

GOD EXPERIENCE IN THE BEAUTY OF ART FORMS

Dr. Thomas D'Sa

Director, NBCLC

Bangalore – 560 084

When we hear the word 'beauty' we think of those faces of pretty models, beauty pageants, latest fashion, innocent expression on the face of a child, lovely flowers, pleasant country side scenarios, art works, etc. Even **animals** are called 'beautiful people' when we discover some patterns of attractive behaviour in them. That is why the movie 'Beautiful People' is all about the **peculiarities of animals**. After watching such a movie the viewers feel like saying that those animals are beautiful people as we see the closeness to human behaviour. The Saint of the Gutters, Mother Theresa, dealt constantly with disfigured faces, battered bodies, physically and mentally challenged of all kinds, whom we hardly address as beautiful. Malcolm Muggeridge considers her work for them and her attitude towards them as a thing of beauty. Beautiful can also mean 'kind'. Helping someone in need can be called a beautiful act. In 60s and 70s the people who stood for peace and love were called beautiful people. **People** are called beautiful when they are physically attractive or when they manifest a distinctive spirit of courage, -determination and commitment. A dark spot on a woman's face is called beauty spot.

What then is Beauty? What makes a person beautiful? Cambridge Dictionary gives this meaning: 'the quality of being pleasant, especially to look at, or someone or something that gives great pleasure'. Things are called beautiful when they embody shapes, colours, textures, and sounds

in appealing proportions, expressing harmonious relationships. A beauty is something that is an excellent example of its type. Referring to the beauty of character people also say 'beauty is in skin deep'. That is more important than how people look. All people do not have same opinion about beauty. That is why some admit 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. For a seeker of truth I would say, "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty". If anything has to be called beautiful it must be true to itself, and anything that is true to itself automatically becomes beautiful. Art is primarily an experience of reality at depth, going into the heart of the matter. When God appeared to Moses, He asked him to know Him at that level and so introduced his Self to Moses, as "I am who I am." In other words, He should be known at the depth of his - reality. Later on Jesus makes use of 'I am' expressions to reveal Him. When a thing stands for what it really is in its originality we say it is beautiful. **This depth-experience of reality is God-experience for us**, but the artist may not call it as such. For us God is at the depth of every being, as every being has proceeded from Him and reflects Him. Many of us do not take the trouble to pierce through the externals to understand the being at its depth. The artist helps us in this process. God is a hundred percent true to Himself and to us. "If truth is beauty, then God is truth and beauty." When Jesus stood by the truth as against his adversaries who were taking shelter in lies he said of himself 'I am the way, the 'truth' and the life.' If truth reveals a person, beauty must give an experience of that person, hence God can be experienced in truth and beauty. Of the nine *rasas* (emotions/feelings) *Shringara* or beauty (excellence) is the most basic one. "Bhojaraja of Dhara recognised *Shringara* as the prime one, and it is the cause of creation in the world."¹

In the order of nine *rasas*, *Shringara* is placed first. The creator loved beauty and therefore he created this beautiful universe, loves it and sustains it. Dance, for example, according to Greeks is an earthly imitation

¹ PRAJNANANDA, S., *Music of the South Asian Peoples*, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 1979,34.

of the wonderfully serene gaiety with which the creator called the stars and the earth into an existence or order and beauty in the primal dance of creation.² He can be well experienced by the beauty in creation. Jesus appreciates beauty and excellence in nature - lilies of the field, birds of the air, innocence of children - and gives glory to God.

In this article I will focus on beauty that we see in a few art forms due to limitations of space. In art forms what is it that prompts us to say 'beautiful'? Art points to what is beyond it, the passion, the pain, the love, the hate. Divine love is also felt in the same way. A work of art must have the capacity to express something and in that communication to transform the person who encounters it, they may be uplifted or changed. It may inspire them to impute further meaning to it. Significant art makes a difference. It asks questions, offers insights, enlarges the parameters of our consciousness. Awareness is the first step towards change. In this way, art forms become beautiful and lead us to recognise the beauty of **the artist** who is God Himself, the source of all arts.

Writing almost in the same vein, Pope John Paul II says: "Here, we touch on an essential point. Those who perceive in themselves this kind of divine spark which is the artistic vocation - as poet, writer, sculptor, architect, musician, actor and so on - feel at the same time the obligation not to waste this talent but to develop it, in order to put it at the service of their neighbour and of humanity as a whole."³ Some contend that art is primarily to provide pure delight, and does not have any cognitive value and art need not serve any 'use', beyond an invitation to experience. In any case, art while providing delight has cognitive, religious and moral value leading us to an experience.

According to the proofs that St. Thomas Aquinas offers to the existence of God, we could come to the following conclusion. If there is beauty in created things, the source of it must be from their Creator. When

² RAHNER, H., S.J., *Meaning of the Dance*, Theology Digest 14(1966) 223,

³ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, no.3, Vatican City, 4th April 1999.

an artwork is created, we begin to admire the artist who created it. No one can give what one does not have. Therefore, if there is beauty in created objects, it must be instilled in them by the Creator, who definitely has the sense of beauty and who knows what is beauty. In conclusion, we agree that God is beauty itself. Can we, then, not experience him through 'beauty'? Experiences are deemed beautiful when they connect with a reality beyond itself (a sunrise or sunset) or when they make some meaning accessible (a ritual event that symbolises a rite of passage).

A. BEAUTY AND GOD

Beauty is much more than what is pleasing, though it is that also. Through pleasing a little, it makes us think that there is much more than what has so far pleased us. It is an experience beyond words that touches the most profound recesses of our being and awakens us to a world beyond the daily grind.⁴ Beauty thus reveals what is invisible and unutterable. Beauty discloses God, because beauty discloses truth and goodness. God is the supreme artist, the supreme beauty. Since he himself is beauty, he can be experienced in beauty easily, whether it is beauty in nature, human beings or in art forms.

The sculptures of medieval artists, and the erection of Cathedrals, glorified God, and for that purpose they did those works of art-finely carved columns and figures to testify the quality of God. Art in India has always been considered a path of realisation of the Ultimate Reality. It is spiritual in its outlook, idealistic in expression and sublime in interpretation. It is not merely a matter of sensuous enjoyment, not a luxury to be enjoyed by the leisured rich class of people or *zamindars*. Every object of beauty in the world whether it be beauty of sound, beauty of form, beauty of colour, beauty of rhythm is but a shadow however faint, of the beauty that is of God. God as absolute beauty is one of the basic ideas of ancient Hindu culture. Every aspect of divinity has its counterpart

⁴WALTON, J.R., 'Beauty' in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, TPI, Bangalore, 1995,83.

in man, and man can reach Him directly by developing and sublimating one or other of these aspects in him. Most of the dance artists consider themselves as *nayaki* (the human soul surrendering itself as the beloved of the One Lover, i.e., *nayaka* Supreme Being of the universe). We see, therefore, most of the lyrics revolve around stories/myths connected with divine characters and their incarnations - e.g. *Brahma* - the creator, *Vishnu* - the protector, *Maheshwara* - the destroyer, laying the path for living in righteousness and peace.⁵

Beauty is a name for God. It not only unveils something about divine nature, but also expresses something of the relationship God shares with humankind. Beauty is God's activity. Aesthetics is concerned with a wide spectrum of reality, while spirituality with a specific aspect of it - the unfolding of the divine, transcendent and Immanent. To the religious seeker, aesthetic experiences often are occasions of understanding God and divine activity. Addressing the gathering, one chief guest, at the end of a dance performance said, "I prayed for the last one hour." It was not because the programme was on religious themes, but the way the dancers added beauty to it by the fineness in synchronisation, created in the viewer a certain sense of God Himself. Aesthetic expressions such as music, movement, colour, light, and design also convey a sense of God. An aesthetic spirituality suggests a framework for seeing and for acting that identifies God's presence in what is vital, provocative, sensuous, beautiful, honest, passionate, and yearning for justice.⁶

Mr. Jyoti Sahi, a renowned artist-theologian goes one step beyond linking not just God but also society with art, as art should, through prophetic voice, bring meaning to the life of the **people of God**. "Art is not a matter of making art-objects which are thought to be 'aesthetic', and find an appreciation in the sophisticated world of the cultured, who patronise an art market. The artist, as a person who uses his/her creative

⁵ D'SA, T., *The Role of Dance and Music in Faith Celebration*, VJTR 65 (2001) 752.

⁶ WALTON, J.R., *Aesthetics*, in *The New Dictionary*, 12.

imagination, does not exist in some kind of vacuum, but needs to interact with a real world, and to use this creative talent in a positive way, in order to express a vision, and also a longing for a better world. It is in this context that we may speak of the important role which art has in society as a whole.. serving both the consciousness which is the basis for education, and the holistic vision of life which is essential for inner psychic healing.”⁷

Art gives us significant information about divine-human relationship. That is why Church preserved the art forms. Restrictions have existed in the Church. Grasping the expression of human-divine revelation through the movement of the human body has been the most difficult. Yet given Christian belief in the incarnation, it is one of the most obviously God-given illustrations. “At all times, therefore, the Church seeks out the service of the arts and welcomes the artistic expressions of all peoples and regions. The Church is intent on keeping the works of art and the treasures handed down from the past and, when necessary, on adapting them to new needs in order that art may aid faith and devotion and be true to the reality it is to symbolise and the purpose it is to serve.”⁸ Because these art forms help us to experience God, they may be used in liturgical contexts. “They also may be brought into the sanctuary whenever they raise the mind up to God with suitable forms of expression and in conformity with liturgical requirements. Thus the knowledge of God will be better known.”⁹

B. GOD EXPERIENCE

Since God is a mystery, no created beings can fully experience Him. We can only have an experience of a dimension of God. What is meant by experience of God is difficult to spell out in concrete terms. However, 1 Jn. 1,1 helps us to lead towards it - from his own personal

⁷ SAHI, J., Some Theological Reflections on the Theme of Dolls, *Word & Worship* 33 (2000) 260.

⁸ SC 123, 129, SCR, *Instr. Euch.Myst.* No.24, *Instr. Interoc* No.13c..

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, # 62.

experience of Jesus. "...What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. .." This is the feel that the artist gives us of God after having experienced him. I was visibly surprised at the end of a performance at United Theological College, Bangalore, when a lady came to offer a vote of thanks said, "Fr. Thomas, today your dancers have given flesh to the Word, continuing what God did in Jesus, while many of us preachers are giving word to the flesh!" The expression given to our God-experience in our preaching and teaching has become too wordy and abstract, whereas an artist embodies that message and God-experience, and makes it alive to us through his/her body, voice, movements, expressions, rhythm, harmony and beauty. People often feel that they have met God in an artist through the art form. Some days ago Anna, a German youth who watched our programme told me: "I do not believe in God. But after seeing these dances, I tend to feel that God is somewhere." People feel they have heard, seen and touched God as per the experience of I Jn. 1, 1. A true artist has met God, and naturally he would like to communicate that experience through his art forms. Artwork is the result of a deep personal experience of the artist. Art is a way of transcendence. Man's thirst for the Infinite takes colourful expressions in art. No one has seen God; the artist helps us 'see' God in a certain sense. That is why Temples and Churches abound in art. Very few of us can articulate our experience. The artist articulates his 'God - experience', and thus helps others have a touch of God. The entire creation reveals God's beauty and splendour and art typifies it. Art is a work of beauty. Therefore, the II Vatican Council boldly states: "Of their nature, the arts are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands. Their dedication to the increase of God's praise and of His glory is more complete, the more exclusively they are devoted to turning men's minds devoutly towards God."¹⁰

¹⁰ SSC # 12.

God is experienced by different people differently down through the centuries. Basing on the understanding of God according to II Vatican Council, I would summarise people's God-experience in the following manner:¹¹

a) God is a Trinity, a community of persons:

This pluralism in God also helps us to accept pluralism in Society - people of various faiths and **cultures** and naturally their art forms. Monopolising on 'one' God leads to domination and control and neglect of other faiths and cultures.¹² Similarly within the Church there should be great respect for the gifts and talents of individuals and the Church should become a worldwide communion of local Churches. In art forms one generally experiences openness which leads us to a universal God-experience.

b) Responding and changing God:

Connected with the Trinitarian model, this tells us that God responds to the daily events taking place, and changes. He is affected by what happens to me and to others. God does relate to me in a personal way - in pain and in happiness. God's role in our lives is not to make something good happen or to prevent something bad from happening, but to help us cope in a creative way with what actually does happen, whether good or bad.¹³ Such a God is moved with compassion for creatures in pain. It is only when he is moved, he begins to find a way to convert it into new possibilities for further good. God does really care even in hard times. Art does precisely that. It has the power to make the compassionate God present, and experiential. Art

¹¹ BRACKEN, J.A., *God*; in *The New Dictionary*, 440 ff.

¹² BOFF, L., *Trinity and Society*, trans. P. Burns, Orbis, NY, 1988, 151.

¹³ KUSHNER, H., *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Schocken Books, NY, 1981, 113-148.

can bring about healing, and point out new possibilities to human beings, the 'art of living'.

c) God as both male and female:

In God we recognise the fullness and perfection of both male and female. When Jesus revealed the Father to us in his own person, he gave expression to this concept. Even when he continued to refer to God as Father, he subverted the institution of hierarchy. God had compared himself to a mother in OT (Is. 49,15; Ps. 131,2). In NT he is like a housewife reaching diligently for the lost coin (Lk. 15: 8-10). Jesus even said he has come to serve, and he did serve in many ways. He treated everyone, whether male or female, as his equal, as a potential friend rather than as a rival or opponent.¹⁴ An artist discovers beauty in perfection. He appreciates the perfection of male and female, and rejoices in it. If God is perfect, there should be the perfection of both male and female in him, otherwise how could he create something that he does not have, that he does not love? Artists, therefore, constantly tilt the patriarchy in God to give place for the feminine aspect in God, because they would like to give expression to all the perfection that they experience in this universe.

d) Transpersonal God:

Some consider images as a hindrance to prayer, so people are turning to anew imageless understanding of God as the ground of being. Asian religions employ various forms of meditation of this kind in Ashrams. Since art transcends time and space, it can be used to experience one who is beyond space and time, God Himself, though not fully, as all created things have their limitations.

¹⁴SCHNEIDERS, S., *Women & the Word*, Paulist, NY, 1986, 42-47.

If I may arrive at a synthesis basing on the biblical understanding of God, I would say **God is experienced in loving, as God is love**. There are many dimensions to love. In true love we strike a balance between **Tenderheartedness and Toughmindedness**. On the one hand God is experienced as toughminded when he expects human beings to exercise their freedom responsibly. On the other hand he is tenderhearted, because we see even when the human beings fail to respond in a responsible way, God gives them opportunities again and again to rise up. Repentance is required so that the human being may realise the fault and choose the right way of life. God, thus, can be experienced as a good combination of both tenderheartedness and toughmindedness. Such is my experience of God based on the Bible and the documents of the Church. I find that various art forms try to depict these aspects of their God-experience. Art unites, and creeds often divide the society. Art appeals more to the heart than the head. Hearts unite themselves more easily than the heads. As many heads there are, so many opinions there will be. Hearts unite. Since art appeals to the heart, it becomes an instrument of peace. Art is also open; it does not put barriers to thinking (mind). It provokes people to think.

True art is prophetic. It does not take everything lying down. It is not merely for entertainment and enjoyment. It relaxes people, at the same time challenges and makes people feel uncomfortable when they do wrong. It does raise questions and make the people see the world in a different way. That was what Jesus did in his artistic parables. In God we see these two aspects. On one hand he tries to create peace and harmony, and on the other, he brings it about not by compromise but by challenging what is socially unacceptable. There is the tenderheartedness of God going along with his toughmindedness.

Let us go on to see how we can have God-experience through the aesthetics that various art forms like dance, music, etc. provide.

I. GOD – EXPERIENCE THROUGH DANCE

The art of dance had flourished in India from time immemorial. It existed in the *Vedic* age where *Vedas* (sacred texts) were the source of living. It was part of daily worship. Temples being seats of religion were attached to their staff artists to supply the necessary music and dance items in the daily routine of worship. A spirit of dedication characterized these artists in their service of Godhead. The ladies who were thus dedicated to the temple as dancers were called *devadasis*, servants of the Lord, a glorious title indeed. All art is divine and meant to lead *jivatama* (human soul) to union with *Paramata* (oversoul). This reach for union is *bhakti* (devotion). Even in the West dance was considered as an unquenchable drive to express ones inner spirit in bodily form, in order to be 'the other' that he/she secretly felt within himself/herself. Christian mystery too is well expressed as dance. "Man's dance reveals what a man is and the mystery of what he longs to become in Christ."¹⁵ In India religion and art are inextricably bound together and art is in fact an expression of religion. Dance is to be recognized as an art form that elucidates *rasanubhooti* or aesthetic relish. Treatises on *rasa* call it a spiritual journey whose goal is at once aesthetic as well as emotional. There is definitely a physical change in the energy pattern. Some writers even go to the extent of saying that modern physics has revealed that every sub-atomic particle not only performs an energy dance but also is an energy dance, a pulsating process of creation and destruction. The artist grasps a vision unexpectedly filling him with an irresistible urge for expression and becomes aware of a stirring of the soul. This condition as Tagore says is "like that which a man groping through a fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house".

Dancing postures are often incorporated into liturgy because through them one experiences God and responds to God. There is the

¹⁵RAHNER, H., *Meaning of the Dance*, 22-23.

dance of the priest lying prostrate on Good Friday, and the dance of the deacons lying prostrate at the right of ordination.

a) *Dance as Prayer:*

A dancer, while dancing has to concentrate on so many things, facial expressions, hands, *mudras*, footwork, body movements, music etc. In this way the dancer offers his/her entire self, body and soul to God, which is a perfect example of total surrender. This is what we call prayer. Dance in worship is based on the fact that God took on a body as a medium and thus entered into human history through his Son. He cared for the body, touched and healed. He met the 'physical' needs of the people and taught people to love God with all their 'being'. And the dancer uses his/her body in worship.

"Dance is the clearest expression of the body at prayer. God created us as embodied beings, so it is most appropriate that our relationship with God be embodied as well."¹⁶ Since God gave us this body, this body can build that relationship with God. Many make prayer an intellectual exercise. In reality prayer is a physical experience of our love for, and gratitude to God our creator, to Jesus who took our body form, and Holy Spirit who continues to breathe their life in us. "Dancing is prayer of the body; it is a psalm of gestures expressing the joy of the heart, mind and body. Dance is... religion; it is liturgy in movements, beauty and truth blended together. Dancer professes faith."¹⁷ Ps.149 exhorts: "Let them praise his name with dancing."

Dancers attract the attention of the people by their body expressions, beauty, costumes, jewellery and colour. I find it to be a very positive thing in **worship**. The main celebrant too tries to attract the attention of the people towards what he says or does. Only then he can meaningfully perform those rites to his people. The hearts of the people

¹⁶ JULIA U., *Dance*, in *The New Dictionary*, 246

¹⁷ KOLENCHERRY, A., *Prayer in Culture*, Franz-Sales-Verlag, Eichstaett, 2003, 62.

are touched when there is a prayerful devotional dance. Their spontaneity begins to function. They feel a touch of divinity. "Because dance transcends the limits of verbal expression, it has the power to erase the boundaries language imposes on religious people. Dance can also communicate realities for which mere words are insufficient, making it a significant element of ritual worship."¹⁸

The tribal dance has an added advantage for Christian worship. Generally most of the tribals know to dance and sing. Sometimes the entire community dances making it a meaningful community celebration with participation by one and all.

b) Dance as Movement:

When there is beauty in a rhythmic movement, then one can experience God. Pilgrimages or '*tirtha yatra*' coming from Mahabharata when the exiled Pandavas 'wandered' in the forest, using their time for various *tirthas* or holy places. The ancient ashrams were places that originally offered hospitality to pilgrims. Unfortunately our image of the Church has become static, something that does not allow for movement. Even *parikrama*, is not taken seriously.

God is to be recognised and experienced as movement. The whole creation that emanates from God is a dance of the Creator. The beauty of this dance is not on the face, or in the make up, or jewellery, but in the rhythmic movement. When there is perfection in the synchronisation of *ragam*, *talam* and *bhavam*, there is beauty, there is harmony and so is God. David, dancing before the Tabernacle is for joy and appreciation of beauty. The Creator is not static. He is fully involved in the history of the world. The planets that he has created move and dance around the sun in a systematic rhythmic fashion *mandala*. Then the beauty arises. And in that beauty one sees God. Nowadays more and more people in the West like to spend the weekend not glued to the pews of the Church, but by

¹⁸ JULIA, U., *Dance*, 246

walking, cycling, going out to find a spiritual experience in nature or forest chapels (*Waldwanderung*). This has become a more stimulating religious experience than the usual parish Church building.

The image of a God who is Himself a dancer, moving through creation, is a sign of the freedom that lies at the source of creation. Jesus in the icon in the lecture hall at NBCLC, Bangalore, has that dynamism. He seems to be stepping out of the cross in a dance posture with *abhaya mudra* and *vara mudra*. One of the most important and famous of all Hindu icons is intimately associated with *Chola* bronzes - the great image of *Shiva Nataraja*, Lord of the dance or Lord of dancers. *Shiva* is depicted in the cosmic dance of creating and destroying the universe. His hair flies out wildly as he dances. Dance as movement, is an expression of the freedom of the body, its longing to step over every boundary, and reach out to the limits of space, where you constantly discover and experience God. Even the seasons that he created are not static. They constantly move, as in winter the weather becoming gradually colder day-by-day, and then warmer day by day as summer sets in. A very rhythmic movement indeed!

Certain festivals in India celebrate these seasons, not only seasons of weather, but also seasons of nature, like ploughing season, season for transplanting etc. They are made into forms of festivity and they are related to the divine, where you experience God. In our Christian setting we have the seasons of Lent, Advent, etc., parallel to the seasons in nature.

In the four-fold God-experiences spoken above, the second one can be experienced easily through dance where we see a God who is ready to change, ready to move. He is in touch with his creation and moves in it in a harmonious fashion which can be called the dance of the Creator as the poem of Sydney Carter runs:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun.
 And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
 And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
 At Bethlehem I had my birth.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
They came with me and the dance went on:

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
And they left me there on a cross to die.

II. GOD-EXPERIENCE THROUGH MUSIC

“Music is a primal reality - as primal as speech, sound and silence. For this reason it is found at all times and in every cultures. Historically, it is intimately connected with the **experience of the sacred.**”¹⁹

Music has some characteristics that evoke the experience of the sacred. Music has been a symbol of the mystery of being (particularly with the Judeo-Christian cultural West). Music has a flow. It sustains and unifies particular temporal moments. It can incorporate the paradoxes of existence - order and spontaneity, variation and repetition, continuous and discreet sound, and it permits our participation in it. It attempts to weave a totality within which some meaning or truth is communicated and celebrated. Therefore, music has a power to evoke experiences of transcendence. Because of the transcendent appeal music has, the II Vatican also permitted participative singing by the congregation. Earlier in middle ages liturgy was limited to clerical action, and the worshipper was a passive and voiceless spectator. The best way of worshipper's participation has been through music. Even choir has a smaller role to play. The cult of sing-along is prevalent. Music is giving them a touch of God. Therefore, Vatican II showed a lot of openness to the music of other peoples. It

¹⁹BOB,H., *Music*, in *The New Dictionary*, 673.

wished to embrace a broad range of musical styles for liturgy. Along with the classical, the popular forms of music were valued in liturgy.

a) *Music can link us to the Divine:*

Music has the extraordinary ability of expressing as well as recreating in others spiritual experiences. It is able to establish harmony between individuals and communities, nations and cultures, secular and religious groups and to affect the leap between time and eternity, matter and spirit, the human and the divine.²⁰ How exactly music is able to achieve such exalted and enviable goals is really very difficult to say. For here, we are in the field not of speculation but of practicality, not of science but of art, not of technology but of mystery, not of experiment but of experience. "Today, there is so much terrorism in the name of religion", observes Pandit Ravi Shankar sadly. Then continuing on a joyful note he adds: "I **have always related to God through music**. Music is the only language I really know. With the sitar, I try and achieve a deeper sense of spirituality. It's the best way, I feel, of reaching the higher elemental level or supreme power. For me, it is performing that generates a deep ecstasy - physically, mentally and spiritually"²¹ The renowned shehnai player Ustad Bismillah Khan, who has made it a practice, so we are told, of praying before a Hindu temple prior to offering his prayers to Allah and who never mixes caste with religion or religion with politics, says: "Music is synonymous with divinity".²²

St. John Chrysostom believes that "Nothing so lifts the soul, gives it wings and frees it from earthly preoccupations as a holy song, in which rhythm and melody form a true symphony". He also tells us how God made the truth of revelation easier for men to understand "by blending

²⁰ KURZSCHENKEL, K., *Die theologische Bestimmung der Musik*, Paulinus Verlag, Trier, 1971, esp. *Aesthetische-musikalische Erfahrung und geistliches Leben*, 436-496

²¹ *The Times of India*, Bangalore, 18 January 2002, 5, cols.4-6.

²² PEREIRA, T., *Music for Harmony*, paper presented at a Consultation on Art forms at NBCLC, 2003. ²² PEREIRA, T., *Music for Harmony*, paper presented at a Consultation on Art forms at NBCLC, 2003.

melody with prophecy in order that delighted by the modulation of the chant, all might with great eagerness give forth sacred hymns to him.”²³

b) Music is the language of the heart/soul:

In worship we celebrate our relationship with God and with our fellow human beings through faith, signs and symbols. We go to worship to proclaim, to bear witness to our faith, to express our feelings and sentiments on the human level, the aesthetic level and the divine-human level. Music, as the language of the heart, serves admirably to integrate faith and feeling in relationships with the Supreme Being present in everyone and in everything. Hymns in liturgy affirm faith not through the doctrines they proclaim, but primarily through the emotion expressed in verbal images as well as musical lines, rhythms and harmonies. One feels courage, hope, and commitment in the lines of a hymn and is inspired to act.

The subtle expressive characteristics of music that work on emotions to express experiences are a powerful mysterious force, which lifts human beings almost to divine heights and realities. And Pope Pius XII declared that “Music is among the many and great gifts of nature with which God, in whom exists harmony of the most perfect concord and the most perfect order, has enriched men, whom he has created in his image and likeness. Together with the other liberal arts, music contributes to spiritual joy and the delight of the soul. The special power and excellence of music should lift up to God the minds of the faithful who are present.”²⁴ Ps.150 is full of musical sounds in praise of God.

“In the movie ‘The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter’, there is a touching scene between Mick Kelly and Mr. Singer. Mick is a young girl who is deeply fascinated with music. Mr. Singer is a boarder who lives in the Kelly house. Mick wants to share with Mr. Singer the joy that she finds in

²³ Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, Norton, NY, 1950, 67.

²⁴ Pope Pius XII, *Musicae Sacrae Disciplina*, no.4, The Vatican City, 25th December 1950.

music, but the man is deaf. So, one day Mick brings her record player up to Mr. Singer's room and puts on a Mozart record. As the music plays, she gestures with her hands and arms, trying to give Mr. Singer an idea of what the music is doing. She makes big sweeping gestures as the music grows in volume and complexity, and smaller gestures when the music grows softer. Mr. Singer sits there and nods and smiles as he watches Mick. Then the record is over, but Mr. Singer keeps nodding and smiling as if it were still going on. Mick realizes that she cannot really communicate to him all that she experiences in the music. She can only give him a vague idea of what it's all about. But she did it because she loved the music, and because she loved Mr. Singer and wanted to share with him the most important thing in her life. Mr. Singer knew what she was trying to do, but he also knew that there was more there than he was equipped to grasp. After this scene, a priest who was at the theatre turned to his companion beside him and whispered: "It's so much like sharing our experience of God."²⁵

III. GOD-EXPERIENCE THROUGH DOLLS

The word 'doll' was a familiar form of the name 'Dorothea' which means 'someone who is given by God.' *Theos* means God. Thus a child can be a doll given by God to the parents. Unfortunately, today we associate the word 'doll' with inanimate objects. We have seen throughout history the figures of child Jesus (*bambino*), infant Jesus, baby Mary (*bambina*) and child Krishna well accepted.

Jyoti Sahi, the artist-theologian too seems to be in love with dolls. "There is a charming story which I have no doubt was true, about a Muslim princess in India, who was given by her Father a little doll to play with. This doll happened to be the image of Krishna, which had been taken from a temple when it was destroyed by the invasion of Muslim armies. It

²⁵ KOLANCHERRY, *Prayer in Culture*, 78-79. 26 SAHI, J., *The theme of dolls*, 264.

was such a charming figure, that the iconoclasts had not broken it to pieces, but had preserved it, and so it had found its way into the nursery of a Muslim princess. The Muslim child mothered this doll, and grew to love it with such a deep and sincere love, that she could not be parted from it. It was her child, her own innermost self. Later, when the Hindu community heard that their most holy icon of Krishna was in the hands of the Muslim princess, they asked that this image should be returned to them. Eventually the Muslim princess understood that her precious doll was also something that the Hindu community treasured, and wanted to be returned. And so she agreed to give back the doll to be once again enshrined in the Holy of Holies of a temple. But so great was her love for this doll, that she gave up her position as a princess and went to live near the temple, visiting the Lord Krishna in his shrine every day. The Hindu community recognizing her deep devotion to their Lord, recognized her as a saint, and kept her memory in deep reverence. Here we are reminded of the deep mystery that God comes to our homes as a doll, inviting us to play with Him. It is in and through this play that we learn to love the Creator, who in His play, has made each one of us.”²⁶

We all have the child, the adult and the parent in us. All these need expressions in order to feel we are fully human. The Child-God definitely evokes a different response in us and when we express it, we begin to feel close to that Child-God and this permits us to have an experience of God at a different level. We feel great to have ‘God-in-our-hands’, at the same time experience God’s greatness as he humbles himself to come among us as a child and even play in our midst. The closeness to God that we feel is itself an experience of God at a particular level. In John’s Gospel when Jesus says “...I am in the Father...” (Jn.14, 10), he perhaps alludes to that relationship between the ‘Father’ (‘Mother’!) and himself. As a child he

²⁶ SAHI,J., *The theme of dolls*, 264.

was physically in his Mother, Mary. Thus he felt that closeness. That same experience he now has with the Father on a different level.

But that closeness to the mother as a child helps him now to have the closeness to his Father, in whom he sees both Mother and Father! Psychologists understand this experience as a participation in the oceanic oneness of the universe. It gives us the basic trust we need for life; trust in ourselves and in others, even when the mother and father are withdrawn from us.

Here is an invitation to all of us "...May they also be in us..." (Jn. 17, 21) to have that sort of God-experience, through the mediation of an art form, doll. It is closer to the Indian way of experiencing God, not as a God who reveals from above (as in prophetic religions) but as a God who can be touched and felt (as in nature religions). Therefore, a Hindu dips in the Holy water of *Gangamata*, to have that touch and feel of a Mother. The basic trust we had in our mother (father), love and respect for them, is later on transferred to God and other people. This sort of God-experience helps us to lead us on to experiencing people in the same way.

Conclusion

Though God is spirit, He can be experienced in his creation, provided we understand certain limitations that are intrinsic to any creature because every creature is clothed in matter. Creativity has to be the basic characteristic of the creator. Otherwise how can he create? The creator himself gave the gift of creativity especially to human beings so that they continue to recreate and add more beauty to his creation. The artist gives expression to this gift of creativity, to his inner spirit, through various art forms, and naturally his product will carry a lot of beauty of the divinity in it. Art forms are unique, appealing and truthful since they stand for the inner spirit of the artist and not for marketing or for the admiration from the people. Human beings feel incomplete without being able to relate to God, especially when they try to find meaning in life. Though all would like to relate to God, many are not able to give expression to that inner

spirit that unites them with the Spirit of God, but an artist does it. That is why all genuine arts are universal, divine and beautiful and they give us a taste of divinity. Thus we meet God through the artist and his masterpieces. God himself is the master-artist and we observe that in his creation. The cultural art forms rise above man-made boundaries, and in this way they are close to God's Spirit, which blows wherever, it wills. When an artist produces a masterpiece, he reflects that Master-artist in his work and thus gives us a glimpse of the eternal bliss which helps us have a God-experience. Liturgy is a context where the faithful come to have a touch of God and experience Him. The Church has prudently introduced these art forms in liturgy, thus enabling her faithful to meet God through Word and Sacrament. These art forms create a mood that helps the celebrants participate in liturgy actively and consciously.