

## Sri Aurobindo's Poetics and Poetic Theory

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### Sri Aurobindo's Poetics:

Sri Aurobindo himself has once declared that he had been first and foremost a poet, that the poet was the earliest side of his personality, the primal aspect. Nalini Kant Gupta has well observed that he was born as a poet and he is a born poet<sup>1</sup>. His poetic career spreads over a period of sixty years from 1890 to 1950 during which he has enriched the realm of letters by a royal quantity of quality. In the words of V.K. Gokak, he is undoubtedly, "the most outstanding Indo-Anglian writer for volume as well as variety"<sup>2</sup>. Sri Aurobindo's poetic career born in England developed in Baroda and Calcutta and reached to perfection at Pondicherry. "The poetry of Sri Aurobindo gives us the impression of a great mountain range prolific and verdant in the lower ranges, its top neighbouring the sky and clothed in eternal snow and light". The two volumes of 'Collected Poems and Plays', the multi-aspected epic 'Savitri' with its 24000 lines, narrative poems, a large body of Philosophical Poems besides the cultures of lyrics present the creative effort of about sixty years and give the impression of the enormous poetic stature of Sri Aurobindo the poet.

A very outstanding seer and great creative writer or thinker of the present century evenly balanced in him, he soaked in great literatures, arts and thoughts, both western and Asian, old and new is also one of the most distinguished theorists and practitioners of literature, giving new dimensions and directions to poetics with a view to making it suitable for the future men of letters. Poetics is primarily founded on his deeply felt intuitive experiences. His view of art and Poetry is embodied in the book 'The Future Poetry', in his letters and in the prefaces to the various works he has bequeathed to us.

In short, Aurobindo's poetics is the natural corollary of his striking original creative mind plus variegated influences that his receptive mind felt from time to time in India as well as abroad. Thus on his aesthetic vision can be perceived the impact of Homer, Aristophanes, Dante, Goethe, French Poets, Shakespeare, The Upanishadas, *The Gita*, *The*

*Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, Kalidasa, Bhavbuti, Rabindranath Tagore, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Vivekanand, the Indian aesthetic tradition, the Greeco-Latin and French traditions, and above all, the Indian spiritual tradition and his own spiritual and intellectual experiences. In the present, an attempt has been made to explain and examine only some of the basic aspects of Sri Aurobindo's poetics, enunciated so comprehensively by him in *The Future Poetry*, Letters and other expository writings.

In *The Future Poetry*. Sri Aurobindo opines that any attempt to define poetry scientifically is a sheer wastage of energy as it is impossible to define it. Obviously, he does not endorse the definition of poetry as given by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, or T.S. Eliot. Nevertheless, he assigns poetry a very high position, and calls it "The Mantra of the Real."<sup>4</sup> What he means by it is that poetry must transcend the earth to encompass higher spiritual regions inhabited by Divine Truth, Divine Beauty and Divine Delight. He uses the Sanskrit word "Mantra" because he believes that there is no word in English which can be its equivalent. The concept of poetry as "the Mantra of Real" is based on what the Vedic poets have stated in this connection. The Mantra of the Real, According to Sri Aurobindo, is the very essence or true nature of poetry. Mantra in his views, is the product of 'overmind' and not of human mind or imagination, however brilliant and powerful it may be. The creator of the Mantra is able to reach and reveal the very soul of things, their innermost reality. Thus poetry is the power of employing words to enchant the reader that is to overflow the human mind with vitality, awareness of things and their true relationship with one another and not with simple delight.

Sri Aurobindo gives a very serious consideration to the poetic inspiration i.e. the originating sources of poetry. He talks of numerous sources of poetry in his 'The Future Poetry' and his Letters.

"Poetry does come from these sources or even from the super conscient sometimes; but it does not come usually through the form of dreams, it comes either through word-vision or through conscious vision and imagery whether in a fully waking or an inward drawn state, the latter may go so far as to be a state of Samadhi-Svapna Samadhi: ... No poetry can be written without access to some source of inspiration"<sup>5</sup>.

In fact the source of poetic inspiration in Sri Aurobindo's views, may be anywhere, the physical plane, the higher and lower vital, the plane or dynamic vision, the dynamic intelligence, the psychic and illumined mind, the overmind etc. True to his belief and theory, Sri Aurobindo as a poet gets poetic inspiration mainly from above his head. He would make himself receptive and would submit himself completely

to the Divine Power. This does not mean that poetry is merely a creation of the Divine Power, and that man makes no contribution to it. As a matter of fact, poetry is result of perfect collaboration between the divine power and the human activity. Sri Aurobindo's stress on the poet's reception of the unhampered inspiration for the composition of great poetry.

"There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind but by inspiration, as the mouth piece of the Gods.<sup>6</sup>

It may be seen how Sri Aurobindo's epic is born of a total cosmic vision, transcending the barriers of nation, caste or time. In Writing his "*The Future Poetry*" Sri Aurobindo remarks:

"This change will mean that poetry may resume on a larger scale, with a wider and more shining vision the greater effect it once had on the life of the race in the noble antique culture".

Poetry, according to Sri Aurobindo, aims at achieving the harmony of five perennial powers – Truth, Beauty, Joy, Life and Spirit – labelled by him as the suns of poetry.

According to him, the poet is the seer and reveller of Truth. He is one who has got an insight into the things around and who can reveal the beauty and reality hidden from the sight of an ordinary man. The true creator and the true listener of the poetry is the soul; the intelligence and the imagination are only the channels of perception and transmission. His *Savitri* is a unique model of the future poetry:

Poetry, according to Sri Aurobindo, synthesises, and lives in the harmonious relationship of vision of truth, passion for beauty and quest for joy- the first is the enlightening power. But the power that sustains the poetic creation and makes it vital and great is the breath of life. Naturally, Sri Aurobindo attaches the utmost importance to life in poetry.

So far as truth is concerned, the poet must deal with the realities of life both the external and in internal, the sensuous and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite, about beauty and joy. His observations are again unique, marked by remarkable originality. Sri Aurobindo believes that Love and Beauty are source of joy, ananda, light and knowledge are of consciousness. God can be found only in the highest joy, and this is the reason why the spiritual joy makes life beautiful, wonderful and resplendent to man. No doubt, poetry which is inspired and governed by spirituality, can exert a healthy impact on the life of the reader: spiritual joy or Ananda is the highest form of human vision. Ananda-

fathomless in visible joy has love and beauty as its two most important ingredients. The highest delight, the spiritual joy which makes life lovable and beautiful is attainable only through the realisation of and close contact with God.

Sri Aurobindo's poetics leads us to draw a few inferences. In the first place, he has thought about poetry more seriously and deeply than any other modern thinker. Even the great mystic poet of the world of both the West and the East, such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, W.B. yeats, Walt Whitman, Emerson, Kabir, R.N. Tagore, Jai Shankar Prasad. Mahadevi Verma and others could not grasp the unfathomable mystic depth of poetry and could not reach the super conscient sources of poetry. His concept of the super conscient is strikingly original and profound. Secondly, he reveals a new facet of the poetic imagination, that is the psychic inspiration.

His theory of poetry is characterised by a remarkable broad outlook, sound judgement and profound grasp of the subject. It certainly opens up new horizons in the domain of poetry-criticism, as it has its bedrock his philosophy and his spiritual insight, particularly his concept of Sadhana and his view of the search levels of consciousness-physical, vital, mental, (lower and higher), illumined mental, intuitive mental, overmind and supermind.

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