

Unit II- Winston Churchill’s “Painting as a Pastime”

Winston Churchill’s *Painting as a Pastime* is a thoughtful and inspiring essay that shows how hobbies, especially painting, can refresh the mind, bring happiness, and help people find peace during stressful times. Churchill begins by discussing how people in positions of responsibility, or those with mentally demanding work, often feel exhausted and worried. They search for ways to relieve this stress. Common suggestions include taking rest, going for walks, enjoying nature, or watching plays. But Churchill believes that the best solution is not just rest; it is a change of mental activity.

Churchill explains that the human brain is like a coat that becomes worn if used too much. If a person uses the same part of the brain again and again, it becomes tired. However, the brain has the power to recover. Just lying down to rest is not enough because the mind continues to worry. A better way is to give the brain something completely new to do, which will take the mind away from the usual pressure.

Churchill explores how reading, as a common form of diversion, provides mental comfort to many. He believes that reading can deepen one's respect, especially when one is in a library. Lord Morley defines a small collection of books as "a few books"—anything under five thousand—but Churchill reflects on how a visit to even a modest library dispels any illusion of pride.

As one browses through the endless shelves of books and considers the vast collection of knowledge and wisdom accumulated by humanity, a sense of awe fills the mind. This feeling is often accompanied by sadness as one realises that there are so many great works written by sages, scientists, philosophers, poets, and historians that they may never be able to fully admire or appreciate in their lifetime. The shortness of human life becomes evident, reminding us that despite the richness of knowledge, our time is limited.

Churchill also advocates reading in a foreign language as a way to refresh the mind. While modern education often pushes students to learn multiple languages, he suggests focusing on mastering just one language well enough to read it with pleasure. This approach, according to Churchill, offers mental relief and variety, engaging different brain areas and providing a refreshing break from the usual routine.

However, he notes that reading alone, while valuable, does not offer the necessary contrast for true mental rest. To achieve balance, it is essential to use both the mind and the body. Engaging in handicrafts or physical activities, like joinery, chemistry, or bookbinding, can be deeply restorative for the overworked mind. Among these, Churchill believes that painting is the most accessible and rewarding hobby, especially because it requires the use of both hands and eyes, offering a complete diversion from intellectual labour.

Churchill expresses his gratitude for discovering painting later in life. He classifies people into three broad groups: the overworked, the anxious, and the bored. Each of these types has different needs. For example, a manual labourer who works hard physically may not enjoy a sport during free time because he is already tired. Someone who is always worrying may not find relief in casual weekend activities. Even wealthy people, who have everything, can feel bored because they lack discipline or purpose. Churchill says that real enjoyment comes when work and leisure are different from each other. Even those who love their job need some change now and then. Therefore, hobbies are important for everyone.

Churchill finds that painting offers a lasting companionship, one that does not demand excessive exertion or youthfulness. Unlike sports or other physically demanding hobbies, painting remains accessible as one grows older. It allows the artist to create without the pressure of physical fatigue, offering instead a peaceful, enriching activity that provides comfort and joy.

Painting, Churchill argues, is an ideal form of diversion because it does not require expert mastery to enjoy. Even at the age of forty, it is possible to discover the joy of painting, and he encourages others to try it, regardless of age or previous experience. He suggests that trying

painting can lead to a new, fulfilling form of entertainment that offers mental relaxation and a renewed sense of purpose. He explains how he discovered painting during a difficult period of his life, after being removed from his government post in 1915. He was full of energy and ideas but had no outlet. Then, one day, he picked up a paintbrush.

At first, Churchill was nervous. He compares the moment of facing a blank canvas to jumping into cold water or launching an attack in battle. But once he made his first stroke, he felt excited and free. His friend, Lady Lavery, encouraged him. That gave him the confidence to continue. Soon, painting became a friend and comfort. It gave him peace, allowed him to use his hands and eyes together, and made him forget his worries.

Painting, according to Churchill, is special because it can be done at any age. Sports may require youth and strength, but painting welcomes both the young and the old alike. It does not demand strong muscles, and it becomes a loyal friend for life. He says that one does not need to be a great artist to enjoy painting. What is needed is courage and the boldness to try. Results are not important. Even if one fails, nothing is lost. But there is a chance that one may discover a hidden talent and find great joy.

Churchill discusses different painting styles. He admires the smooth and natural beauty of Turner, but he also appreciates the bold colours and strange forms of modern French painters like Manet, Monet, Cézanne, and Matisse. Though their style often goes against natural direction, it adds light and energy to the painting. Just as Keats and Shelley brought new life to English poetry, these artists brought freshness to painting.

Churchill shares an interesting experience where a French friend could guess Churchill's favourite painters just by looking at his brush strokes. This made Churchill realise that sincere painting, even without training, can help develop a true artistic taste. He also began to see the world in a new way. A plain wall was no longer just grey; it had light, shade, colour, and texture. Painting, he says, teaches people how to see deeply.

Churchill notes that a beautiful scene is not always necessary for a good painting. Sometimes, dramatic conditions like changing sunlight or bold colours can inspire great work. But one must be careful not to paint things that are already too decorated, as they may look artificial on canvas.

Churchill also explains the importance of memory in painting. When painting a scene, there is a delay between observing it, mixing colours, and applying paint. That gap is filled by memory. Great artists often work indoors from memory, long after having seen the real scene. Churchill gives an example of the painter Whistler, who trained his students by asking them to look at a model and then paint it from memory after running up several flights of stairs. Whether or not this story is true, it shows how much painting depends on memory.

Churchill says that once he begins to paint, all his worries disappear. Time flies, and he feels fresh. He jokes that standing still at a parade feels boring and painful, but he can stand for hours painting without feeling tired. Painting, he says, becomes a reason for travel. For a painter, every day is full of purpose and excitement. Unlike tourists who rush from one place to another, painters truly observe and connect with the places they visit.

Churchill lists places like Avignon, Egypt, Palestine, and India as ideal for painting because of their light, colours, and atmosphere. But he also reminds us that we do not have to travel far. Beautiful landscapes exist nearby in the Scottish Highlands or along the Thames in England. The joy of painting is in truly seeing and feeling, wherever we are.

In the end, Churchill says painting is not just an activity, but it is a way of life. It brings happiness, sharpens memory, develops observation, and gives comfort. He encourages everyone, young or old, to try painting or any creative hobby and to discover the joy it can bring.