

29. The Place of Art in Education

The true object of education is to develop human personality in all its aspects. Any over-emphasis on a particular aspect to the neglect of another may lead to a kind of lop-sided development which in the long run may do more harm than good. There was a time in our educational history when emphasis was laid only upon the intellectual develop-

ment of the student. In those days there was very little attention paid even to physical development. Latterly they began to consider the importance of physical instruction so much so that one's proficiency in sports was given great weight in selecting candidates for certain appointments. But man is not merely his intellect and his physical body. He is very much more. He is a composite being whose real existence is far above and deeper than the merely physical and mental aspects. He has his emotions which play a more vital part in his development and the development of his nation than is ordinarily recognised. It is often said that we are mostly led by our sentiments and our intellect comes in only to supply valid reasons for what we decide to do in response to the promptings of our sentiments. Over and above all this, man is an immortal soul whose progress all the other factors of his existence serve to help.

Unfortunately the development of human emotions has not received that attention which is due to it in our educational institutions. In one sense it may be said that the present dead-lock in world affairs is to a large extent due to the lop-sided development of human personality referred to above. All emphasis was laid on head development while the heart of humanity was allowed to starve. It is this over-development of the head at the expense of the heart that has gone a long way to supply the psychological basis for our modern troubles. If there had been a balanced progress of the head and the heart, human nature would have developed certain fundamental moral values which would have made it impossible for the present world muddle to have come about. It is, therefore, necessary that the heart development of the pupil should receive very great attention at the hands of the educationalists. I am reminded in this connection of a great Chinese proverb which says. "If you have two loaves, sell one and buy a lily". The impli-

cation is obvious. Do not concentrate your attention on only food and drink, but pay equal attention to the development of your aesthetic nature. If the aesthetic nature of man is ignored, he will slide back to the animal kingdom. There is an old Sanskrit verse which says that a man who is without any taste for music, literature and other fine arts is verily a beast. What distinguishes a man primarily from a beast is this aesthetic faculty.

We speak of culture as signifying an all-round development of human faculties. It has been said that science is curiosity about life, art is wonder at life, philosophy is an attitude towards life and religion is reverence for life. True culture includes all these four aspects and a cultured man ought to show development along all these four lines. Einstein said: "The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the Mysterious. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who could no longer wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead." This sense of wonder is the basis of true culture.

It is, therefore, obvious that education in aesthetics is as essential as, if not more than, mere intellectual or physical education. Man can never be complete or balanced or harmonious unless his emotions are trained, developed and sublimated, and here comes in the need for introducing art in our educational curriculum as a compulsory subject. The true function of all arts is to train our emotional nature, harmonise it and then sublimate it so that an instinctive feeling to decide what is good, what is true and what is beautiful may be developed. Art enables one to sense the essence of things not merely as they seem but as they really are. To the artist, every object or event is not merely what it appears but represents a thought in the mind of God. When he looks at an object he not merely looks at it but through it into the Idea behind of which

that object or event is an expression, however faint; and so the objective world has a new meaning for him, reveals more to him than to the ordinary man. He is thus enabled to think in terms of types (archetypes, as Plato called them) in the mind of God. This helps him to achieve a synthesis which the analytical methods of intellectual science will rarely help him to achieve. A type in the mind of God is revealed down here in myriads of forms representing that type, multiplicity below and unity above — this is what the artist is enabled to feel and realise. This is best seen especially in portrait-painting where the portrait (painted by a real artist) does not only represent the person as he appeared to be at the moment he was observed but the person as he generally is (which means his general character and temperament) and what that person is in the mind of God.

Art refines our nature and creates an instinctive sense of fitness of things. It helps discipline without any formal rules of discipline. I may mention here an experiment tried by Madame Montessori in one of her schools in Milan. This is what she says: "I had tried to have a Directress of 'Children's House' in Milan who is a gifted musician make a number of trials and experiments..... She was greatly surprised to discover the effect of such music..... She now noticed that as she multiplied and repeated the rhythm exercises the children little by little left off their ugly jumping, until finally it was a thing of the past. The Directress one day asked for an explanation for this change of conduct..... The older children gave various replies, whose meaning was the same.

'It is not nice to jump',

'Jumping is ugly',

'It is rude to jump'.

This was certainly a beautiful triumph for our method."

Many problems of discipline might be solved to some extent by introducing art training as part of the educational curriculum. I am reminded of what the late Sir C. R. Reddi said in inaugurating one of the Music Conferences in Travancore. At that time some Indian politicians were going to attend some War Council meeting in London. Mr. Reddi said that if instead of sending politicians they would send some top-ranking musicians and if the War Council proceedings started with their music, there would in all probability be no war at all. A great change takes place in human nature in a mysterious manner through art education. Of course, I do not mean that in our schools we should train professional musicians and artists any more than we train professionals in other walks of human life. We are here to open up the hidden faculties in a human being and give full play to good ones and transmute the undesirable ones into desirable ones. A man of heart, despite his numerous failings and lapses will one day become a saint. But a man who is intellectually arrogant may not be able to achieve this. In our institutions we should provide facilities for unfolding the aesthetic nature in the young ones entrusted to our care. They should develop art sensibility, power to appreciate art and beauty — or to put it in short, become a cultured citizen.