

Aesthetics



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Mahesh Gupta

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WITH THE EDITOR'S COMPLIMENTS



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Editor

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CONTENTS

DEVOTEES OF AJANTA	RAVISHANKAR RAVAL
ARTIST & ASPIRATION	GURDIAL MALLIK
TWO SONNETS	HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA
ART AS A SOCIAL FORCE	KAMALA DEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA
EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF VISUAL ARTS	O. C. GANGOLY
OLD STORY TELLER	AMRIT SHER-GIL
OEUVRE	NICHOLAS ROERICH
OUR CULTURAL TREND	KRISHNA HUTHEESING
THE QUEST OF A STANDPOINT IN AESTHETICS	D. CHATTOPADHYAYA
CACTUS	K. K. HEBBAR
SPRING	J. M. AHIVASHI
TWO POEMS	AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY & PREMENDRA MITRA
THE ETIOLOGY OF A MODERN MALADY	SACHIN CHAUDHURY
READY FOR DANCE	K. H. ARA
THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE	BALRAM DAS
SISTERS	LADY TEMPLE
FREEDOM & BOOKS	MANUEL KOMROFF
REPOSE	B. D. GARGA
MORNING WALK	HARBANS CHADHA
OUR NEW INDIA MUST HAVE NEW MUSIC	BHUPENDRA NATH MUKHOPADHYAYA
WILLIAM TURNER	JOHN FLETCHER
LOVE	BISHNU DEY
TWO POEMS	NICHOLAS ROERICH
CHAOS IN INDIAN DANCING	RAJENDRA SHANKER



"LEL"—Russian Shepherd God

NICHOLAS ROERICH

A clear yet at the same time an almost untranslatable French word. One can say "creative work", yet for all that one has to be agreed in the understanding in which the word "oeuvre" has entered from the French literature.

About art in all its manifestations, people are accustomed to judge very light-mindedly. Some have read two verses and already speak with authority about the poet. Some have seen three or four pictures or reproductions of pictures and already pass judgment on the artist. From one novel, they fix the position of a writer. One book of sketches is enough for an irrevocable opinion over a cup of tea.

More than once it has been noted in literature that the celebrated "cup of tea" binds one to nothing. And perhaps the pronouncements at the table likewise are not binding; yet, in the meantime, they often have very profound consequences. In such conversations over a "cup of tea", people do not think about the fact that the separate productions are only as the petals of the entire "oeuvre". Even an experienced horticulturist or botanist would hardly undertake to form a judgment about an entire plant from a single petal of its blossom.

Each one has had occasion to listen to most definite opinions about an author, yet it proved upon verification, that only some one volume of all his writings had been read by the speaker, not to mention those in general who do not take the trouble to do any reading themselves, but pronounce their judgments according to the newspapers critiques. But the concept "oeuvre", the concept of

OEUVRE

by NICHOLAS ROERICH

all of a person's creative work, should be set forth with special clearness. Not only a full acquaintance with all the creativeness of the author is needed, but for making a just estimate it is necessary also to assimilate his productions in the chronological order of their creation.

The whole creative work—it is like a necklace, put together in a definite order. Each production belongs to this or that psychological moment of the creator. The life of the artist has been composed of such moments. In order to understand a result, one must know the cause. One needs to understand why such and such a sequence of creation took place. Whatever internal or external circumstances were stratified and produced fragments of the whole creativeness, to leave them out would mean to form an opinion about the design of a necklace from merely one or two links of it.

In all kinds of creativeness—in literature, in music, in the graphic arts, an attentive and careful correlation is decidedly necessary. Each one has had occasion to read and to hear, how much has been attributed to authors, which was entirely alien to them, by quoting snatches from their uninterrupted train of thought. You know that not only casual people take it upon themselves to pass judgment. In each domain dwells a self-appointed judge.

I recall how in the law faculty the students were considering how they would apply their assimilated knowledge. One, who was attracted to the bar wished to be an administrator. Another aspired to the role of prosecutor, but a third, a fun-loving

student, said: "For my part, it would certainly suit me to pass judgment on all of you." Who knows perhaps, this jest really impelled him to a juridical career, for which in last analysis he had no special aptitude.

The same happens in many professions; in judgments about creativeness, much is contrived completely accidentally. But from this casualness often springs almost irreparable consequences.

It is said that the valuation by critics changes three times in a century,—that is, by generations. To observe these, deviations of evaluations is very instructive. How many irrelevant considerations will influence public opinion. Competition of publishers or greed of the dealers in artistic productions, finally of any of the various forms of envy and enmity which are so complexly reflected in appraisals, that for the future investigator-historian it is often completely impossible to discriminate. A great number of examples of this could be adduced.

Let us recall how two competing publishers tried to disparage an author whom they had in view, in order to secure more cheaply the right of publishing his work. You know that such specific belittlements are to be found in any annals. Let us recall how a certain dealer in pictures tried by all means to depreciate for a time the value of an artist, with the end in view of buying up enough of his productions and then commissioning someone to resurrect anew the forgotten or discredited artist!

Let us not bring up certain episodes out of the world of collectors, when competition led

these people to most unworthy conduct. It is only important to remember that appraisals of creative work are singularly tortuous and personal. We recollect how a certain music lover warned a well-known musician not to play on a particular day because an influential critic had a toothache. But when to all these various fortuities, there is added the wish in general not to acquaint oneself with a man's entire "oeuvre", then one's situation becomes truly tragic.

Let us recall my prolific writer. Can one form a judgment about him without knowing the sequence of all his works? One can, indeed, estimate separate productions of the author, but then this will be an opinion which concerns the production itself, but not the man's creative "oeuvre". It is not alone the biography of a great personality, for it is still more valuable to follow the accumulation of creative power and all the paths of its expression. Thus once again we see how significant in its meaning

is the word "oeuvre". It impels one to reflect broadly, it impels one to outline the entire manifestation and comprehensively to examine its influence and consequence.

History, passing from personal "oeuvre", appraises also the "oeuvre" of an entire nation, of a whole epoch. If the historian does not teach himself in the small and accessible, then by what means can he draw near to and encompass broad problems? Before thinking about conscientious judgments of parts, how can he think of individuals? He who sets himself the task of always staying within the bounds of truth, learns to discriminate and to compare causes and effect carefully. It is a pleasure to rejoice at the whole beautifully composed necklace in which are found many natural colours in unexpected combinations.

Just now, when there is so much destruction and upheaval, each clear, honest exhaustive understanding of a subject will be an especially needed contemporary task. We have read

how Stokowski has definitely expressed himself about the harm of mechanical music for true creativeness. Stokowski has justly reminded that even between the very vibrations transmitted directly or mechanically, there is an enormous difference. Certain instruments are generally imperceptible in mechanical transmission.

In a time when music and the graphic arts have been subjected to mechanisation, precisely then must the appraisals of creativeness be still more precise, profound, and well-grounded. At this very moment, when it is the modern practice to strive for the brief, the staccato, and the casual, it is especially necessary to aspire to evaluations on the basis of the entire "oeuvre".

Though it is difficult to translate, the word "oeuvre" is a very expressive one.

Let it be the seal of our age to record beautiful "oeuvres", which will safeguard for the glory of the nation entire immutable images of giants of thought and beauty!



Our Cultural Trend

by KRISHNA HUTHEESING

The culture of every country in so far as it represents a way of life or of self-expression must, like a great tree, be rooted in the soil. It involves contacts with life both in the rough and in the smooth. To some people Indian culture is synonymous with certain religious or philosophic beliefs that have always been associated with India, beliefs such as the doctrine of Karma or Maya. To others it is associated with the dreams and ideals embodied in architecture, rock cut caves ruins and so on.

The civilization of the Indus Valley represented a perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment which could only have resulted from years of patient endeavour. It has endured through the ages and forms the basis of modern Indian culture. It is an amazing fact that any civilization or culture should have had this continuity for five or six thousand years or more. But this did not mean that India was static. She was changing and progressing all the time. Coming into contact with Persians, Egyptians, Chinese, Arabs and the peoples of the Mediterranean, she influenced them and in turn was influenced by them, but always her cultural basis remained strong enough to endure.

The people who lived in those ancient times had among them men and women who understood life as it should be understood. It was out of their wisdom that a structure was built which gave India the stability which has lasted these thousands of years.

There are many gaps between the old civilization and the India of today and may be the links that join us are not very evident. Nevertheless, there is a sense of continuity, of an unbroken chain which joins modern India to the civilization that began five or six thousand years ago.

The dominant feature of Indian culture and outlook in the past was an inner urge towards synthesis derived essentially from the Indian philosophic outlook. Each incursion of foreign elements was a challenge to this culture but it met it successfully by a new synthesis and a process of absorption. "Whatever the reason", says C. E. M. Joad, "it is a fact that India's special gift to mankind has been the ability and willingness of Indians to effect a synthesis of many different elements, both of thoughts and peoples, and to create in fact, unity out of diversity".

In India, there have never been two different departments for the art and life of the common man. They have always merged into one. Beautiful sculptured images formed part of the daily worship in every household. The rhythm of life was expressed in dancing which was an integral part of music. The ancient arts of our country, which were renowned the world over died the day that the common man lost his individuality and perished under the heel of economic exploitation.

Today when a new era has dawned in our country many

changes will take place. So far, being under foreign domination, we have tried to escape from the present in dreams of a vanished age, and have tried to find consolation in visions of past greatness. It is a dangerous pastime to indulge in but many of us have done it. To imagine that we are still a spiritually great people is foolish, for spiritual or any other kind of greatness cannot be founded on lack of freedom, or on starvation and misery. But now all that is changed. We are masters of our own destiny and it is up to each and every one of us to try and shape the new India in such a way that it soon achieves the heights it once had known and may be, reach even greater ones. But, in the process of creating a new and better India let us not be forgetful of the deep debt of gratitude we owe to our ancestors. It is due to their great wisdom and knowledge that we have survived all these years of foreign domination. In the joy of our newly acquired freedom let us not become arrogant, but let us retain some of that humility and graciousness that was the hallmark of our civilization and culture thousands of years ago and which has withstood the onslaught of time, giving to our country a uniqueness which is unknown elsewhere in the world. Throughout the early period of the Vedas the theme stressed upon most was the "worthwhileness" of life. It should still be the theme of both young and old, thus enabling us to develop once again the arts, music, dancing and literature of which we were once so proud.