

NATURE OF ART ACCORDING TO IQBAL

ZIAUDDIN AHMAD

Iqbal has discussed the nature of art which we may gather from his different writings and poetic works.

In his introduction to "MURAQQ-I-CHUGTAI", Iqbal wrote:

"The spiritual health of a people largely depends on the kind of inspiration which their poets and artists receive. But inspiration is not a matter of choice. It is a gift, the character of which cannot be critically judged by the recipient before accepting it. It comes to the individual unsolicited and only to socialise itself. For this reason the personality that receives and the life-quality of that which is received are matters of the utmost importance for mankind. The inspiration of a single decadent, if his art can lure his fellows to his song or pictures, may prove more ruinous to a people than whole battalions of Atilla or Changiz... To permit the visible to shape invisible, to seek what is scientifically called adjustment with Nature is to recognise her mastery over the spirit of man. Power comes from resisting her stimuli and not from exposing ourselves to their action. Resistance to what is with a view to create what ought to be, is health and life. All else is decay and death. Both God and man live by perpetual creations".

These lines very briefly summarise Iqbal's views about the nature of art. There is abundance of studies and thinking behind these lines. Iqbal was a keen student of art and literature and

when he rose to be a great philosopher these studies were deepened in meanings and sagacity. He was aware of the great philosophies of art. As he was himself a superb artist, he was directly in commune with the artistic spirit. In order to explain, what does he want to convey in his introduction to the Muraqq-i-Chughtai, I selectively reproduce from the writings of the great art-philosophers and artists.

It was Hegel, whose philosophy of art has great influence upon the theories of art as they are prevalent nowadays. Therefore, I start with his views. He believes that only when it has attained its appropriate freedom is fine art really art; it cannot fulfil its highest function till it has established itself in the same sphere with religion and philosophy and has become simply one of the ways of expressing, or presenting to consciousness, the divine, the deepest interests of man, the most comprehensive spiritual truths...This character art shares with philosophy and religion, but there is this difference: that art expresses even what is highest by sensuous form, and so brings it nearer to natural appearance, to our senses and feelings.

The universal and absolute need from which art, in its general character, springs, originates in the fact, says Hegel, that man is a thinking consciousness; that is that he makes explicit to himself, by means of his own nature, what he is and what the world is. Natural things are simply there and that is the end of it; man, being a mind, gives himself a double existence, since he not only like natural things, is, but also realises his own existence, perceives

himself, has ideas of himself, thinks himself, and only by this active realisation of himself is he a mind. Man attains this self-consciousness in a two-fold way. First theoretically, so far as he had to bring his inmost self before consciousness — every movement of the human heart, every storm that sways it. In general he has to contemplate himself, to picture himself, to fix before himself what thought discovers as his essential character; he has to recognize only himself both in all that is called up in him and in all that he assimilates from without. Secondly, man realises himself through practical activity, since he has the impulse to express himself, and so again to recognize himself, in things that are at first simply presented to him as externally existent. He attains this end by altering external things and impressing in them the stamp of his own inner nature, so that he rediscovers his own character in them. Man does this in order that he may profit by his freedom to break down the stubborn indifference of the external world to himself, and may enjoy in the countenance of nature only an outward embodiment of himself.⁶

How beautifully William Wordsworth expresses his ideas on Poetry:

"All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of

⁶ Hegel's Aesthetics.

human nature, and more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him, delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he had added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than everything which, from the motions of their own minds merely other men are accustomed to feel in themselves: Whence and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.

"The poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected of him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man...He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.

"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance; of all Science....carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself...The Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement and a greater power of expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men.⁷

Shelley in his "Defence of Poetry" rightly thinks that poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world.

Iqbal also thinks:

بہار برگ پراگندہ را بہم بر بست

نگاہ ماست کہ بر لالہ رنگ و آب افزود

"The Spring has only put the scattered leaves together. It is my eye which has given the poppy colour and sheen".

The same views have been beautifully expressed by Tolstoy, Walter Pater and Gentile.

⁷ Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

Tolstoy believes that "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling — this is the activity of art. It is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity".⁸

Walter Pater thinks that just in proportion as the writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, come to be the transcribing, not of the world, nor of mere fact, but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work fine art; and good art in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense; as in those humbler or plainer functions of literature also, truth — truth to bare fact, there, — is the essence of such artistic quality as they may have. Truth! there can be no merit, no craft at all, without that. And further, *all beauty is in the long run only fineness of truth*, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within.

Literary art, that is, like all art which is in any way imitative of reproductive of fact,-form or colour, or incident, is the representation of such fact as connected with soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, its volition and power.

⁸ Tolstoy's What is Art?

Such is the matter of imaginative or artistic literature—this transcript, not of mere fact but of fact in its infinite variety, as modified by human preferences in all its infinitely varied forms.

Good art, then if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will also be great art, if, over and above those qualities I summed up as mind and soul — that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.⁹

Gentile expresses his views with clarity and verve. The form of art, which every man recognizes from his own experience, or to speak more exactly, the form of certain products or experiences of the spirit which have artistic value, is the form of the Ego as pure subject. But if tried to lay our hands on this form as a concrete existence, it would be a vain shadow. Yet it reveals itself in experience in the medium of the whole creative act of thought, which besides being pure subjectivity, is also pure objectivity.

The form of art is not identical with the form of thinking, for art, as we have seen, is not thought but prior to thought. Art is the soul of thought, not the body, that pure soul which we distinguish

⁹ Walter Pater's "Appreciation".

as being the principle of life, out of which the living thing draws its whole being and makes itself our actual body; the principle in which and by which we really live. This soul in itself, prior to the body which it animates, is the unique form in which art consists.

Art is not the expression or intuition of feeling but feeling itself.

It was a mere result of adding the intuitive form to the subject matter of feeling. First there was the feeling and then the vision of this feeling; as if such immediate vision could be possible, or indeed any spiritual activity could be directed upon an object already existent.

What is called a work of Art (poem, symphony, picture, statue), just so far as it is a work of art, is closed within itself, incomparable with any other. For its artistic character is to be found in the feeling that animates it, in the soul that governs it and that makes us feel something inwardly alive, for which our hearts beat with that secret passion which is the very passion of life. This feeling, which underlies every distinction, is distinguishably one and without parts. Yet at the same time it is the whole. Nothing is outside it and all that comes to light in the life of the spirit must be a form of it and be its offspring...

Art does not consist in thought, but in that moment when the mind returns to the thrill of simple feeling...and we find that in the end we are all of us men.

The artist, like the critic, must rise above his subject matter and come into confident possession of his technique so that, when he sings, or paints, he simply translates into objective representations (in self-consciousness) nothing else but his own feeling, in which all the rest is united and fused. When he has succeeded in dissolving the world in his pure subjectivity, that is to say in feeling it, then only can he express it, drawing from himself what has flowed into him and analysing in the light of consciousness the dim and formless matter within him, the mere feeling...

Art is the form of a subject-matter; it is the feeling which has a definite being of its own as the subject experiencing a certain world; it is the feeling of a personality which, as body and thought, includes everything within itself.

Where there is feeling there is everything; it is universal and infinite as the soul whose essence it is. And this universality and infinity of feeling is the humanity of true art, which, in expressing the most secret heart of every individual, turns out to be what is most intimate to the hearts of all men, without limit of time or place. Thus it makes all men brothers by uniting them in a single soul.¹⁰

Iqbal says: —

"The ultimate end of all human activity is Life-Glorious, powerful and exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to

¹⁰ E. F. Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty*, p. 323-330

this final purpose and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to Reality around, on the mastery of which alone life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power."

نغمہ می باید جنوں پروردہ

آتشے در خون دل حل کردہ

نغمہ گر معنی ندارد مردہ ایست

سوز او از آتش افسردہ ایست

آن ہنرمندے کہ بر فطرت فزود

راز خود را برنگاہ افسردہ ایست

آفریند کائنات دیگرے

قلب را بخشد حیات دیگرے¹¹

¹¹ A melody must be nourished on madness of Love,

Iqbal believes in man's powers for limitless developments and creative activities and is wide awake to his high and sublime position in this Universe:

Iqbal is an Artist as well as a poet of Nature. He has the *eye* of an artist and interprets all the fine shades of colour in Nature. He is a minute observer of its doings and a keen student of its manifestations. Clouds, stars, mountains, trees, flowers and streams attract his imagination most. He catches a glimpse of the landscape, an outline of the mountain peak or a momentary gleam of the Sea and busies himself with his impressions. His imaginative impressions are remarkable and superb.

صدمہ آجائے ہوا سے گل کی پتی کو اگر

اشک بن کر میری آنکھوں سے ٹپک جائے

It should be like fire dissolved in life-blood.

A melody that has no meaning is lifeless,

Its warmth is only from a dying fire!

The skilful master improves upon nature

And reveals his secret to our gaze!

He creates a new world

— and gives a new life to our being.

(If the petal of a flower receives a shock from the breeze, the shock will drop from my eyes as a tear.)

Coleridge in the same strain, writes "Art is the reconciler of nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into everything which is the object of his contemplation; colour, form, motion and sound, are the elements which it combines and it stamps them into unity in the mould of a moral idea.

"By Excitement of the associative power passion itself imitates order, and the order resulting produces a pleasurable passion, and thus (poetry) elevates the mind by making its feelings the object of its reflection.¹²

Iqbal with delicacy has thrown further light on his art and poetry.

نگاہ شوق میسر نہیں اگر تجھ کو

ترا وجود ہے قلب و نظر کی رسوائی

(If thou hast not the vision of love then thy being is merely a dissipation of the heart and the eye.)

دلوں میں ولولے آفاق گیری کے نہیں اٹھتے

نگاہوں میں اگر پیدا نہ ہو انداز آفاقی

¹² Carritt, *Philosophies of Beauty*, pp. 134-135

(Universe-conquering passion does not arise in the heart If the eyes do not first produce the manner universal.)

What does the thinker Benedetto Croce say about Art? According to him art is a vision or intuition. The artist produces an image or a dream; and those who appreciate his art turn their eyes in the direction he has indicated, look through the loophole which he has opened and reproduce in themselves that image. 'Intuition', 'Vision', 'Contemplation', 'Fancy', 'Imagination,' 'Pattern', 'Representations' and the like are almost synonymous words, continually recurring in discussions about art, and all leading us to the same conception or systems of conceptions, a clear indication of universal agreement.

This character of art which distinguishes intuition from conception, art from philosophy and history — that is to say, from both the assertion of the universal and the perception or narration of the events, — has also been called ideality. And ideality is the very essence of art.

What gives unity and coherence to intuition is feeling. Intuitions are truly such because they represent feeling and only thence can they arise. It is not a thought but a feeling that gives to art the airy lightness of its symbolism. Art is an ideal within the four corners of an image.

He further says: "What we seek and enjoy in art, what makes our heart leap up and ravishes our admiration is the life, the movement, the passion, the fire, the feeling of the artist, that

alone gives us the supreme criterion for distinguishing works of true and false art, inspiration and failure.

Iqbal has envisaged his ideal of art in the following strain: —

مری نوا سے پریشان کو شاعری نہ سمجھ

کہ میں ہوں محرم راز درون میخانہ

(Do not take my distressed voice as mere verse,

For I am the knower of the innermost secret of the wine-shop)

زمانہ عقل کو سمجھا ہے مشعل راہ

کسے خبر کہ جنوں بھی صاحب ادراک

The world takes Intellect as the light of life; who knows That
Madness is also percipient)

دنیا کو ہے اس مہدی برحق کی ضرورت

ہو جس کی نگہ زلزلہ عالم افکار

(The world needs that rightful Guide, Whose Eye is an
earthquake in the world of ideas)

In the words of Prof. M. M. Sharif "It is a hidden treasure, a conserved dynamic wealth, super-abundant in the case of a genius, that finds an outlet in Art".¹³

Iqbal has profound predilection to believe that all fine art is product of intuition. The main component of poetry is the 'eye', the Nazr. That poetry is intuitive and revelatory and that the true art is presentation of the moods and style of the essential reality, seems to be the main stream of thought in Iqbal. This theory or the nature of poetry and art requires the concepts of 'eye', 'sight', 'mirror', etc as its logical foundation.

کچھ اور ہی نظر آتا ہے کاروبار جہاں

نگاہ شوق اگر ہو شریک بینائی

"The affairs of the world are seen transformed if the seeing
Is accompanied by the vision of love".

نگاہ پاک ہے تیری تو پاک ہے دل بھی

کہ دل کو حق نے کیا ہے نگاہ کا پیرو

("If thy eye is clean, thy heart is clean; for God has made the
Heart the follower of the eye".)

¹³ Beauty, Objective or Subjective, page 65.

مرا درس حکیمان درد سر داد

که من پرورده فیض نگاہم

(The lesson lesson of the Philosophers has given me a headache,

For I have been brought up only in the lap of the eye that sees).