CHAPTER VII

"THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP"

§ 1. THE MEANING OF THE IMAGES: MIRROR AND LAMP:

Prof. M. H. Abrams titles his excellent work on "Romantic theory and the Critical Tradition" in European (mainly English) literature as "The Mirror and The Lamp". He shows with a great mass of material for support that the romantic theory of poetry is an outcome of the recognition of the creative ability of human mind. In the earlier days when human mind was conceived as either an automatic mirror or a passive blank state, the theory of art and literature did not pay any significant recognition to the mind, which, according to the theory, was quite unimportant.

Now, we may make use of these two images or metaphors—the Mirror and the Lamp—to characterise the theories of truth and beauty which we considered in the earlier chapters: truth and beauty as (1) Imitation, (2) Instrument and (3) Harmony. The first two theories (with much emphasis on the first) can be characterised with the image of the mirror; and the third theory with that of the lamp. The imitation theory of truth and beauty points for its criterion to somewhere outside it; the function of the mind is only to reflect the light that falls on it from without. The instrument theory also can be characterised with the image of the mirror, because like the

and Aristotle, and it is too known a fact that both of these great ancient philosophers held the imitation theory of beauty. Both of them used the images which stand for the mirror view of mind. But it was John Locke who gave a very rigorous impetus to this view to stand itself against the other view. Locke asks us unequivocally to "suppose the mind to be, as a, say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas." But however thorough-going Locke was in his mirror-view of mind, he could not reduce the function of mind to that of a mere mirror. When he concedes to the mind certain function such as the perception of the secondary qualities, and recognises a distinction between simple ideas and complex ideas, he recognises the lamp-nature of human mind. As the inadequacy of the mirror-view of mind was realised, the lamp view began to clarify itself. And it gained more prominence in the popular imagination and among the poets even before it took a definite academic shape in the hands of the technical philosophers. Says, M. H. Abrams: "The copernican revolution in epistemology—if we do not restrict this to Kant's specific doctrine that the mind imposes the forms of time, space and the categories on the 'sensuous manifold', but apply it to the general concept that the perceiving mind discovers what it has itself partly made—was effected in England by poets and critics, before it manifested itself in academic philosophy." This shows not only the basic view of mind which is at the

2. Essays concerning Human understanding, 1, 127 (II, i, 2).
bottom of the imitation theory of truth and beauty but that there is an underlying current or tendency which expresses itself both in epistemology and aesthetics, retaining its original nature in both the forms of its manifestation.

§ 2. THE AESTHETIC AND THE EPISTEMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE METAPHORS:

We may now proceed to explain the real meaning of the metaphors—the mirror and the lamp. When we say that the mind is like a lamp, it means that it is self-shining and that in whatever the context it is used, epistemic or aesthetic, the proof of its validity is within itself. That is, the two propositions that a judgment is true and why that judgment is true are contained within the mind which made that judgment. Similarly that a work of art is beautiful and why it is beautiful are contained within the mind. To express the same in the Mīmāṃsaka and Veda terminology, truth is svatah-pramāṇa. If we may apply the same terminology to the aesthetic judgment also, we may explain in a greater detail the meaning of this term in the context of what we have been discussing, noting the epistemological and aesthetic contexts in which the term is used.

In the context of truth, when we say that the mind is like a self-shining lamp, what is meant is, knowledge (needless to say genuine knowledge) not only is true but its truth is self-evident; and the question of the validity of its truth does not arise at all. When a judgment is true, the question, what is the validity of its truth?, is non-sensical. Yet one may ask, why or in virtue
of which condition, is that particular judgment true? But this question itself may mean a certain false notion that truth is something which is made by certain conditions of which truth is a consequent. But in fact truth is not in any way different from the conditions like the cream is from milk. It is identical with how the conditions are related to each other and thus it makes a coherent whole. The self-evidence view of truth only means that the whole, which is called truth, should be self-complete and it cannot depend for its logical ground on any extraneous condition. And if it does so, that extraneous condition is already a part of that whole. So, knowledge is the proof of knowledge or truth is the proof of truth. It is this view which is held by the coherence theory of truth. The coherence that is aimed at is an all-inclusive self-coherence and a limited whole cannot to that extent claim a greater degree of truth.

Here one may ask: Does it not follow that corresponding to the degree of inclusiveness, we should recognise the corresponding degree of self-evidence? But this question is totally uncalled for; because self-evidence and inclusiveness are one and the same. The point is, we should only consider whether there is any piece of knowledge. If there is, as long as it is a genuine piece of knowledge (and a piece of knowledge is always genuine unless it is proved otherwise, in which case it is no longer knowledge) it is self-evident.

It is this view which is meant when the mind is described in the analogy of the lamp. To elaborate the
metaphor a little more in detail but without becoming literal: the lamp stands not merely for the flame but for the whole field of light just as the mind is not merely a particular spatial area with a material stuff called brain, but the whole field of human knowledge. This knowledge may go on widening and may become more and more bright. The wider it becomes, the more inclusive will it be; and more and more systematic it turns out itself, it becomes brighter and brighter. Just as no outside help is necessary to reveal a real light, even so no external proof is necessary to prove the validity of truth.

A similar view is meant when we speak of the self-evidence of beauty. When a work of art is beautiful, all the conditions or the factors that make it beautiful should be within that work itself. Earlier (Ch. III) we defined beauty as imaginative integration or the coherence of imagination and we have already explained the sense in which the word imagination is used. Now, a work of art is a unity of diverse parts. It is the unity of these parts or how these parts are coherently organised that we call the beauty of the work. The beauty is identical with all the parts as they are related to each other. That beauty is self-contained only means, whatever the elements that are necessary for the work of art should be within the work itself and if the work depends in any way on any extraneous condition, due to that very reason, that condition, is also a part of that work.

The self-containedness of beauty points to another
fact: Beauty is the coherence of imagination and when imagination achieves the self-complete coherence, we have the experience of beauty. For that, no other factor extraneous to imagination like the intellectual need come to the assistance and say, "Lo! you are having the experience of imaginative coherence and therefore you should experience beauty."

The analogy of the lamp in explaining the self-evidence nature of beauty helps us to understand that beauty is essentially a mental experience. But it should not be understood that because it is a mental experience, it excludes the feeling or emotional tones of experience. Without falling into the old faculty psychology, we only mean that whatever we experience is mental and in the case of truth the experience is coherently organised by intellect while in that of beauty it is done by imagination. In both the cases, the experience is essentially mental and any attempt to prove the validity of these two distinct modes of experience from outside the mind is an attempt to invite contradiction.

That beauty is a mental experience should not mean that aesthetic experience is merely subjective; nor should it imply that it need have no reference to the physical work like a picture hung on the wall. What is actually meant is, though the picture is out there hung on the wall, unless it becomes one with our imaginative mind, the experience of beauty cannot take place. To express the same in Indian terminology, unless the citta takes the form
indicated in the picture, in such a way that the indicated form and the citta become one, the experience of the beauty of that picture cannot take place.

The conception of mind in the analogy of lamp in the context of our discussion of truth and beauty raises a number of ontological questions. If the lamp is a self-shining spirit, what does it show? Is its nature only to shine for itself or to reveal an external object which is other than the light of that lamp? Is not the object of truth and beauty independent of this lamp? Here we have neither space nor scope to enter into a detailed answer to this question. The problem of the status of the objective world in Idealism has been tackled and answered in different ways by different philosophers; and in spite of the diversity of answers given by these various thinkers, all of them agree in that the object of knowledge is not independent of knowledge and hence it cannot be the final judge to be appealed for the confirmation of truth.

In the same way, when we grant beauty the status of a value on a par with that of truth, it cannot be either confirmed or rejected by an appeal to something which is not independent.

The mirror theory of mind makes a number of claims. It claims that in any cognitive situation, the process of knowledge starts from the object and that it is possible for this mirror to verify its own image with the real object. If the analogy of the mirror is pressed to its logical extreme, truth should cease to be a value; for
the process of knowledge becomes an automatic mechanical phenomenon, just as the mirror facing the right side of the motorist automatically reflects all the trees and houses and practically everything that exists on the road. And just as truth ceases to be a value, so also beauty cannot claim any value. Since we studied this aspect of the problem quite elaborately when we criticised the imitation theory of truth and beauty, we need not repeat the same.

Treating the mind as a mirror involves a confusion of a casual category for logical and aesthetic categories. Just relying on the account given by the physics of perception, it takes the category of physics—i.e., causation—and applies it to epistemology and aesthetics. The physics of perception holds that the stimulus starts from the object and the effect is the consciousness of perception in the cortical centre. But in epistemology in which we are supposed to start without any assumption—and causation is an assumption of physics—we cannot start with the external object. Causation is a category that is applicable to the phenomena and knowledge which reveals all the phenomena to us is not a phenomenon itself. Phenomenal facts never come to us directly without the mediation of knowledge. As the Nyāya school thinks: "When we say that knowledge has been produced in us by the external collocations, we just take a perverse point of view which is unwarranted by experience: knowledge only photographs the objective phenomena for us; but there is nothing to show that knowledge has been generated by these phenomena..."
The rise of knowledge is never perceived by us to be dependent on any objective fact, for all objective facts are dependent on it for its revelation or illumination. This is what is said to be the self-validity (svatah - prāmāṇya) of knowledge in its production (utpatti).\(^4\)

The same thing in a different mode applies to the experience of beauty. Beauty is not an external fact and it is the same as the creative spirit of the inner intuition. The great Indian aesthetician, Buddhaghosha (5th Century A.D.) holds that "the objective expression" of the creative spirit of the inner intuition "is only an accidental translation (Atthasalini).\(^5\) In modern times, the expressionist Croce too echoes the same view. For Croce, whether the imaginative realization is expressed on the canvas or the paper etc., or not, the moment the intuition (not in the Kantian sense) is realized the work of creativity is over and the external translation of it is a secondary and an accidental function. We shall not agree with the view of Buddhaghosha and Croce. For, no concrete act of artistic imagination can take place apart from its medium. A musician may tonally imagine a new Rāga, but he can do so without either singing loudly or playing on an instrument because he is a trained expert in tonal perceptions. Even in the absence of real physical sound, he can imagine so as though the physical sound is present.

But music is not possible without the physical medium of sound. And so is the case with all the other forms of art. What we here insist upon is: in art experience or art-creation, we should not try to divorce the physical medium from the activity of the creative spirit. The creative spirit and the physical medium are called different only at a later stage of reflective analysis. But the work of art—the aesthetic experience—is one and the creative process (if the term is understood without any causal implication) is not complete till the inner intuition is translated into the physical medium. The aesthetics of Sukranitisāra supports this view.6

The point of special importance for us in this context is only this: that the work of art or the creative imagination is not caused by any outside object but it is due to the imaginative or creative power of the human mind: which never allows the difference between its physical or external medium and itself. It is itself and so whether it is really aesthetic or not is to be judged by itself with its own standard and no external standard is allowed to perform this function. This is what the analogy of the lamp implies in opposition to the analogy of the mirror.

§ 3. VERIFICATION OF TRUTH AND BEAUTY:

If the validity of truth is in knowledge itself and that of beauty in the aesthetic experience itself, we cannot say that the validity is different from knowledge or beauty from aesthetic experience. The two in each are

6. Ibid. p.115.
one and the same. Knowledge, because it is knowledge is valid by itself and aesthetic experience because it is aesthetic experience is by itself beautiful. So the question of showing the validity of truth or proving the beauty of aesthetic experience does not arise.

But it might be asked: sometimes even knowledge should subject itself to criticism and substantiation or modification; and what was once claimed as aesthetic experience should confess that it is not a genuine case of beauty.

This objection is based on a confusion in distinguishing genuine knowledge from a disguised error and a genuine aesthetic experience from a deceptive allurement. When I doubt what I believed to be true, I am not doubting real knowledge, but only what claimed to be knowledge and and if I know that what I believe to be knowledge is genuine, I never doubt it. Hence it is error which is always the subject of doubt and criticism. Sometimes we know a particular judgment to be true and yet we try to adduce a number of arguments in its support. But here, the question is whether the original judgment is complete knowledge without the several supporting arguments or it becomes complete only by including all of them. In the latter case, its proofs are within itself and hence it is self-evident. In the former case, the supporting arguments are only like luxury ornaments to an originally beautiful lady; the ornaments, though they may give an impression of grandiosity, are basically superfluous from the point of view of judging her beauty. Explaining the self-valid
nature of knowledge according to Vedānta, Dr. D. M. Datta writes: "When ten different arguments are adduced to ratify a particular knowledge, what is achieved is not directly the ascertainment of validity (which is congenital with knowledge itself), but the removal of ten actual or possible sources of doubt or contradiction which stand in the way of knowledge itself."⁷

In the case of aesthetic experience too a similar thing happens. What we once believed to be beautiful may turn out in a later developed stage as unbeautiful or even positively ugly. We did believe rather dogmatically that a novel was beautiful because at the early stage it had excited our grosser emotions or inartistically played on our anxiety; we believed a musical piece to be really beautiful because it had brought in us the mood to forget an ethical failure we had committed. But when our aesthetic sensibility has developed to a certain height, the very works that once allured us cease to be beautiful. Here also, the genuinely beautiful can never cease to be what it was and only the spurious is doubted.

What this points to is this: Either in aesthetic experience (beauty) or in cognitive experience (knowledge or truth), a certain degree of training or tempering of the mind is necessary. In Indian terminology it is called Citta Suddhi or Citta Samskāra. We may also describe it as the fulfilment of the ethical conditions in aesthetic and cognitive experiences. In Indian tradition the artist is enjoined to sit in meditation and purge out all his
citta vṛtti before he can concentrate his mind on the content of his creation. Coomaraswamy writes according to Buddhistic sources: "The artist (sādhaka, mantri, or yogi, as he is variously—and significantly—called), after ceremonial purification, is to proceed to a solitary place.... Then he must realize in thought the four infinite moods of friendliness, compassion, sympathy, and impartiality. Then he must meditate upon the emptiness (Sūnyatā) or non-existence of all things, for 'by the fire of the idea of the abyss, it is said, there are destroyed beyond recovery the five factors of ego-consciousness'...... Then finally on pronouncing the dhyāna mantram, in which the attributes are defined, the divinity appears visibly, 'like a reflection' or 'as in a dream' and this brilliant image is the artist's model."

Coomaraswamy further comments: "This ritual is perhaps unduly elaborated, but in essentials it shows a clear understanding of the psychology of the imagination. These essentials are the setting aside the transformations of the thinking principle; self-identification with the object of the work; and vividness of the final image."8

A similar kind of psychological purification is necessary for the art-experient (rasika) too lest his experience should diverge or degenerate from the rasa of the work of art.

The various prescriptions given in Patanjali's Yoga Sūtra and accepted by many other Indian schools, point to

8. The dance of Shiva. p.44-45.
the recognition of the utmost necessity of the tempering of the mind as a precondition for the attainment of truth. In the experience of either truth or beauty, its opposite—error or ugliness—passes itself for what it is not because of certain defects in the mind. When the mind is purged of all defects what it cognitively creates will be truth and what it imaginatively creates will be beauty—both genuine and self-valid. If the lamp is cleansed of its slag, it radiates light.