

The Berkshire Conference – Tradition and the Arts

Art and Culture are knowledges, which offer perspectives of reality. But they are divided by their function in time. While culture is the sum of knowledges already in existence due to the functions of history and therefore reflects what we call Tradition--- Art is a forerunner of the future. Both the artist and the mystic anticipate the future, are outside the collective suggestion and express knowledge which has yet to become part of the collective.

This position regarding the avant garde nature of art is based on the premise that there is or are other realities, which are beyond the seen, objective reality of everyday experience. And artists and mystics can access these more readily than others due to processes unique to them as artists and mystics. Processes like inspiration and intuition, which give their work a prescience or visionary quality with regard to the future. History illustrates how in South Asia mystics through their poetry have contributed to leaps in thought by the collective. And also to a further rich unpacking of such thought expressed through other forms of art and science. By way of example I mention here some examples of such poetry--- the Veda, Upanishads, the Bhakti mystics of medieval times, which contributed to and in some instances continue to contribute towards social thinking, to science, metaphysics, literature, the plastic and performance arts. In Europe too, from the time of the Greeks art has anticipated the collective thinking of society. Notions of Space, Time, Energy and Matter have been revised first by artists and then in the field of science. Their contribution therefore to the collective is absolutely irreplaceable.

The concern for many of us in India is how do culture and art relate? Or how does the traditional relate to the contemporary? There is the crying need for a sense of continuity and at the same time for something 'new'. The need for continuity is almost atavistic. I think the birth story of Ganapati is a metaphor for this sense of continuity

Art and Culture Temporalized.

1. The Tradition and its importance to the creation of avant garde art.

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