

Treatment of Mysticism in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry

Veena Vijaya

Faculty of Language Studies
Arab Open University, KSA

Abstract

Mysticism is an important element in mankind's experience of God. Throughout history, there have been many mystics whose experiences fascinate us and open the door to a higher realm of experience. Many great mystics have lived both in the orient and the occident. Meister Eckhart, St Teresa of Avila, Jacob Boehme, Andal, Shankara, Meerabai, Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi are some of them. India has a rich mystic tradition and Sri Aurobindo is one of the greatest intellectual mystics of the modern period. His concept of mysticism is unique; it is more of a continuum, ever changing and evolving, that he is constantly trying to pin down in words, to define, to concretize, to categorize, but which seems never to yield itself entirely to language. As a result, in his poetry, the mind gets more and more subtle, rarer and refined. His mysticism is tirelessly reaching for perfection, apparently finding it, not stopping there but inventing new looks for itself; it is a mysticism that seems to stress becoming more than being. Aurobindo's genius is unparalleled in the world of the mystics. The works of many great mystics are part of the human heritage. Many of them were men of God who spent their lives in convents and monasteries. This paper investigates the poetic works of the great intellectual mystic Aurobindo who teaches that all beings are united in One Self and Spirit, but divided by a certain separate consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. For him, the mystical experience is an ongoing phenomenon, varying and changing rather than a final or all transforming experience as it is with the other mystics. He tries to blend the Western and Eastern philosophies and follows a array that is both intellectual and in harmony with the patterns of scientific thought.

Keywords: mysticism, poetry, philosophy, mystics, consciousness, divine.

1. Mystics and Mysticism: The Background

Indian culture represents the combined achievement of many races and communities. Apart from Hinduism, one can also find other religions like Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. India has had a long line of saints and mystics who, steeped in the deep wisdom of the ancients, brought the results of their own experience to the common man. The objective of these seers was to establish sincerity of faith and integration of the whole man and they emphasized fundamental truths and eternal values.

Mystics and men of religion have always had a prominent role in India that held a rich tradition of mysticism (Durvedi, 1991). Many of them have given expression to their feelings of devotion and to their experience of mystic states through poetry of enduring value. Indeed, some of the greatest mystic and religious poems have been composed in India. During the 6th century, there erupted in South India, a widespread Bhakti movement (Sen, 1961). Within a century, the movement had reached the heights of poetic and religious fervor of devotional poetry. The devotional poets in South India were either Vaishnavites commonly known as Alvars and Saivites, known as Nayanmars. The eminent poets among the Alvars were Pogaialwar, Bhuttalwar and Peyalwar. In Nayanmars, Saint Sundarar, NambiyandarNambi and Sekkilar were prominent (Devasenapathi, 1978). Bhakti movement was in its noon-day glory by the middle of the 9th century, when the solitary woman-poet of the Alvars known as Andal or Naachiyar became popular (Raghavan, 1978). Her poems were rich in wisdom and ripe in experience, and they fascinate us by their sheer simplicity and melodic beauty (Nandakumar, 1978).

Meerabai, the 16th century woman saint of North India, has become part of the heart-beat of India. Her mysticism is highly devotional and aesthetic; her poems are an outpouring of love and faith. Meera was a devotee of Lord Krishna and led a wandering life, singing, dancing in ecstasy and keeping company with men of God. There is a particular quality to Meera's love and mysticism which has made her the archetypal woman saint of North India. The only religion she knows is the religion of love. Meera has become a mythical figure whose mystic experiences have been embodied as great poems that will last forever (Futehally, 1994). Meera is not the first, nor the only one, to use the language of love in speaking of God. St. Catherine of Siena, Richard Rolle of Hampole, Julian of Norwich in the West, and Narsimha Mehta, Dasimayya, Mahadeviakka in India, are only some of the many names of mystic poets who have spoken in the language of love (Raval, 1978). The other mystic poets found in North India are Jnaneswar, Nanak, Kabir, Surdas, Tulasidas, Narasimha Mehta, Tukaram, Ramdas etc.

Kabir, who was the son of a Muslim weaver, was free from all kinds of inhibition and could proclaim his faith with full vigor and self-confidence. He struck at the roots of

every kind of religious ritualism and superstition. He combined in him the Sufi and Bhakti traditions of the Islamic and the Hindu religions. The knowledge he had gained and the Truth which he had realized were not the outcome of reading of the Sastras but of his own spiritual experiences. Kabir composed songs for the common people and he knew that the God of all religions is the same and considered himself to be a tool of God (Tiwari, 1978). The founder of the great Sikh religion, Nanak, was greatly influenced by Kabir's teaching. Some of the attractive simplicity of Sikhism can be traced to Kabir. Surdas was a blind bard and an ardent apostle of Krishna Bhakti. He was a seeker of Truth, an explorer into the ultimate Reality. Surdas' poetry embodies a whole gamut of emotions. His writings still inspire and motivate people towards a spirituality, dedicated and morally correct way of life (Verma, 1978). The common characteristic of all these poets is their worship of God as a loving and intensely lovable Creator.

In the last two hundred years, Indian culture has been greatly influenced by the West. The new developments are partly the result of the influence of Christianity, but not entirely. Indian society has undergone considerable changes since the advent of the modern age and it is only natural that this resulted in certain changes of ideas. The impact of modern western culture brought into being a few movements which contributed much to the making of modern India. Most of these movements started in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the central figure in this awakening. He got inspiration from the modern sciences of the West as well as from the ancient knowledge of India. He argued in favour of a universal religion based on the principle of one Supreme God. Debendranath Tagore was a saintly character who did much to consolidate the Upanishadic faith of the BrahmoSamaj which was started by Ram Mohan Roy. Rabindranath Tagore's contribution to the mystical tradition is very significant. His mysticism is neither a creed nor a philosophy, but a practical way of looking at the world with a pure soul and it is an attempt at the purification of the soul. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa can be seen in a direct line with the Bhakti movement and his disciple, Swami Vivekananda was intensely interested in social problems who declared himself as a socialist, and wanted to make a European society with India's religion. RamanaMaharshi was an important figure of this kind in the South; he taught no formal doctrine, but gave expression to the doctrine of the 'Atman' or self in his discourses.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose is a unique figure in this long lineage of mystics. He is an intellectual mystic whose works are distinctively Indian and are a dynamic contribution to world literature. Aurobindo and his philosophy still continue to inspire people of all nations. A clear example of this fact is Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. In the works of Aurobindo, we can see the blending of politics, Indian culture, social theory, philosophy, yoga and poetry. But the focus here is only with his poetry, the hall-mark of which is a mystic quality that enables us glimpses of a higher order.

2. Aurobindo: Life and Works

Sri Aurobindo Ghose, the multi-faceted genius of modern India was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta. He was the son of Krishnadh Ghose, a physician in government service and Swarnalata Ghose, an orthodox Hindu lady who was the eldest daughter of Rajnarain Bose, the head of the Adi Brahma Samaj. At the age of five, Aurobindo and his brothers were sent to the Loreto Convent School and it was here that he had his first paranormal experience, the vision of a heavy, palpable darkness speedily descending on to the earth and entering him. The darkness stayed with him for the next fourteen years. As a child of seven, he was sent to England for his education where he studied at St. Paul's School in London. At a very young age, Aurobindo had begun to feel strongly that a period of great revolutionary changes was emerging in the world and in India that he was destined to play a part in it. Gradually his silent political activity turned into active participation in India's struggle for freedom. He became the leader of the Nationalist Party. In 1901, Aurobindo married Mrinalini Bose, but soon lost interest in her as both of them varied very much in their outlook. In 1906, in the wake of the popular agitation against the partition of Bengal, he left his job in Baroda and enrolled as a writer for *Bande Mataram*, an English-language newspaper that became the mouthpiece of a new party of nationalists. Aurobindo soon became an all-India figure. While, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, considered him to be the most dangerous man that the authorities had to reckon with, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das hailed him as the poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and a lover of humanity (Heehs, 1989).

Along with his political journalism, Aurobindo wrote and published in the *Karmayogin* numerous articles on philosophy and yoga, educational theory, art theory and criticism, and literary criticism, as well as translations and poetry. In 1910, in answer to an inner call, Aurobindo withdrew from the political field and sailed for Pondicherry, the capital of French India to devote himself entirely to his evolving spiritual mission. He turned his attention to the inner change of consciousness that he believed had to precede any lasting change in the structure and workings of society. Between 1910 and 1914, Aurobindo worked alone, devoting most of his time in meditation, in the study of Sanskrit texts, the development of new interpretations of the Rigveda and the Upanishads. His interpretation of the Upanishads became the basis of his own philosophy, which began to take shape at this time (Purani, 1978).

Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, who was a French lady named Mirra Paul Richard, joined him in 1920. They together brought out a journal called *Arya* in which he published most of his major prose works. Aurobindo presented his philosophy in *The Life Divine* (1939-40), his method of yoga in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948), his interpretations of Indian scriptures in *The Secret of the Veda, Essays on the Gita and other works*, his social and political thought in *The Human Cycle* (1949) and *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1950), and his theory of poetics in *The Future Poetry* (1985). He also wrote essays on philosophical and other topics, and a series of articles defending Indian culture from foreign detractors (Heehs, 1998). Even after his retirement from politics, Aurobindo

remained an influential figure among those who took part in the freedom movement. At the end of 1926, Aurobindo stopped meeting with anyone except Mirra and one or two others and devoted most of the time to his yogic practice. The management of the Aurobindo Ashram was assigned to Mirra and Aurobindo asked its members to regard her as their active spiritual guide or 'Mother.' From around this time, he became known as 'Sri Aurobindo,' the honorific 'Sri' being regarded by his followers as an integral part of his name.

From the mid-1930s, Aurobindo again found time to work on his poetry. His early work had been traditional in form and romantic in style and substance (Iyengar, 1985). During the early years in Pondicherry, he put most of his poetic energy into large dramatic and narrative projects and in the thirties; he composed a series of seventy-three sonnets and a number of shorter mystical poems. The most remarkable are first-person accounts of spiritual experiences, seemingly written while the experience was going on. During and after his recovery from an accident in November 1938, Aurobindo revised his major prose works and published them as books. These include *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948), *The Human Cycle* (1949) and *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1950). His epic work, *Savitri*, was published in two volumes in 1950 and 1951. Aurobindo affirms that all life is yoga and that man has a greater destiny awaiting him (Iyengar, 1985). Through a conscious aspiration, he can evolve into a higher being and open himself to a higher consciousness which he called the Supramental. Aurobindo left his body on 5th December, 1950 after a brief illness.

3. Mysticism in Aurobindo's Poetry

For the sake of convenience, Aurobindo's mystical poems can be divided into four groups: poems written in 1895-1908, in 1908-1930, in 1930-1950 and his epic poem *Savitri* which he worked for over a period of thirty-five years can be best considered as a unit in itself because of its dimensions. The poems that he wrote before 1908 are mostly derivative, belonging to his English period when he was hardly twenty years old and had little contact with India. *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895) which features poems, written between 1890-92 is of this period and contains no strong indication of the poet's mystical bent. Indeed, most of the poems written before 1895 have little relevance to his mysticism. The relevant poems which illustrate the first glimpses of Aurobindo's mysticism are those in the second section, written in 1908-1930 which are mainly short poems and sonnets. The poetry he wrote in Pondicherry after 1930, gives voice to an unusual inspiration in verse, of great elegance and power. This can best be seen in a short lyric like 'Trance' but is sustained to a remarkable degree throughout the twenty-four thousand lines of *Savitri*.

As a poet, he uses many personae; some of the most important passages concerning his view of the mystical experience are spoken through fictional characters; most of whom are mythological such as Trishuncou, Mandavy and to mention the most famous example, Aswapathy and Savitri. The mysticism of Aurobindo shows stages of development. For

Aurobindo, the mystical experience is an ongoing phenomenon, varying and changing rather than a final or all transforming experience as it is with the other mystics. The symbolism of the over-coming of death is central to Aurobindo's mysticism. For him, death is not an end but a new beginning of the timeless process of self-realization. Man attains ultimate salvation only after a long cycle of birth, death and re-birth. This concept is visible in his poems and many of them have related themes. Death is the ultimate symbol of all ignorance and limitation. Savitri's triumph over death is the climax of the epic and symbolic of the dawn of a new age of enlightenment.

A second feature of Aurobindo's mystical experience closely related to the denial of death is the experience of the unity of all life or the universal vision; everything in the universe including oneself is viewed as a Divine Unity. This idea is well illustrated in three poems namely 'Parabrahman,' 'God' and 'Epiphany,' which belong to the period 1908-1909. In all the three poems, the world is considered a manifestation of God, not divorced, but intimately connected with Him; indeed everything is contained and related to Him. Aurobindo declares that the difference between opposites like life and death, bliss and pain which seems to be central to human existence are simply a matter of attitudes. In a sense, all of Aurobindo's poetry points to *Savitri*. The chief elements of the mystical experience such as the denial of death, the experience of the universal consciousness, the loss of an individual identity, the paradoxical questioning after finding are all developed more fully in his great work.

Aurobindo is first and foremost, a poet besides being a thinker, philosopher, leading intellectual, seer, sage, yogi, patriotic revolutionary, an educator and interpreter of truth (Gokak, 1990). His poetry does not stand for 'art for art's sake'; it rather seeks to unfurl before us the future of man and the lives on which the evolution of consciousness is likely to proceed. His poems are mystic for their visions, thoughts, themes, symbols, images, figures of speech and style. His thought is profound. These technical devices are commendable, but the music that enchants or disturbs is not there. But Sethna (1974) rebuts these charges and remarks that Aurobindo wrote his poetry not for musicality, but for capturing his inspired vision.

Aurobindo himself has described mystic poetry as that which has perfectly concrete meaning, much more than intellectual poetry which is more abstract. The nature of the intellect is abstraction; spirituality and mysticism deal with the concrete, by their very nature. According to Aurobindo, the poet is the seer and revealer of Truth. He is the one who has got an insight into the things around and who can reveal the beauty and reality hidden from the sights of an ordinary man. He can enter where the sun's rays do not reach. He is interested in the legend of the soul; to him, poetry is the act of the soul. It is the mantra of the Real and its sole purpose is to provide salvation from pain, ignorance, darkness, evil, suffering and 'Maya.'

Aurobindo is regarded as the mystic of mystics. Even as a young child, he used to show signs of mutism and interpersonal withdrawal, which were early signs of spirituality. He

uses poetry as a medium to convey to humanity, his deep and profound experiences of spiritual life. The mystical plains are broadly classified by Aurobindo as occult, psychic and spiritual. His poems reveal a dissolution or disintegration of the ego or the limited self which is one of the cardinal features of mystic poetry (Sinha, 1979). There is a union with the Absolute, an immediate communion of the soul with the transcendent source of all beings in all his poems. Aurobindo's mystical poetry reaches its height in *Savitri*, where we find the mind energy with a vast sweep of thought. Here, his mystic poetry strikes deep. It can stir the innermost and subtlest recesses of the life, soul and the secret inner mind; at the same time, it can sometimes go beyond these into the pure most psyche.

Aurobindo was of the opinion that the ultimate goal of his mysticism was the regeneration and transformation of every human being, so that this earthly life of sorrow, pain and death may become the Life Divine. The way of self-realization in his poetry consists of a dual commitment namely effort and supplication. In order to achieve the goal of complete self-realization, a man must first struggle towards God and then God must lean down to man. This idea is developed to a great length in his great epic *Savitri*. It is his *magnum opus*. It is cosmic in character and can be placed among great epics of the world.

Savitri is based on the story of Savitri and Sathyavan as told in the great epic 'Mahabharata'. *Savitri* with its twenty-four thousand lines divided into twelve books spans earth and heaven in scope, comprises diverse occult worlds, and projects the drama of life, death and immortality on the cosmic stage. In Aurobindo's recounting, Savitri is an incarnation of the Divine Mother brought down to earth by the aspiration of the sage Aswapathi. Savitri marries Sathyavan, who, after a year of bliss, is taken away by the Lord of Death. Savitri, having foreknowledge of the coming tragedy seeks for and discovers her soul, with whose help she will face and overcome Death. Thus, Savitri puts an end to earth's estrangement from God. *Savitri* begins with a picture of darkness passing into the day. Here it is the last dawn in Sathyavan's life, a phenomenon, packed with significance of the immortal light which Savitri has to win for earth by challenging the decree of death so long accepted by man. The symbolic dawn is presented as follows:

It was the hour before the God's awake,
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence; merge. (Book I, Canto I, 1-5)

Aurobindo never loses sight of the Super-Nature. The natural objects have been merged in the realities of planes beyond the earth; a spiritual concreteness fuses with their

material concreteness and makes them affect our senses with forms full of an unearthly significance. It will be easy to appreciate this art of mystical fact by noting the following lines:

Into a far-off nook of heaven there came

A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal.

The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch

Persuaded the inert black quietude

And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God. (Book I, Canto I, 85-90)

Savitri has, in one form or another, a direct poetizing of the divine. But this does not prevent the expression of human interests in any way. In fact, the human element is unavoidable, as the figure from which the poem derives its name is the divine consciousness descended into flesh. Her work is among terrestrial creatures; it is among their joys and travails that she awakes on that fateful morning. Trees, animals and human beings hold her in their midst, an immortal imprisoned in mortality. Aurobindo can be seen at his best in the third part of *Savitri*, in the debate between Death and Savitri. There are wonderful descriptions of the various seasons in Book IV and Aurobindo's grand manner, asserts itself in Love and Death in Book V. In Book VII, Canto VII, the heroine journeys into the 'inner countries' in search of her true self, and this realization comes to her at last. The outburst of the Goddess of Pity in Book VII contains more indignation against social wrongs than many socialist poems. There are a number of lyrical passages in *Savitri*, which are steeped in great and deep emotion. The utterances of the Mother of Might and the Mother of Joy and Peace in the same Canto are also significant.

Aswapathy's penance and vision of the Divine Mother and the boon vouchsafed him by her, constitute the central situation regarding the fulfillment of the most cherished aspirations of the human race. Savitri asks the Lord of Death for His Peace, His Energy, His Joy but not for herself. She warns them for earth and for men, like Ganga coming to the parched earth from heaven, the 'mystic Rose', the power and the glory, the bliss and the love, the joy and the peace, should blossom here, on earth and men. According to K.D. Sethna (1974), it brings our living symbols from the mystical planes, a concrete contact with the Divine's presence. Even when realities that are not openly Divine are viewed, the style is of a direct knowledge, direct feeling, and direct rhythm from an inner or upper poise. It is great also because it presents a vision which is interpretative and inspiring.

Savitri has lines which ring like a mantra in our ears. As in the case of a mantra, the effect of these lines depends on incantation. The passage, describing the avatarhood of Savitri, keeps the mantra, ringing for dozens of lines. It is possibly the most mystical portrait in all literature. Aurobindo paints the picture of a woman who would lead

mankind from darkness to light and from ignorance of God to Knowledge of Him. Aurobindo's Savitri is the incarnation of the Godhead of Love. Savitri is not only a legend but also a symbol that incorporates mystic vision and superhuman consciousness. The depth of the work largely depends on this incorporation.

Aurobindo believed that integral philosophy that is based on the finest perceptions of East and West could be the philosophy of the modern world. 'Revelation' is a mystical lyric of great transparency written during his early days. As the title indicates, it is a poem of revelation or vision. In a state of spiritual intensity, the poet saw someone 'leaping from the rocks' and having 'wind-blown locks.' That someone belonged to the 'heavenly rout' and gave little time or thought to the poet to realize him fully. The following lines describe:

Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows,
Just a footstep like the wind
And a hurried glance behind,
And then nothing, ----- (5-9)

'Transformation' is a poem charged with spirituality and divine inspiration. The poem shows the poet's transfiguration from a physical level to a spiritual level of divinity and purity. The poet seems to be inspired and ecstatic in the complete identity with the Infinite. This can be seen in the opening line itself:

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;
It fills my members with a might divine:
I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine. (1-3)

The transformation has revealed to him the immortality of his spirit.

Aurobindo can be seen at his best in 'Thought the Paraclete.' It is a metaphysical poem revealing the ascent of consciousness to the Supreme Power through different spiritual planes. The meter of this poem has similarities to the Latin hendecasyllable. The Greek word 'paraclete,' meaning 'one called to help,' or 'intercessor,' is borrowed from Christian theology, where it is applied to the Holy Spirit. 'Rose of God' is a poem of ecstatic devotion and exultation that has the power to fascinate. It abounds in mystical symbols and ecstasies of the soul at the possibility of God's descent to earth. In this, a pure mystical cry of the soul can be seen:

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,

Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!

Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,

Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name. (1-4)

Like 'Transformation,' 'Trance of Waiting' is a poem of spiritual illumination. In this poem, he expresses his feeling as he was waiting for God's descent. The poem is highly spiritual and contains spiritual terms and phrases.

'The Tiger and the Deer' is a metaphysical lyric of great significance and can be classed with 'Rishi,' 'Who,' 'Parabrahman' among Aurobindo's early lyrics and with 'Thought the Paraclete,' 'Rose of God,' 'Ahana,' 'The Birth of Sin' and above all, the third part of *Savitri*, the debate between Death and Savitri. It expresses a general truth, a prophecy and is unique poetical expressions of the mystical experience. 'The Tiger and the Deer' may be read as a symbolic expression of the beastly power that is dominant in the current period, the representative of which the tiger is, crushing the innocent and the beautiful, which are well-represented by the deer. But the poet is hopeful that the present state will not last long, and that a bright day will bring an end to this undesirable situation.

In 'Urvashie' and 'Love and Death,' he speaks of love that defeats death. Aurobindo's other mystical poems include 'Hell and Heaven,' 'Muse Spiritus,' 'The Triumphsong of Trishuncou,' 'Kamadeva,' 'Death and IgnisFatuus,' 'The Human Enigma,' 'Life,' 'The Blue Bird' and poems about the Goddess Kali. 'The Tree' represents man's aspiration for salvation while his roots remain bound to the earth. Aurobindo's 'A Dream of Surreal Science' and his lyrics on Goethe are also fine works. Some of the poems which are first person accounts of experiences of the mystic path are 'Invitation,' 'Trance,' 'Ocean Oneness,' 'Descent,' 'Thought the Paraclete,' 'Transformation' and 'Nirvana.' 'Invitation' is a short poem written while Aurobindo was in the Alipore jail. 'Trance' is an experiment in the use of quantitative meters. 'Ocean Oneness' and 'Descent' are written in quantitative meters on the Greek model – alcaics and sapphics respectively. 'Hymns to the Mystic Fire' is a translation of Vedic hymns to Agni. In 'The Essence of Poetry,' a chapter from *The Future Poetry*, Aurobindo (1985) explains his idea that the greatest poetry, whatever its theme, approaches the power of the 'mantra' or word that reveals the Veiled Reality.

'BajiPrabhau' was written when Aurobindo was in the thick of the freedom struggle as a leader of the Nationalist party. The narrative is founded on the historical incident of the heroic self-sacrifice of BajiPrabhauDeshpande, who to cover Shivaji's retreat held the pass of Rangana for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moghuls. The poem is in a way, a reflection of Aurobindo's intense love for Mother India. It is full of deep spiritual favour, portraying the leaders as instruments of a divine power, Bhavani, the Goddess who presides over the destiny of India. It is a heroic poem written in blank verse.

Aurobindo's poetic creations are prophetic illustrations of the processes through which the Divinity shall manifest itself in an earthly form (Gokak, 1970). In them, we find a vision of the past, knowledge of the present and a peep into the future. A single dominant motive, namely, man's aspiration for the higher and a more divinely fulfilled here and now seem to run in all the works of Aurobindo.

4. The Philosophy and Teachings of Aurobindo

In Aurobindo, both the Indian and the Western have met. There is a real synthesis of these two thought patterns in him. Synthesizing the best of the thought of the East and the West, Aurobindo's poetic mind has given expression to a mystic poetry that contains a concept of the Human and the Divine that is intellectual in character. According to Aurobindo, poetry must break its narrow walls of individualism and acquire a dynamic and cosmic character. He believed that spirituality was the dominant note of Indian life. In Indian philosophy, the highest reality was always conceived as 'Atman' or the self which is itself a manifestation of the divine reality, 'Brahman.' The interpretation of the universe was from the standpoint of consciousness. Aurobindo looks at the whole universe from the perspective of the highest consciousness which he calls 'Satchidananda.' All reality is consciousness and Aurobindo emphasizes that, the higher the position of anything in this scale of reality, the deeper and more unified is the consciousness that is revealed in it. The 'Absolute' therefore is the highest consciousness. The individual, if he is to attain union with the 'Absolute,' must possess the broadest, deepest and most unified consciousness. Unconsciousness is characteristic of matter in its grossest form.

According to Aurobindo, 'Evolution' is the transformation of the mind from consciousness to Nescience or knowledge. In Aurobindo's view point, it rests with the Divine to choose the time and the occasion for the Divine Descent without which realization is impossible. This direct intervention by God and the resulting emergence of New Consciousness are held as absolutely essential for World-Evolution in the Bhagawat Gita. By Evolution, Aurobindo does not mean merely an addition of some new principles to those which already exist. It means that the old principles, by reason of the emergence of the new ones, change their character. Life, for instance, as it was before the emergence of Mind is very different from life as we know it today dominated as it is by Mind. Mind presupposes a power of knowledge free from its limitations. This power, Aurobindo called 'Supermind.' In man, 'Supermind' will appear as a ray of the eternal omniscience and omnipotence, even in its evolutionary beginnings.

In the process of the unfolding of an always greater force of the one Existence, some delegation of this power shall descend into our limited human nature, and then and then only man can exceed himself, divinely act and create. He will have become at last a conscious portion of the Eternal. Thus, the 'Superman' will be born, not a magnified mental being, but a supramental power descended here into a new life of the transformed terrestrial body. Aurobindo thought that a Gnostic Supermanhood is the next distinct and

triumphant victory to be won by the spirit descended into earthly nature. Thus, 'Supermind' is something beyond mental man and his limits, a greater consciousness than the highest consciousness proper to human nature.

Aurobindo's teachings sounds the same as the true essence of the beliefs of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separate consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all. Aurobindo's teachings states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter and that Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection.

Life is the first step of this release of consciousness, mind is the second, but the evolution does not finish with mind; it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be toward the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it becomes possible for life to manifest perfection. It is not by the mental will in man that this perfection can be attained, for the mind goes only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit.

Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance of its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle. This cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible.

Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake. It is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward

life by an inner light and force. In doing, so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements, but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descend of a higher principle of the Being, but even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force. There are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body. Only afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The process of this self-discipline and Sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection more possible.

According to Aurobindo, the idea of the supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature. There are many things belonging to older systems like the opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, and emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; and outward asceticism in not essential, but the conquest of desire and attachment and a control over the body and its needs, greed and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of the old systems, the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self-interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. The whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature. In this discipline, the inspiration of the Master, and in the difficult stages, his control and his presence are indispensable – for it would be impossible otherwise to go through it without much stumbling and error, which would prevent all chances of success.

The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being, and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching but by his influence and example, and by a power to communicate his own experience to others. Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice was not to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religion or to find any new religion, for any of these would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolves into a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness, which will transform and divinize human nature.

Conclusion

The chief elements of the mystical experience such as the denial of death, the experience of universal consciousness, the loss of an individual identity, the paradoxical questioning after finding etc, are developed more fully in Aurobindo's works, especially in his great epic *Savitri*. For him, these are the ways, goals and the incentives to spiritual life. Many concepts such as the dual movement of the ascent of man towards God and the belief in a Divine Life to come are all the more developed in *Savitri*. His other poems also have the quality of self-realization, 'Ascent,' 'Nirvana,' 'Epiphany,' 'Thought the Paraclete,' 'Rose of God' etc testify to a fully developed, moving and potent, poetic and mystical sensibility that is capable of lifting the reader to the highest states of consciousness. These poems help to unveil the continuing enigma of Sri Aurobindo's personality as Mystic poet, and an enigma which was responsible for creating the great epic, *Savitri*. In short, he was a great mystic and his goals and philosophy are visible in his poetic output. Like the Vedic rishis, like Yeats and Heidegger, Aurobindo believed that the rhythmic language of poetry could convey meanings that went much deeper than the intellectual significance of the words. In *The Future Poetry*, he showed that this heightened power of speech was not the prerogative of Sanskrit scriptures, but could be found to some degree in the poetry of any language with a developed literature. Aurobindo believed that the key to human unity was the spiritual conception of life, present in all civilizations but best preserved and developed in India. It was to help fulfill his dreams of a 'spiritual gift of India to the world' that he reinterpreted the Indian tradition in the light of modern knowledge. His own philosophy, articulated in his chief prose work, *The Life Divine* (1987) takes as its basis the omnipresent Reality or Brahman of the Upanishads, but includes also the European idea of progress through evolution. This idea which Aurobindo possessed marks him out from the rest of the mystics and also has a scientific way of explaining his philosophy. The word 'scientific' normally cannot be applied either to poetry or to mysticism. However, Aurobindo's thought follows a pattern that is intellectual and in harmony with the patterns of scientific thought. Thus, we can assert that Aurobindo is an intellectual mystic. This is the distinctive feature of Aurobindo's mysticism.

References

1. Aurobindo, S. (1985). *The Future Poetry*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
2. Aurobindo, S. (1987). *The Life Divine*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
3. Devasenapathi, V. A. (1978). 'Nayanmars.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part I*. New Delhi: Publications Division I & B Ministry, 17-25.
4. Durvedi, A.N. (1991). *Papers on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Amar Prakashan.
5. Futehally, S. (1994). *Songs of Meera: In the Dark of the Heart*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers.
6. Gokak, V.K. (1990). *Seer and Poet*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Company.
7. Gokak, V.K. (1970). *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.
8. Heehs, P. Ed. (1998). *The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
9. Heehs, P. (1989). *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
10. Iyengar, K.R.S. (1985). *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
11. Iyengar, K.R.S. (1985). *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
12. Nandakumar, Prema. (1978). 'Andal.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part I*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 46-55.
13. Purani, A.B. (1978). *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
14. Raghavan, A. S. (1978). 'Alwars.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part I*. New Delhi: Publications Division I & B Ministry. 26-45.
15. Raval, A. (1978). 'Mira.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part II*. New Delhi: Publications Division I & B Ministry. 17-25.
16. Sen, K.M. (1961). *Hinduism*. London: Penguin Books.
17. Sethna, K.D. (1974). *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
18. Sinha, A.K. (1979). *The Dramatic Art of Sri Aurobindo*. New Delhi: S.Chand and Company Limited.
19. Tiwari, R.P. (1978). 'Kabir.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part I*. New Delhi: Publications Division I & B Ministry. 87-95.
20. Verma, J.R. (1978). 'Surdas.' *Devotional Poets and Mystics. Part II*. New Delhi: Publications Division I & B Ministry. 1-7.