

Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty

– That is all ye known on Earth and all ye need know

Beauty to Rabindra Nath Tagore is that which gives joy without any sense of utility. It is disembodied joy. In the experience of ordinary delight there is the satisfaction of getting something, realization of some fulfillment. But there may be some desire or want also associated with the delight of beauty. Herbert Read considers beauty as unity of formal relations among our sense-perceptions. It is a very fluctuating phenomenon, which finds diverse expression at different places and different times. Its consciousness conveys rhythm, unity and harmony. Man abhors chaos, disorder and ugliness. In his heart burns a deathless desire for perfection. Thus beauty feeds the soul of man. It brings the soul in contact with a world of new dimensions – a world of Truth.

Truth is not fact. It is more generalised fact. Moulton says, “The opposite of truth is false and that of a fact and that of a fact is another fact.... Facts are raw material which by generalization can be manufactured into truth”. Artistic truth is the emotional apprehension of fact. Ultimate truth is eternal immutable and final. It is true to all times and all ages. Realisation of truth is the perception of higher reality behind appearances, behind the change which are outward and superficial.

To see things in their beauty is to see things in their Truth. What the wise imagination seizes as beauty must be Truth. It means Beauty is truth arrived at through intuitive perception and intellectualized-imagination weighed with thought and judgement. The excellence of all art is its intensity capable of making all disagreeableness evaporate from their being in close relationship with the Beauty and Truth. For example in the poem Grecian Urn of Keats external does not constitute the main interest of the poet. The Urn suggests something deeper. The imaginative eye peers through the outer form and the poet’s heart was stirred by imaginative picture of Greek life. The poet describes a series of pictures of scenes that the imagines must have formed the basis of the life of an artist at work and then he gives us his own definition of a growing art. The Urn is a transparent glass through which there is revealed a miniature pageant of the past merging into the present. The tiny varieties of the old ages as perceived, interpreted and presented in this piece of art tickles Keats’ imagination and sets it aflame. Here comes the sense of discovery of truth and he sees not a moral or a religious idea by a principle of existence, a law of life and insight into the universal heart of man. Thus to Keats, Truth arrived at, through emotionalized

imaginative perception, is Beauty and Beauty is Truth. He said: "I can never conceive of Truth except through the clear conception of its Beauty- its imaginative reality."

'Satyam, Shivam Sundaram'. The greater the element of Truth the deeper the perception of Beauty. Truth discovers the permanent, the eternal and the final. Thus it transcends the decadence and dissolution, and the decay and death. It helps man to transcend the limitation of time and space. It tries to touch perfection in the domain of rational investigation and reasoned approach. Beauty, on the other hand is perfection in the field of aestheticism-the desire to discover unity and harmony. They express the man's ideal and are identical; Beauty helps to discover truth. A man is enchanted by the beauty of a flower-pure soul of the flower. Tagore feels, Nature holds, a commerce with the soul of man that rises higher than the mundane level of his existence. In this moment of the activity of the soul, beauty takes us deeper into the reality of Eternal Spirit which lurks behind everything.

C.M. Bowra explains the relation thus: Truth is another name for ultimate reality and is discovered not by the reasoning mind but by the imagination. The imagination has a special insight into the true nature of things and Keats accepts its discoveries because they agree with his senses, resolve disagreeable discords and overwhelm him by their intensity. He is convinced that anything so discovered is true in a sense that the conclusions of philosophy are not. Keats calls this reality "beauty" because of its overpowering and all-absorbing effect on him. In fact he substitutes the discovery of beauty through the imagination or the discovery of facts through the reason and asserts that it is a more satisfactory and more certain way of piercing to the heart of things since inspired insight sees more than abstract rationality. Keat's concern is with the imagination in a special sense, and he is not far from Coleridge in his view of it. It is an insight so fine that it sees what is concealed from most men and understands things in their full range and significance and character. The rationale of poetry is that through the imagination it finds something so compelling in its intensity that it is at once both beautiful and real. Thus "there is nothing real but the beautiful and nothing beautiful but the real." And through the Urn he wants to say that this is only knowledge we possess and that we need no other.

The second line of the quotation-"that is all ye know on earth and all ye need know"-is sometimes misunderstood to mean that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" gives the complete philosophy of life. Keats never intended it to be. It is only a theory of art, a doctrine to explain Keats' own creative experience. He was increasingly conscious that art is not everything and in his last two years he

became more uneasy about the detachment from life which his work imposed on him. In "Fall of Hyperion" Shelley suggests that the poet is but a "dreaming thing" and must hold a lower place than those who are moved by human suffering. When he wrote the Ode on a Grecian Urn in which the lines occur-Keats had not gone so far as to think that the truth which he sought through the imagination was a dream. It was still a very important truth for him as a poet but only as a poet. The Ode is his last word on a special activity and a special experience. Within its limits it has its own view of life. The belief that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is true for the artist while he is concerned with his art. It is no less true that, while he is at work, this is all that he knows for certain and all that he needs to know for the proper pursuit of his special task. Unless he believes, he is in danger of ruining his art.

This proposition implies that art should not exist for a moral purpose so much as primarily for its own sake. Keats worshipped beauty for the sake of beauty. Oscar Wilde like Swinburne and Keats too had no utilitarian view of art and battles against didacticism. The sole object of art is to please us by its aesthetic experience.