocationally expert.

Asia has not relied on the vagaries of genius, but on training: she would regard with equal suspicion "stars" and amateurs. She knows diversities of skill among professionals, as apprentice or master, and likewise the products of different ateliers, provincial or courtly: but that anyone should practise an art as an accomplishment, whether skillfully or otherwise, would seem ridiculous.³³ Art is here a function of the social order, not an ambition. The practice of art is typically an hereditary vocation and not a matter of private choice. The themes of art are provided by general necessities inherent in racial mentality, and more specifically by a vast body of scripture and by written canons; method is learnt as a living workshop tradition, not in a School of Art: style is a function of the period, not of the individual, who could only be made aware of the fact of stylistic change and sequence by historical study. Themes are repeated from generation to generation, and pass from one country to another; neither is originality a virtue, nor "plagiarism" a crime, where all that counts is the necessity

³³"That anyone not a Śilpan (professional architect) should build temples, towns, seaports, tanks or wells, is a sin comparable to murder" (from a Śilpa Śāstra cited by Kearns, *Indian Antiquary*, V, 1876). Cf. *Bhagavad Gītā*, III, 35.



TWO BRASS LAMPS
Indian



PORCELAIN BOWL
Chinese

inherent in the theme. The artist, as maker, is a personality much greater than that of any conceivable individual: the names of even the greatest artists are unknown.³⁴

"What are the paintings even of Michael Angelo compared with the paintings on the walls of the cave temples of Ajanta? These works are not the work of a man: 'they are the work of ages, of nations.'" Nor would the biographies of individuals, if they could be known, add anything to our understanding of the art. What the East demands of the artist, as individual, is in-

³⁴This statement is almost literally exact so far as sculpture, architecture, the theatre, and sumptuary arts are considered. The chief exception to the rule appears in Chinese and Japanese painting, where a somewhat fictitious importance has been attached to names, from the collectors's point of view.

tegrity and piety, knowledge and skill, let us say order, rather than peculiar sensibilities or private ideals for man is a responsible being, not merely as maker, but also as doer and thinker.

In all these ways the freedom and dignity of the individual, as individual, have been protected in a way inconceivable under modern conditions. Where art is not a luxury, the artist is on the one hand preserved from those precarious alternatives of prestige or neglect, affluence or starvation, which now intimidate "artist" and laborer alike.³⁵ Where ability is not conceived as an inspiration coming none knows whence, but rather in the same light as skill in surgery or engineering, and where eccentricity of conduct is neither expected of the artist nor tolerated in him, he is enabled to enjoy in privacy the simple privilege of living as a man among men without social ambition, without occasion to pose as a prophet, but self-respecting, and contented with that respect which is normally due from one man to another, when it is taken for granted that every man should be expert in his vocation.

³⁵On the status of the craftsman in Asia, see my *Indian Craftsman*, and *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (Ch. III); Birdwood, Sir G., *The Industrial Arts of India*; Groslier, G., *Notes sur la psychologie de l'artisan cambodgien*, in *Arts et Archéologie khmèrs*, Vol. I ("élevé et grandi dans le renoncement...s'il est artiste, c'est pour obéir") and *Le fin d'un art*, in *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. V; Hearn, L., *Japan, an interpretation* (esp. pp. 169-171, 440-443).

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