



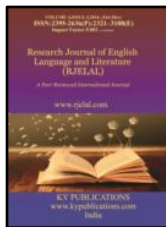
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SRI AUROBINDO'S EARLY POETRY: AN AMALGAMATION OF MYSTICISM AND SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr ZEBA SIDDIQUI

Asst Professor, Amity School of Languages
Amity University MP
zebasid2010@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo's poetic output is enormous. The span of his creative activity covers a period of over sixty years, and his poetic output runs to over three thousand pages. He tried his hands at a number of poetic forms, and almost always with great success. He has to his credit lyrics, sonnets, narrative poems, epics, poetic plays, besides numerous translations and adaptations. For the convenience of study, his poetic career can be divided into three stages: The early stage, the middle stage and the last stage. This division is only to study his poetic career in a more lucid manner, for many of his poems composed in the earliest stage were printed at a much later date, and the trends and features of a later stage can also be noticed even in the early stage. Sri Aurobindo was a profound yogi, a mystic and an aesthete. His personal and original yogic experiences were firmly grounded in the Upanishads and the age old Indian aesthetic tradition.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, mysticism, yogi, mystical poetry, symbolism

Sri Aurobindo started writing poetry as a young student, and continued until late in his life. The theme of his poetry changed with the projects that he undertook. It ranged from revolutionary homages to mystic philosophy. In the early stage, the poet is quite young and immature and echoes of western poets can be heard in his creations. In addition to the great influence of the Greek and Latin poets which was great on his blossoming mind, the heart of young Aurobindo during his fourteen year stay in England was also coloured by the temper of Romanticism and late Victorian poetry. Such varied influence was not unusual in the 80's of the previous century. The exact date of composition of his early poems cannot always be settled and one must therefore be content with the broad period of composition. But even in this early phase, we hear the authentic voice of the great *Rishi* and there are occasional flashes of genius. Many of the poems

written by Sri Aurobindo, during the early stage, were published much later as *More Poems* and *Poems*.

Sri Aurobindo had some very profound mystical and spiritual experiences, which he himself has described in some of his short poems. These are exceptional poems, which have a multiple significance of being autobiographical records, mystical poetry and poetic description of spiritual experiences.

Sri Aurobindo was much more than a poetic genius. He is known as Yogi par-excellence and a mystic. Therefore, his poetry often tends to be mystical and metaphysical. His short poems are quite revealing and striking. Hence his early poems showing the genius and seeds of mystical vision deserve closer study and attention than has so far been accorded to them. The mystical vein of these poems is startlingly inviting. Aurobindo had once

remarked: "I used this word mystic in the sense of a certain kind of inner seeing and feeling of things, a way which to the intellect would seem occult and visionary –for this is something different from imagination and its work with which the intellect is familiar."

During the first thirteen years of his stay in India, Sri Aurobindo immersed himself in the study of Vedic culture and learnt on his own Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali. This phase of poetic activity was of prodigious literary productivity and most of his themes and the symbolism of his later poetry were first worked out during this period in works such as *Love and Death*, *Urvashi*, *Uloupie*, *The tale of Nala*, *the Rishi*, *Ahana* etc. Inspired by the British poets of the Romantic school, the matter is typically Indian and spiritual.

As a poet, Sri Aurobindo is full of mystical approach. The poet has included the element of mysticism about the time and the place. The mysterious element 'the Presence' - 'Thou', has been left to be solved by the reader. In brief, this poem is the mystical narration of a mystical experience of the poet which encourages the reader to unravel the mystery of the further unfolding of the events on which the poet has intentionally chosen to remain mystically silent.

Poems published in 1905 have a different tone. The problem of belief, and soliloquies and debates could be witnessed. The mood and manner of these writings explain why in certain minds Sri Aurobindo is equated with "The Philosopher as Poet". An unequal volume, there are however, exceptions to the philosophizing mood. For instance, in a poem like *Who*, the poet speaks about the Divine:

He is lost in the heart in the cavern of Nature

He is found in the brain where he builds up the thought:

In the pattern and bloom of the flower He is woven.

In the luminous net of the stars He is caught.

[Who]

The vision of the Divine is expressed in terms of simple truths. The expression is precise and clear; there is no ambiguity or vague generalisations.

Sri Aurobindo's mysticism is not a withdrawal from life, but a celebration of it as the complex manifestation of Godhead (as written in the poem). It celebrates the paradoxical powers of the Supreme: "In the blue of the sky in the green of the forest,/ Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?/ When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,/ Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?"

This poem is a good instance of how the poet is able to translate or rather transform philosophical thought of the one underlying the many into pure emotion: "These are His works and His veils and His shadows./ But where is He then? By what name is He known?/ Is He Brahma or Vishnu? a man or a woman?/ Bodied or bodiless? twin or alone?" The poet's mood may be gay or romantic the voice of the Invisible Power makes a common feature, explicitly or implicitly.

The collection *Nine Poems* lyrics belong to the early stage, though published much later. *Ahana* is the main poem of this volume. This poem contains charming flashes of sustained poetry. The stately march, the fullness of voice, the wealth of imagery, and vigour of movement can be witnessed. The reader is thrilled with the majestic sweep and the wide rolling Cadence.

Ahana's poesy is particularly, a mingling of fact, myth and symbolism; hope, aspiration and ecstasy presenting before us dazzling images: "But I descend at last.../ Lo, I come and behind me knowledge descends and with thunder/ Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom, Joy to the arms..."

More Poems was published in 1967, after the death of the poet. The volume contains a number of lyrics written during this early phase. It includes poems like *The Symbol Moon*, *Sun of Lighting*. Several of the poems are incomplete and fragmentary.

Sri Aurobindo's diction in early poetry is highly suggestive, expressive and even picturesque. The description of nature, by him, is picturesque. It is like painting in which the particular sight is painted with remarkable and flawless precision and accuracy. He invites us to participate in the creative activity of his mind. Here is his *Invitation*, one of his early poems:

With wind and the weather beating round
me

Up to the hill and the moorland I go.

Who will come with me ? Who will climb
with me ?

Wade through the brook and tramp
through the snow ?

Not in the petty circle of cities

Cramped by your doors and your walls I
dwell;

Over me God is blue in the welkin,

Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,

Of misadventure have made me a friend.

Who would live largely? Who would live
freely?

Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

[Invitation]

This indeed is an invitation to power of
passion and to light of thought. His poetry aspires to
achieve 'an integral view of man, nature and God.' It
brilliantly reveals his mystical and *yogic* experiences.
In one of his early lyrics, *Parabrahman*, Sri
Aurobindo sees the glimpse of the Eternal in
material phenomenon: "He is not anything, yet all is
He:/ He is not at all but far exceeds that scope,/ Both
Time and Timelessness sink in that sea,/ Time
is a wave and Space a wandering drop."

[Parabrahman]

Sri Aurobindo's mystical poetry is a recording of his
yogic aspiration to achieve an integral view of man,
Nature and God, of his sublime vision of man as an
evolving being with the possibility, or rather the
assurance of-hitherto unrealized capacities opening
up in him, for,

A dumb Inconscient drew life's stumbling
maze, A night of all things, packed and
infinite:

It made our consciousness a torch that
plays

Between the Abyss and a supernal Light.
Our mind was framed a lens of segment
sight

Piecing out inch by inch the world's huge
mass,

And reason a small hard theodolite

Measuring unreally the measureless ways.
Yet is the dark Inconscient whence came all
The self-same Power that shines on high
unwon:

Our Night shall be a sky purpleal,
Our torch transmute to a vast godhead's
sun.

Rooted in mire heavenward man's nature
grows, —

His soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose.

[The Dumb Inconscient]

Giving his views on the vision in the poem, Sri
Aurobindo says-

A mystic poem may explain itself or a
general idea may emerge from it," says Sri
Aurobindo, "but it is the vision that is
important or what one can get from it by
intuitive feeling not the explanation or idea:
Thought the Paraclete is a vision or
revelation of an ascent through spiritual
planes, but gives no mane and no
photographic descriptions of the planes
crossed."

Sri Aurobindo's poems, as is evident,
besides being reflection of his ideas on poetry, are
practical experience in which he explained his yoga,
which is integral as well as intellectual. In many
poems Sri Aurobindo exhibits his belief that his yoga
can be translated into the language of poetry. His
poems are thought- provoking and highly spiritual.

Sri Aurobindo's poetry is deep and cosmic.
The poems of the early period like, *Evening* and *To
weep because a glorious sun* belongs to this
category. The suggestiveness of these poems is
obviously quite apparent. *Evening* suggests the old
age of man and with that, man goes nearer to God
and heaven as the hour of death approaches.

A golden evening, when the thoughtful sun

Rejects its usual pomp in going, trees

That bend down to their green companion

And fruitful mother, vaguely whispering, —
these

And a wide silent sea. Such hour is nearest
God, —

Like rich old age when the long ways have
all been trod.

[Evening]

Sisir kumar Ghose aptly describes Sri Aurobindo— “To read Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is to believe in immense human possibilities. Here is, in fact, the hope for poetry and hope for man. With him, we have the return of *Rishi*. It is in this light that he is not only a great poet, but the poets’ poet.”

Conclusion

Though it will be an exaggeration yet it is an exaggeration of a vital truth that these poems of the early period, whatever be their poetic form—lyric, free verse, blank verse, or any kind of sonnet proper or experimental sonnet—they all read like as many shlokas (two-lined verses of Shri Bhagwad Gita). They are enunciations of the abstruse and intricate process and philosophy of yoga. In one poem after another, the philosopher poet broaches one aspect or the other of his life, vision and philosophy to enlighten his readers, who are teased out of thought, wrestling hard to make out the whole meaning of the poems, fragments of poems. The entire range of early poetry of Sri Aurobindo is an amalgamation of his mystic consciousness and poetic craftsmanship.

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