In the previous chapter we noted that one of the main functions of art lay in the positive ethical value provided by it in the life of the individual, a value which did not accrue to it from any extra aesthetic causes but stemmed from the very nature of the art activity itself. In this chapter we wish finally to emphasize art as a function of the social order and its value to society thereof. The discussion will also include allied questions such as the extent to which the artist is free within the social context. Should he permit himself to be influenced by his cultural environment? Does he, as an artist, owe a responsibility to society and to its members? If so, in what way?

The traditional Indian theory of art assumes an integral relation between art and society.¹ This assumption

¹Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, Dover Publications Inc. New York 1956 p. 27. "In our traditional view of art, in folk art, Christian and Oriental art, there is no essential distinction of a fine and useless art from a utilitarian craftsmanship. There is no distinction in principle of orator from carpenter, but only a distinction of things well and truly made from things not so made and of what is beautiful from what is ugly in terms of formality and informality."
is based naturally on their comprehensive understanding of the term 'art' which is for them not a particular kind of activity relying on the "vagaries of genius", but a highly disciplined method depending largely on training. Through this method everyone (genius or otherwise) is able to achieve a desired result. In other words, it is simply the systematic and organized employment of energy and skill towards the fulfilment of human purpose and as such is not confined to a special group of people who alone are considered competent to practise art. In fact, it is a discipline which can and should be imbibed by everyone. Philosophers have a similar idea in mind, when they declare art to be human intelligence.² Taken in this very wide sense art includes the whole of life. Now, a complete civilization is one which is based on organisation and system. Life in such a state would automatically be coincident with art,³ and the arts of the statesman, artisan, physician, lawyer etc., would be given therein the pre-eminence that goes to the arts of music, dancing, painting and sculpture, and the fine arts would be created to serve social ends.

The point of difference between this approach typical of the Indian point of view and other art theories


³Ibid., pp. 36-37.
lies basically in its refusal to isolate art from human purposes and to make a distinction between the utilitarian and the beautiful. "The work of art is not merely an occasion of ecstasy, and in this relation inscrutable, but also according to human needs and therefore according to standards of usefulness, which can be defined and explained." In this context art is a human necessity and not a mere playtime activity. It is the fulltime expression of a healthy civilization and not the passing fad of a leisured class. It belongs to mankind in general and not only to a small privileged group of people who label their idiosyncracy as art. In fine, art is not an exclusive cult the object of which is to pursue the remote ideal of beauty, but a normal, healthy, intelligent activity distinguished from the ordinary by the high degree of organization, system, discipline and training that is required. Beauty accordingly is not an inaccessible value abstracted from life but lies in the perfect functioning of the work, that is, in the complete

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4 Mulk Raj Anand, The Hindu View of Art, Appendix I, The Philosophy of Ancient Asiatic Art, by Ananda Coomaraswamy, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1957. "This good or usefulness will be of two main kinds: religious and secular; one connected with theology, adapted to the worship and service of God as a person, the other connected with social activity adapted to the proper ends of human life which are defined in India as vocation or function (dharma), pleasure (kama) and the increasing of wealth (artha)."
working of the purpose for which the work is made. This view presumes that every object is made for some purpose and not simply for decoration and exhibition. When it is made for use, a work of art is subject to certain requirements, individual and social, and hence considers its relationship to its ultimate surroundings. It becomes then an integral part of the entire social complex and does not remain a phenomenon isolated from it. Artists are accordingly socially responsible beings, securing human aims and not society outcastes, or according to the trend-in-vogue, society idols. An object which is made to suit the inclinations of the artist and not the requirements of society is a kind of oddity and curiosity, and not art. Since it is made without any purpose in view it becomes an accidental form of self-expression rather than a carefully planned and organised work.

Indian art theory like the medieval Scholastic theory of art in the West, emphatically denies the view that makes art a curiosity; for the Indian theorists it


6 "Art which is only intended to be hung on the walls of a museum is one kind of art that need not consider its relationship to the ultimate surroundings. The artist can paint anything he wishes, any way he wishes and if the curator and trustees like it well enough they will hang it up on the walls with all the other curiosities." Steinfels, quoted by Amand K. Commaraswamy in Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, p. 8.
is a perfection in making as ethics is a perfection in doing, and the artist is one who has understood the principles of proper making and learnt how to apply them with adequate skill. Consequently there is no substantial difference between the vocational worker and the artist. This aspect of the art activity is often overlooked by those who in their anxiety to place art on a pedestal and elevate it above other activities, emphasize purely its mental aspect and neglect to take account of its application in practical life. Art thus in order to justify its existence in everyday life assumes a superficial role. Some declare its very function to be "uselessness", and if this leads to a rift in society between the useful and the beautiful, justify the isolation of the latter by the well-known cliche that "Art bakes no bread but it nourishes the soul". A rift is, therefore, 

7This view is similar to the medieval Christian view where art belongs to the practical order. Its orientation is towards doing, not to the pure inwardness of knowledge. The Scholastics make a sharp distinction between making which belongs to the sphere of art and doing which belongs to the sphere of ethics. Metaphorically the whole of life can be said to be an art i.e. the art of living in true perfection; this art the saints alone fully possess. It may be compared to the Indian concept of the jivanmukta that is, the man who lives in perfection, fully enlightened and hence has no more need for art or morality. The sharp distinction made by the Christian Schoolmen between art and prudence is not clearly defined in the Indian theories, but implied by them. Both art and morality subserve the final goal of self-realization.

8This view was accentuated in the nineteenth century, when as a result of the reflections of such men
created 1) in the social order, between two different classes of activities, the utilitarian and the artistic, with all that is dreary, monotonous and stultifying characterizing the former, and all that is pleasurable, characterizing the latter and 2) in the human personality between two different faculties, the practical and the mental with no possible connection existing between the two. This rift presumes a dual function of the individual whereby he is motivated by opposing forces and desires. On the one hand is the work he undertakes for his physical and material well-being in which no element of beauty or joy must enter, and on the other hand is the hobby he pursues for his mental and spiritual well-being and in which pursuit no element of utility or labour must enter. Beauty, it is held, by those who support this theory, must be pure and totally free of all restrictions.

The cause of this unnatural cleavage between art activity and the practical concerns of life is not difficult to trace. It has two main causes: 1) an inadequate understanding on the part of the artist of ultimate human goals and purposes, and 2) socially inadequate conditions which compel the individual to

as Dubos, Vico, Kant, and Schiller who developed a separate philosophy of art, the view that art has a unique nature and function came to be associated with the so-called theory of "art for art's sake".
seek fulfilment in superficial activities rather than in the essential.

The art impulse of mankind is predominantly an expression of the ideas, aspirations and thoughts of the age in which it is nurtured. When a relatively more materialistic view of life predominates as against a religious and spiritualistic view, art becomes primarily a medium for providing sensuous pleasure and the artists' main emphasis lies in presenting pleasing and decorative forms to the eye rather than those which are spiritually elevating. The aim of art becomes in this case the mere exhibition of aesthetic surfaces and often no distinction is made between the amusing, the provoking, the emotionally stimulating object, and the artistic object. The only criterion the work of art is expected to conform to, is to its capacity to please.

Those aestheticians who would justify this view of art and save it from degenerating into a philosophy of pure hedonism, justify it on the grounds that while the main function of art is no doubt to provide pleasure, it is a different kind of pleasure from the ordinary. Terms like "mental pleasure", "objectified pleasure", "ecstasy" are used to distinguish the latter from the former. The attempt to distinguish the different kind of pleasure that art provides, from that which is provided by other activities is justifiable in itself. It generally
results however in isolating from life not only the pleasure, but the art activity which produces it as well. Since the pleasure provided is unique, the art activity which gives rise to it must also be unique, it is argued. Consequently art is removed from the ordinary affairs of daily life and elevated to an extraordinary realm. That which serves the mundane purpose of providing utilitarian goods cannot be artistic, nor give rise to the aesthetic pleasure. Art and utility cease to function together, the former withdrawing into the limited sphere of pure art, the production of utilitarian goods becomes merely mechanical designed to sell easily rather than to satisfy the creative urge. Instead of goods becoming beautiful and functional at the same time, they are either beautiful or functional. Instances of the former are confined to what are commonly called pure or fine art, such as "a sculptured horseman among the Elgin marbles, a Greek temple shining by a Sicilian sea, a lyric by Shelly or a quartet by Schubert". The argument in their favour goes like this. "These things seem to have their own unquestioned charm. They bake no bread but they feed the eye or the eye of the soul. They stir the senses to action and the imagination to pleasure and the mind to delight. They are good because they are good for nothing except their own immediately charming selves.

9Irwin Edman, The Arts and the Man, p. 39.
Such value as they have is to be reckoned not in terms of the utilities they produce but the immediate sensuous and imaginative satisfaction they provide — for the colours, shapes, sounds and suggestions they are.  

This argument, persuasive as it is, loses sight of the primary function of art, which is not to provide pleasure, intellectual or otherwise, as an end in itself but to act as a systematic means for the achievement of human goals. Pleasure or aesthetic delight (rasa) is an invariable and necessary accompaniment of this achievement but cannot be pursued for itself. In other words beauty is an essential aspect of truth and goodness and not an autonomous value existing for its own sake. It is for purposes of discussion alone that beauty is considered in isolation. In fact as already mentioned beauty as a value is synonymous with the perfect working out of the ends for which men work.

Historically we find that the isolation of art, from society has been due to the urge to save art from the mechanization and mere utilitarianism to which it degenerates in those periods when the materialistic view of life dominates, that is when considerations of profit and other motives dominate rather than the good of the

10Ibid., p. 39.
work itself.\footnote{Jacques Maritain, \textit{Art and Scholasticism}, p. 35. "The good of the work does not mean the pursuit of art as an end in itself but the functional considerations for which the work is created rather than the moral ends which lie beyond the work."}

An instance of "mere utilitarianism" is provided in modern times by the emphasis placed on high profits and mass production of goods in industry rather than on the good of the work. Accordingly today men prefer to take jobs which provide great income and profit even though the means of production are mechanical and repetitive rather than vocational. This condition has been aggravated by an industrial and technological society dominated by the laws of economics wherein responsibility rests only upon those who can produce the maximum goods for the maximum gain. As for those who wish to create also for the sake of beauty, they are forced to confine their work to the production of articles that have no use in life.\footnote{De Wilt H. Parker, \textit{The Nature of Art}, reprinted in the \textit{Problems of Aesthetics}, Vivas and Krieger, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1963, p. 98. "The industrial arts have always proved to be stumbling blocks to aesthetic theory. Is it said that the field of art is mere appearance, unreality, illusion: well, what is more real than a building or a pot? Or, is it said that beauty has nothing to do with utility; well, is it not obvious that fitness of form to function plays a part in the beauty of pots, baskets, houses, and the like?"} "The cult of beauty without responsibility
is a reaction against a responsible life without beauty. In the forms of art the emancipated spirit may find the satisfaction that is denied to it by a civilization without form or a universe conceived as without meaning.\textsuperscript{13}

In traditional societies on the contrary the motive for production is generally the good of the work itself and the good of the artist. Consequently the division between utility and beauty is less acute.

"There are half a dozen museums in Europe which have whole galleries filled with the delicate paraphernalia

The only way to solve the difficulty is to recognize that the practical meaning as pure meaning does enter into the aesthetic experience of such things. It is of course true that the aesthetic value of a building is not the same as its practical value; one does not have to live in it or own it in order to appreciate its beauty. Or one does not have to wear a shoe in order to know that it is beautiful; "window shopping"— a good example of imaginative satisfaction — proves that this is so. The aesthetic value is a transfer of the practical value to the plane of imagination.

"The beauty of the shoe is in the way the shoe looks, not in the way it feels; but it must look as if it would feel good. So the beauty of the house is not the living well in it; but the way it looks as if one could live well in it. It is in the memory or anticipation of its service — twin phases of imagination — that its beauty resides. The use is in action; the beauty in the pure meaning. The recognition that the practical meaning, as a pure meaning, may enter into beauty of an object thus solves the paradox of the industrial arts, and reconciles the contention of those who insist on the connexion of art with life, with the disinterestedness of beauty proclaimed by the aesthetes and the philosophers."

\textsuperscript{13}Irwin Edman, \textit{Arts and the Man}, p. 43.
of daily Greek life - vases, spoons, combs, jars and shields. These things were all made for use; they were intended to serve a function. But to the nostalgic eye of the modern it is not their function but their decorative perfection that is of first interest. We see almost purely as things of beauty what to the Greeks who employed and to the Greeks who made them were things of daily use." This statement applies equally well to Indian traditional art. The temples and palaces of the past were intended for habitation of the gods and men and the decorations upon their walls were for the purpose of enhancing faith and devotion. The outward manifestations helped men towards a true inward realization. In an age which was predominantly religious, the sculptures and murals of Indian art were the expressions of a given social order and a given civilization. What are now exhibited as curiosities

14Ibid., p. 41.

15Eric Gill, Art and Reality, reproduced in Hindu View of Art by Mulk Raj Anand. "And strange as it may seem painters and sculptors were not very great dukes even in medieval Europe or India. The great works of those ages also were great communal efforts. There was no such thing as a school specially devoted to the learning of a thing called art. Buildings and workshops were their art-schools, and the ideas to be expressed, made manifest in material, were not specially those of the workmen but, as today in the case of science and mechanics, of whole populations. Individual prowess was doubtless applauded, but it was seen in right perspective—a thing of small importance compared with the right-thinking of the community. A medieval cathedral, like the Quebec bridge or a common microscope, expresses the genius of a people".
once used to serve the needs of men. Even the traditional Indian music and dance forms, which are now performed in concert halls and theatres for the aesthetic delight of passive audiences, were originally active forms of religious worship. The Bharata Natyam, South India's best known classical dance form, was till a few decades ago primarily a temple-dance and classical music in India is permeated with the devotional spirit. Dance and music as forms of entertainment in India really gained prominence during the Muslim rule wherein these arts were developed in the courts of kings and emperors, away from the people. It is this isolated and limited sphere of art that has been condemned by moralists and philosophers both in India and the West, from Plato onwards. The stress on the purely pleasurable aspect as against the functional has always seemed a distraction to men intent upon the serious concerns of alleviating the disorders and distresses of human life and a sensuous disturber of the spirit. For Plato the fine arts were dangerous panderers to emotions and if not kept in control could disrupt the order of things and divert men from the truth of reality. Moreover, music could mould the emotions of men according to its martial or soft quality. Other moralists such as St. Augustine in the West, the Buddhists, and other puritan sects in India, have condemned the sensuality to which the arts might turn men. They have been conscious
of its physical surface value which arrests the attention and leads the mind away from the inner and permanent value of things.

Those who condemn the arts of poetry and literature do so on the grounds of their highly sensuous appeal and the irresponsible use made of this attractive media for unethical purposes, such as the provocation of revolutionary thinking and propaganda.

The above objections and others similar to them, made by practical men, politicians and moralists against the impracticality of art is understandable. For them art is an indulgence and not a necessity.\(^16\)

It is clear that people who object to art on these grounds reflect the indignation of the whole man against an unnatural split in the human personality and in the integrated social structure.

\(^{16}\)"Men of the world, the heads of families of businesses, and institutions have always regarded with more than suspicion, the artist who feels no responsibility to anything save his medium, the aesthete who feels no responsibility to anything but his exquisite sensations. In a world where there is much to be done merely to keep that world going, where the cares and compulsions of affairs tax the energies and exhaust the ingenuities of the most robust and ingenious of men, the arts both in their creation and enjoyment seem fantastically trivial." Irwin Edman, *Arts and the Man*, p. 50.
The moralist who objects to art is really objecting to a kind of art which is used as a stimulant only for excitement and entertainment. His objection does not extend to the concept of art as a disciplined and organized human activity. Even Plato who condemned the arts of the poet, painter and musician, justified a higher art, an art which includes the whole of life. The practical man is perfectly justified in accusing the artist of a self-imposed isolation from society, an abdication of all responsibility and a refusal to use art for the good of man. Those who offer a counter argument to the practical man and justify art on the grounds that though 'art bakes no bread it feeds the soul', overlook the important point that the spirit cannot be nourished in a vacuum and that to pursue art for itself and not for an end is a form of isolation. Even the spirit must find its fulfilment in the things of this world. If the fine arts have come in for criticism and contempt by widely differing groups of persons, it is because they have during certain periods been encouraged for their irrational, superficial and individual role, rather than for their disciplined, organized and universal role. The arts come in for severe censor when they cease to be the earnest expression of a whole civilization and
become the symptomatic outburst of a special group. 17

Undoubtedly it was a reaction against the widespread infiltration of industrialization and mechanization into every aspect of life that the arts, particularly in the nineties of the last century, virtually gave up their claim to serve human ends and abstracted themselves from society. The cause was valid but the solution was not. The solution does not lie in taking art away from life and putting it into museums, art galleries and

17 Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, tr. J. F. Scanlan, Charles Scribner's & Sons, New York, 1943, p. 32. "In the powerfully social structure of medieval civilization the artist ranked simply as an artisan, and every kind of anarchical development was prohibited to his individualism, because a natural social discipline imposed upon him from without certain limiting conditions. He did not work for society people and the dealers, but for the faithful commons; it was his mission to house their prayers, to instruct their minds, to rejoice their souls and their eyes. Matchless epoch, in which an ingenious folk was educated in beauty without even noticing it as perfect religious ought to pray without being aware of their prayers; when doctors and painters lovingly taught the poor, and the poor enjoyed their teaching, because they were all of the same royal race, born of water and the spirit.

"More beautiful things were then created and there was less self-worship. The blessed humility in which the artist was situated exalted his strength and his freedom. The Renaissance was destined to drive the artist mad and make him the most miserable of men — at the very moment when the world was to become less habitable for him — by revealing to him his own grandeur and letting loose upon him the wild beast Beauty which Faith enchanted and led after it obedient, with a gossamer thread for leash".
drawing rooms, but to introduce it into all aspects of human activity and bring it back to life. In a well-ordered society the principles of art would be applied by everyone at their daily work and not be confined to a few aesthetes in the museum or the concert hall. To seek for art a function away from society and to try and create beauty without meaning and utility is to reduce art to a mere superficiality. By introducing art to serious living, the quality of disciplined spontaneity and organized pleasure is brought to everyday life and work is transformed from drudgery into a creative fulfilment. The primary function of art in society is to effect this transformation and thereby to help integrate the social order.

The main point to be noted here is that art is essentially a practical activity. While it derives its source from the imaginative visualization of artist and leads to the contemplative enjoyment of the aesthete, it is the external and necessary manifestation of a three-way process. The aesthetic experience to which the art activity leads is undoubtedly a unique experience marked by its "away-from-life character", but the art activity itself is that which requires worldly skill and aptitude; it is the manifestation in visible and tangible form of the aesthetic consciousness. A far-fetched analogy can
describe it as the body in which aesthetic joy (rasa) is the soul. As a tangible phenomena, art is subject to the laws and rules of society, and its making is not merely an occasion for aesthetic contemplation, but does something for human needs.

The Indian view of art places an equal emphasis on skill and training as on visualization. The practice of art consequently becomes typically an hereditary vocation and not a matter of private choice. Artistic ability is not conceived as an inspiration, but rather in the same light as skill in surgery or engineering.

This view may seem to impair seriously the concept of the freedom of the artist, particularly as it is conceived in modern times, when the artist feels no pressures whatsoever from society and is permitted to create according to his own choice. If "freedom" in art implies the freedom to express one's self in whatever way one chooses and to "invent" new themes the traditional view he doubts imposes a restriction. Traditional Indian art forms require the artist to work within the narrow confines of technicality and craftsmanship. Innovation for its own sake is not encouraged, the work of art being required to conform to the strictest prescribed standards.
Admirably does Coomaraswamy sum up the total traditional approach: "The themes of art are provided by general necessities inherent in racial mentality and more specifically by a vast body of scripture and by written canons; method is learnt as a living workshop tradition, not in a school of art; style is a function of the period, not of the individual.... Themes are repeated from generation to generation and pass from one country to another; neither is originality a virtue, nor 'plagiarism' a crime, where all that counts is the necessity inherent in the theme. The artist as maker, is a personality much greater than that of any conceivable individual; the names of even the greatest artists are unknown."\(^{18}\)

The outward restrictions imposed upon the artist are not designed to stultify and choke him, but rather to provide the guide lines within the framework of which he can achieve a more profound expression. The goal of art is not a vagrant spontaneity but a disciplined expression. Freedom in art as in any other human activity is achieved, when the universal principles are understood

by the subject so completely that their manifestation in a specific form becomes effortless and spontaneous. This understanding achieved through the practice of the strictest discipline, is the result of a total identification of subject and object. What is expressed therefore is the inner spiritual "self" the essential aspect of the personality and not the transitory "self" with its passing fads and fancies. The traditional Indian artist aims at revealing through the art-work his innermost being and thereby effecting a liberation from his superficial individuality. He does not feel the necessity to express his personality through the uniqueness and novelty of the art-work. The kind of freedom which permits the artist to express the varying facets of a changing personality is not what he seeks. He does not waste his efforts in trying to evolve new art forms and modes of expression but depicts the typical because for him all art forms are conventions which when fully grasped, the artist has no need for any more. But till such time that these are properly understood they must be applied conscientiously with complete mastery. The one thing most necessary to the human workman is practice (abhāṣa) which is not simple dexterity but a devoted application (anusīlānaṇaṃ) with full comprehension of the rules, which results in an effortless second
nature and finds graceful expression (madhurya) in the performance.19

Abhyasa requires complete fidelity to the prescribed canons, which can be put aside only when the artist has achieved such perfection in his work and has attained to such an identification of the inner and the outer, that he works with complete accuracy and spontaneity. Such a condition is seldom achieved and when it is, the artist has no more need for art. Such an ideal is represented in Indian philosophy by the concept of the jivanmukta, that is one who has transcended human ends and is entirely free from motivation. In this stage the individual is beyond action, knowledge and art. It is the seldom achieved goal towards which all creation strives.

The canonical prescriptions which the traditional artist follows conscientiously help not only the artist to achieve his purpose but also help the spectator to achieve a ready identification with him. When the artist creates according to personal choice, the spectator can appreciate his purpose only if by accident he is able to identify himself with the artist's intention and theme.

A question arises regarding the symbols of art. Are they universal or culturally tempered?

The only universality that can be said properly to take place in art, is due to the creative impulse seeking expression through the eternal laws of rhythm, harmony, tension, cadence, dynamic movement, contrast etc., which are referred to as ekhandas. These laws belong not only to external nature but find a subjective correspondence in the emotional and intellectual life of the individual, and are expressed through the media of sounds, colour, line, movement, texture etc. The techniques, methods and conventions which an artist employs are generally confined to his age, time and civilization. They constitute, so to speak, "the language" of art as it is expressed within a certain cultural milieu. These techniques do not restrict the artist's freedom but provide him with a medium of expression relevant to his environment. As the grammarian depends on his rules of syntax and the writer on his command of the language, so the artist depends on his techniques. These are to him the instruments through which he can communicate and express. Because the art symbol is a natural and ideal one, and not arbitrary or conventional, the "language of art", despite its cultural setting, can be more widely understood. It is nevertheless a product of the civilization from which it springs.
To what extent is the artist responsible to society and what responsibilities must society assume towards the artist?

It is clear from our fore-going discussions that the term artist implies a responsible human individual who produces for the good of the work and not for considerations of profit or exploitation. The artist who creates purely for pleasure and does not take account of human goals is an "idler" and his place in society is in the same category as a dreamer and a parasite. As in Plato's "Republic" we may honour such a man, but give him no place in a well-organised state. At the same time if we desire every man to be in some way an artist, that is, to work without any motive other than that of the good of mankind and of the work done, society must assure every individual of an opportunity to create according to his aptitude and ability. In other words, society must create conditions, whereby each man can choose his vocation and earn his livelihood through that activity in which he finds pleasure.