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The Idea of Beauty and Truth in Literature

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Abstract

Beauty is an experience of an idea that has the potency to give initial pleasure and peace at the end. For example, a mother is always beautiful. If one agrees, then, the beauty of the mother becomes an idea. It can be extended to any beautiful object like a rose, whose beauty remains as an idea forever. Therefore, the pleasure received from an object of beauty is an initial experience that gains concreteness an idea later and gives peace at the final stage. In English, most people mean truth as being honest and faithful but the former means authentic and reliable whereas the latter means sincere and truthful. Where truthful is correct truth is the observer and the observed. It starts from insight when honest and truthful are from the conscious part of the memory. The whole of consciousness is an instrument connected to a deeper energy called memory and therefore to access truth through consciousness would end drastically. For example, no sane person can call the colour red by any other name because it is real but not true. This paper seeks to examine how the notions of beauty and truth are represented across different texts and genres, spanning from poetry to mythology.

Keywords: Beauty, Truth, Art, Genre, Poetry and Indian myth

Beauty is both expressions outwardly and the sense of inward feeling of extraordinary elation at the complete cessation of oneself. When one refers to the mother's beauty or the beauty of a rose, it is not the physical beauty that is mentioned but the beauty of character – the mother's love and the rose's sweet smell. Hence, it becomes convenient to categorize beauty into outer beauty and inner beauty. Creative art expresses beauty and fails when an artist is conscious of the fame that he

will receive at the publication of the work. It will not be a wholesome product with such perversions. His mind becomes fragmented with creativity and personal whims which, as a result, cannot be beautiful and creative. As Plato says knowledge alone can make a work beautiful mere aesthetic point of literature does not meet the standards of the society or its culture.

Though art is a work of imagination, it remains in the artist and it is with his knowledge that the things would have been made. It is an artist's eternal consciousness that shapes an art and as Croce has said an artist never takes his brush before seeing the picture in his imagination. To express his views an artist uses symbols, as symbols are the universal language of art. In the hands of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the letter 'A' becomes a sign of shame or a symbol of the adulterer and represents identity. Besides the physical beauty of Hester Prynne, the novelist addresses her innate strength. Demanded by her daughter, Pearl, Hester Prynne wears the Scarlet 'A', again after a brief time. With her Scarlet back, it is written, "her beauty, warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed, like fading sunshine; and a gray shadow seemed to fall across her." The novelist reiterates that the punishment changes her physically but has a profound effect on the beauty of her character.

The same idea, that beauty is intrinsic, is represented in Shakespeare's sonnet number sixteen. It pictures the brevity of physical beauty and highlights the importance of progeny and only through children one can transfer his beauty to his heirs. Beauty gives a sense of joy and a sense of peace simultaneously while uttering that a child can keep a young man's beauty alive and youthful in the form of art. Beauty thus manifests itself as an eternal state. Therefore, beauty cannot be taken easily as anything that fascinates and interesting and that gives pleasure. Schopenhauer says in *Interest and Beauty in Work of Art*, the work of art must be a 'clear mirror' in reflecting the inherent ideas of the world or ideas of mankind, in particular, so that it can elevate the common man. It is possible only when the presented idea is good. Plato says, "Beauty is certainly a soft, smooth, slippery thing, and therefore of a nature which easily slips in and permeates our souls. I affirm that the good is beautiful."

Other demonstrations of inner beauty like selfless love and sacrifice give joy followed by

peace. One can find selfless love in the characters of *The Ramayana*, the Indian epic. Lakshmana is the brother of the hero, Rama, who is an incarnation of Lord Visnu. In Hindu mythology, Lord Visnu is the creating God among the Trinity forces that include Siva, the destroyer, and Brahma,

the creator. Rama's wife, Sita, who is also a personification of Goddess Lakshmi, is considered to be the Goddess of wealth. Both Lakshmana and Sita migrate to the forest along with Rama when

Kaikeyi demands Dhasaratha, the father of Rama, as a boon fulfillment to promote her much younger son, Bharatha, as the heir to his father. Bharatha differs from his mother and pleads with Rama to ascend the throne. Having been dejected by the negative response, Bharatha borrows the slippers of Rama and rules under the divinity of his brother's slippers. The selfless love of these characters highlights their inner beauty.

Jesus Christ has sacrificed his life for the people and the cross becoming the symbol of sacrifice is the greatest and noblest example of surrender. The life of Christ as well as his Christendom accosts beauty that gives a sense of pleasantness and peace at a time. Whenever one thinks of the characters of *The Ramayana* and Jesus Christ one can enjoy niceness and harmony. Beauty, then, seems to be a concrete idea and image that has the value of giving joy and immense peace whenever recollected. The taste of a person may differ. It may be spiritual or literary. It depends on the imaginative faculty of the subject that helps him to become one with objectivity. This experience of oneness with the object that brings tears out of joy and peace is not only beauty but also truth. Reality has many levels of meaning. If one considers God as real, He is also Brahman, Pure consciousness, Atman, Soul, Spirit, Ishwar, Vishnu, Christ, Mohammad, etc. Reality becomes a thought process that culminates from predetermination. It is a work of consciousness but truth is thinking through insight.

Nachiketa, a boy of five, is a seeker of truth. He is the principal character of the story with which the Katha Upanishad begins. His father Viswasrawas performs a spiritual ritual at the end of which he must give away all his possessions including his wife and son. This ritual is performed to attain spiritual bliss. Viswasrawas gave up all the useless possessions of his like sick and old cows and kept all the useful wealth: his two wives and his son Nachiketa. He makes a great show out of nothing. Nachiketa, the obedient son of his father repeatedly calls him during the ritual to alert and save him from sin. He voices to give him also. Disturbed Viswasrawas, out of anger, shouts that he will give Nachiketa to Yama, the God of death.

Follower of truth Nachiketa goes to Lord Yama's abode, as he does not want his father to take back the word. As he was not there, the boy waited for three days at the doorsteps even without eating. When Lord Yama returns, he appreciates the boy's determination and his faith in truth. Lord Yama grants the boy three boons.

Nachiketa asks for the welfare of his father as a first boon which is immediately granted.

As the second boon he asks,

“Sir I desire to know how one could reach heaven where there is no sorrow, old age or death”. Nachiketa did not ask for this second boon for himself but for the sake of the people. He wanted everyone to learn this secret knowledge and free themselves from suffering. (Gibbousmun)

Yama gives him all the details. As a third boon, Nachiketa asks, “Respected Sir. What happens to a man after death? I should like to know the truth from you. This I ask for the third boon.” Yama not expecting this question from a young boy tries to divert him but in vain. Nachiketa declines all worldly pleasures offered to him by Lord Yama in place of the answer to the third boon. The young boy and his capacity to stand for truth move Lord Yama so he teaches him the art of self-actualization through which one can arrive at immortality. His love for truth helps Nachiketa to take the path of goodness. Now truth becomes the ‘fundamental part of virtue’ as Montaigne writes in the essay, *On Presumption*. Truth and good include one another; for truth is something good, otherwise it would not be desirable; and good is something true, otherwise it would not be intelligible. Therefore just as the object of the appetite may be something true, as having the aspect of good, for example, when someone desires to know the truth, so the object of the practical intellect is good directed to operation, and under the aspect of truth. For the practical intellect knows truth, just as the speculative, but it directs the known truth to operation. (qtd. in Thomas 75)

Tirukkural, one of the best Tamil didactic literature states that noble scholars get enlightened through the light of truthfulness. It is argued that art, which instructs effectively what is good, true, and induces man to act accordingly, must be considered the greatest human art, and poetry can do this better than man's traditional tutors can, namely history, and philosophy can. The real world of the poet is of value because, it is both, a better world than the real one, and the reader is stimulated to try to imitate it in his practice.

Reading such literary pieces, in general, contributes a lot for man to remain 'human' But reading poetry, the highest expression of feeling in rhythmic words, providing both enjoyment and information has a vital role in shaping a man to be 'human'. Poetry thus, has the power to reproduce an ideal golden world, not just the brazen one we know, and so to offer 'a speaking picture'- with this end to teach and please.

Moreover, poems are charged with emotions, experiences, mechanics of language, deviant use of language, etc., which provide a rich resource for developing the learners' knowledge and language use. Among the various forms of literary works, poetry is more compressed than either fiction or drama and makes use of rhythm and rhyme as a means of conveying tone. In a way, reading poetry is akin to listening to music.

If a reader possesses the skill of listening to music, sharing the experience of the poet, getting at the meaning expressed by the poet's diction, and realizing the mosaic of suggestions carried by the choice of syntax, poems become a source of joy and enlightenment to him. He will be able to discover the value of the poem in its clarity of actual communication and the value of the experience communicated. Matthew Arnold writes that poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things. He writes about poetry thus,

As the critics are divided, so does the criticism regarding the function of poetry. Any art for that matter communicates with the hidden answers that man has been craving to know. Though its purpose glues to sensory cognition – beauty, it turns ingenious only when it directs to the consciousness of the individual.

As poetry could concentrate only on a single emotion, drama started to gain prominence - replacing poetry. Though the form had been there even before 1500 BC in Athens, where Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, wrote tragedies, it was also believed that "the first instance of drama was in Africa with an oral storyteller called the 'griot'. His narrative would be supplemented with drums and actors playing out motions"

According to the Bible,

the first drama was when Satan tried to dethrone God and was tossed out of heaven. Technically, the first drama on earth was when Satan tempted Eve to take of the forbidden truth, and when she and her husband took of it, that is when drama became a major factor. (Hodge)

The derivation is this: drama enacted or pictured various facets of life. When looking into certain masterpieces one could understand how these plays represented life, for example, Othello. A story of sexual jealousy on the part of the hero and cynicism, hypocrisy, and malignity on the side of the villainous character, apart from the love, and bravery, brings life insisting on moral values. A play engages a whole life of people to help the readers as well as the listeners to make an estimate, as it employs "the sensual and emotional man, the intellectual and moral man, and even the spiritual man – and reading great literatures become a matter of coming to grips with reality, almost cutting through reality from the superficialities to the centre". (Iyengar 654)

At any rate, plays as a special genre, help the person who reads or the spectators to stir away, even so temporarily, from the complexity of living and help them to learn, explore, and enjoy the language by encouraging enactments of many different social roles and engages numerous levels, styles. As an amalgam of words, sights, sounds, silence, stillness, motion, relationships, and

responses drama plays a crucial role.

Drama encourages us to explore, clarify, and elaborate feelings, attitudes, and ideas for it requires the readers to organize, synthesize, and articulate their ideas by providing an excellent opportunity for reflection. As it again did not reach the working-class people, a further lucid form - novel-of literature came to the forefront.

The novel is a long narrative story in prose. The early novel seems to have appeared in 1000-1600 AD. The early novel, which appears to be pure 'romance, gradually produced fable and other forms.

Nevertheless, the modern novel penetrates the consciousness of men and becomes complex consequently. It tries to picture the psychological problems of the characters plus their emotions and experiences. A consistent point of view, clear focus, a direction, or sense of flow towards something, a problem, or conflict, crises leading to a climax, and some kind of resolution apart from a theme are the major ingredients of a novel. A novel with so many characteristics becomes an interesting source to a reader and its language is reality, and only in literature, does language find its fulfilment.

The novelist has to set up man against life or a segment of life itself to achieve a comprehensible unified effect. Once he has judged his subject matter, the novelist is free as far as form is concerned. What matters then is a sense of flow. In order not to allow his novel to become static, the writer indulges in flashbacks and stream-of-consciousness techniques. This is because, in novels, a flow, though slow has to be there.

Another constituent of the novel is the 'point of view, which must be consistent, but at the same time, it can be changed within the novel. In long novels, the writers use the omniscient point of view, which enables the reader to enter the minds of as many characters as they please. At the same time, any reader discerns the careful control of his focus, which the novelist does by avoiding being carried away by his interest in a minor character.

Theme, whether general or more comprehensive is another factor in a novel, which need not be limited to one premise. The basic thesis of most novels is concerned with the defect in the human being that makes it impossible for him to handle life as he encounters it. On the other hand, the theme may be how despite his flaw, the human being can stand up to whatever life hands him. Precisely, it motivates the reader to delve deep into the novel.

A novel like other literary works involves several conflicts and time may be used in a loosely - it may cover the span of several generations or maybe only a day. When the reader imaginatively participates in the world created by the text, he/she relates the literary experience to actual experience.

The evolution of literary genres and their treatment has opened various vistas to the men of letters, as art has risen above personal emotions. T.S Eliot defines in *The Objective Correlative* in his essay 'Hamlet' - a phrase that has gained currency in the literary circles-which it refers to

...a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (Eliot 92)

It means that any artist, be it a dramatist, or a novelist, should be in a constant effort to bring in 'objective correlatives' to evoke the indented emotion with a cathartic effect. It clearly states that the literary fervour for 'beauty' has gone as art and science have become reciprocal in nature. The more art has developed the more scientific it seems to be, for instance, web designing, just as science may become artistic. Separated in their early stages, the two would probably become one when they reach their peak but the future is beyond human perception. Anyhow, if one rewinds his memory, he would find that poetry once reflecting personal emotions and is replete with symbols, a drama that preached ethics projects sociocultural aspects, and fiction, which started with fable, now has turned socio-psychological.

For an artist, the notions of truth and beauty seem to be integral for expressing their thoughts. Genres like poetry, drama, essays, and novels serve as a vessel to explore these concepts. Throughout the centuries these concepts are developed and changed to enhance the taste of the artist as well as the readers. As the changes happen, many new genres are brought to explore the concepts of beauty and truth. Even these concepts are not static and their evolution in present and forthcoming literature is inevitable. Thus, literature and these concepts provide the readers with not only mere pleasure but also profound insights.

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