

26. Drama, a Form of Yoga

To put Drama and Yoga in juxtaposition may appear to be rather strange. In popular mind Yoga is associated with certain fantastic notions like a flowing beard, matted hair, etc., while Drama, Music, etc., are related to the lighter side of life. Art has been considered as a luxury to be indulged in by the rich and leisured class. This is really not so. Culture which includes Drama, Music and all forms of Art as well as Science and Philosophy is an absolute necessity of life and makes for human progress which would become meaningless without art sensitiveness. As the poet put it, the person without knowledge of music and letters is distinguished from the animal only by the lack of horns and tail.

While the instincts of self preservation and race preservation are fundamental to all life, the great thing that distinguishes a cultured man from the beast is that minimum time is given by him for these two purposes and more time is released for higher cultural pursuits. The Chinese saying "If you have two loaves, sell one and buy a lily" is very significant. Culture and Fine Arts are food for our souls just as bread keeps the body going.

In India, Art has always been considered a sacred vocation, a path of approach to the Supreme, a road to Reality.

Just as God can be realised through His aspects of Wisdom, Love and Power, so He can be approached through the aspects of Beauty which is equally an aspect of God. We may recall the famous Divine Trinity enunciated by Plato—God the good, the true, the beautiful. The line of approach to God along the line of Beauty has been called Soundarya Yoga, just as we have Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yôga.

In Drama particularly, we can see very many of the elements which go to make for Yoga. Yoga is generally understood to mean the path of union with the Source of things—the word Yoga literally means union, and a Yogi always looks to a way of approach to the Ultimate Root of things.

Now we shall take some aspects which are common both to Yoga and Drama. A yogi always looks for chances of realising identification with as many people as possible so that he can build into himself the experiences of various types of human beings. A good actor does this very thing on the stage. Unless an actor is able to achieve this identification (of course, artistically) he can never be a good actor, and the greater the variety of characters the more is the power of identification with others developed, perhaps unconsciously.

To the true dramatist, a character or an event has special significance which may escape the notice of ordinary people. To him a particular character or an event represents thoughts in the Cosmic Mind and in trying to portray such characters and events he is in a way contacting the Divine Mind, and this is also in a way the aim of a Yogi. The Yogi always looks for Divinity in everything and in every occurrence. To him all that he experiences down here are only imperfect, perhaps even distorted, expressions of thoughts in the mind of God, and he tries to get behind these imper-

fect impressions to the Divine idea of which these are expressions. In other words, a Yogi always looks for things and events not as they *seem* to be down here, but as they *are* really in the mind of God. The things in the mind of God were called by Plato Archetypes, i.e., abstract ideas in the Divine Mind which give rise to millions of concrete things and events down here. A dramatist, if he is really an artist, does this very thing when he portrays great characters and events. Through these characters and events the dramatist enables us to get glimpses of them as they exist in the mind of God. We may put it this way: the characters and events in a great drama, though they may have a historical basis, really represent typical characters and typical events, as they are in the mind of the God all the time. The Hamlet as portrayed by Shakespeare was not merely a prince of Denmark at a particular time in the world history, but he was a *typical* person who appears in the world at all times. So also, Shakuntala was not merely a charming girl brought up by Sage Kanva. Shakuntala of Kalidasa is a type of an innocent girl brought up in certain surroundings and then thrown into other surroundings. There had been, there are and there will be many Hamlets, Othellos, Shakuntalas and Dushyantas in the world. Here we see how the dramatist falls into line with the Yogi.

The basis of this world of manifestation is said to be the dual limitation of space and time. The object of Yogi is to transcend these limitations. In the art of scenery painting there is a distinct suggestion of an attempt to get over the limitation of space. On a paper or a canvas of a few square inches area, the artist paints a scenery which in nature may extend over many square or cubic miles, and if the artist is really a master the effect of the painting will be as good as, if not better than, the effect of the natural scenery upon us. What scenery painting is to space that drama is to time. Events covering many years are presented

to us within a space of two or three hours, with this additional advantage that in the drama we get the essence of things without being bothered with non-essential, dreary, humdrum, common-place details. So there is an indication of the possibility of getting beyond the limitation of time.

Shakespeare called the world a stage and men and women mere players. This can be reversed and we may as well say that the stage is a world, perhaps a miniature world, and the actors represent typical men and women and the actions are typical experiences of humanity. Generally a dramatist worth the name has a lot of intuition playing about him. In his characters and events of the drama, the artist places before us great types and by studying and following the development of the theme as portrayed by the dramatist we can in a way vicariously experience the joys and sorrows of other people without ourselves having to go through those experiences. This is one of the most important aspects of the dramatic art. A Yogi also in a way is able to have vicarious experiences through his identification with other people. There is, however, this difference: both the Yogi and the dramatist go through these experiences in an impersonal sort of way, as *sakshi*.

From what has been said above, it will be seen that a great drama is a permanent record of the essence of the events which occur in the world at various times and in various places. In actual history an event occurs at a particular place, at a particular time and involves a particular set of people. Therefore, a historical event is conditioned by these factors of time, space and the people involved. But a dramatic presentation of that event is a permanent record left with us by a great artist for our benefit. This sensing of the permanent among the impermanent things and events of the world is a characteristic of both the Yogi and the dramatist.

I may also refer to the aspect, common to Yoga and drama, of enabling us to go beyond pairs of opposites. Both these have a faculty of synthesis which helps them to reconcile apparently opposite factors and getting a synthesis out of them. One object of Yoga is to achieve such a synthesis, to realise unity in diversity, to realise a common basis behind pairs of opposites. Drama enables us to achieve such a sort of synthesis of the opposites, joy and sorrow. When we enjoy a tragedy we are unconsciously transmuting even sorrow into joy. It is a common experience that when we witness a tragedy enacted by expert actors we put ourselves *en rapport* with the actors' experiences, the deep sorrows of the tragic character; we even experience the physical reactions, such as choking of the throat, eyes brimming with tears and so on. When again that tragedy is being enacted somewhere we yearn to witness it and again we go through all these experiences of sorrow in ourselves. Is this not apparently a riddle? We do experience all those sorrows and want to re-experience them many times. Why? Because in that experience of sorrow we get an aesthetic happiness. In other words we are able to squeeze out some joy out of that very sorrow. This is possible because we experience these sorrows impersonally without getting entangled in them, and so it is possible by maintaining an impersonal attitude to synthesise even such opposites as joy and sorrow. Aesthetic enjoyment of a tragedy is a striking example of this possibility and this is one aspect of Yoga.

Thus, we see that there are many elements common to Yoga and the dramatic art. It is no wonder that in India, Art was considered to be a Yoga.