Chapter 4
The Glimmer

The realm of Sri Aurobindo’s inner flight gradually extends. His intense and ever-increasing spiritual aspiration to unveil the mysteries of life prompts him to proclaim firmly: "All thy [ of life] bliss I would explore, / All thy tyranny" ("Life" 13-14). The central motive of his later poetry is an exploration of the mystery of existence. Ultimately it results in the opening of the gate of the inmost chamber of the Self. The poems mostly written during the Baroda days and Calcutta days15 mark a decisive leap in this direction. A distinct shift in setting, subject, and expression catches the reader’s attention. These lyrics show the glimmer before vision becomes the poet’s characteristic power and the yogi suffuses the poet and the philosopher.

As mentioned earlier some mysterious experiences and revelations came to him unsought and stirred his agnostic mind. When he studied the Upanishads and the Gita deeply he discovered these experiences in their pages. But inadequacy of perception and lack of realisation aroused in him a deep discontentment. Thus started a serious and restless philosophical inquiry that resulted in a conviction and his wonder and doubt yielded to a

15 These refer to most of the poems bunched together with the titles "Short Poems 1895-1908" and "Short Poems 1902-1930" in volume 5 of Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.
mood of faith. He himself has amplified: "... I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe" (Aurobindo 26: 90). He was impressed by the glimmer of the new found wisdom and tried to grasp their essence. These ideas permeated his thought. The poems which come within the purview of our discussion in this chapter are mainly inspired by this philosophical wisdom and subsequent intellectual conviction and faith. Consequently these poems give us, writes Iyenger, "philosophical generalizations or images of vividly perceived facets of the truth" (Sri Aurobindo 145). The tone and expression of the poet change remarkably. He starts looking "beyond the thing visible to the thing essential" (Cousins 28).

This is a period of transition in the poetic career of Sri Aurobindo. The philosophical thoughts have deeply stirred the poet’s inner being. Though he expresses his deeply perceived ideas and convictions in intellectual language it seems to draw sustenance from a strong urge of the soul. Intellect acts under poetic inspiration. Lotika Ghose, however, sees the prominence of thought in these poems. She writes that thought "rather heavily overlays poetic expression though the poetic word is firmly held and reined in to express the thought of the poet" (Mandir Annual 1949:136). The statement is somehow self-redeeming. Thoughts always do not hamper felicity of expression. The inner man frequently peeps through the thoughts. But "a dry touch, a pursuit of the idea rather than the metaphysical reality
behind it" (Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo* 88) are perceptible here and there. Mostly the poet and the philosopher move hand in hand. At times the poet suffuses the philosopher. There are moments when the ideas take the force and conviction of realised experiences. This happens when these ideas have settled serenely somewhere in the depth of the poet's being. These moments compel one to feel that the philosophic is fused with the mystic. Thus for Sri Aurobindo, the poet, philosophy is not a handicap, rather a support.

As we find in these poems, the poet continues to grow steadily. He not only matures in art and expression but tends towards his natural region of inspiration and vision. These poems are marked by clarity and profundity in expression, more effective use of poetic words to make them adequately expressive and heightened spiritual argument. The poems also show variety in mood and theme. Intellectual interests or philosophical debates sustain some poems like "A Vision of Science" and "Parabrahman." In some poems like "A Vedantin's Prayer" and "Invitation" philosophic ideas are subdued and suffused by poetic inspiration and felicity. There are occasional flights into "pure sight and speech" and in such elevated moments he creates a "wholly delightful" (Cousins 29) piece expressing some vision-like truth as in "Revelation" or "God." Riddles of life, problems of belief are raised and ideal intellectual solutions are offered as, for example, is given in the poem "The Fear of Death": "Death is but changing of our robes to wait / In wedding garments at the Eternal's gate" (15-16).

Intellectual debate sustains the poem "A Vision of Science." Yet an urge to look beyond the surface of life is palpably felt: "know first this
thing, / Who thou art in this dungeon labouring" (60-61). This invitation to self-enquiry disturbs the proud and triumphant march of Science, one of the three angels the poet dreams about. Science is awakened to its own imperfections and limitations of which it was unaware in its pride of victory. This poem thus prophesies, writes Sri Aurobindo, "the awakening by science to the hollowness of its own early materialistic dogmatism, an awakening which is part presage of a new era of spiritual seeking and experience" (qtd. in Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 353). The following lines--"For all things opened, all seemed clear, seemed bright-- / Save the vast ranges that they left in night" (21-22)--sarcastically point out the ignorance and limitation of science even though the lines that follow elaborate its achievements. The self-asserting reply that science makes petrifies one as its self-conceit reveals its own serious handicaps and hollowness:

"Nothing am I but earth,
Tissue and nerve and from the seed a birth,
A mould, a plasm, a gas, a little that is much
In these grey cells that quiver to each touch
The secret lies of man; they are the thing called I.
Matter insists and matter makes reply.
Shakespeare was this; this force in Jesus yearned
And conquered by the cross; this only learned
The secret of the suns that blaze afar;
This was Napoleon's giant mind of war." (62-71)
Science can unveil, to some extent, the secrets of nature. To unveil the mystery of existence and to know the infinite housed in man is beyond it. The other angel, Religion, shies away from its searching gaze. But the third angel brings about a new awakening: "But the third Angel came and touched my eyes; / I saw the mornings of the future rise" (76-77). This awakening indicates the dawn of new possibilities. This conflict between intellect and wisdom is a perennial one. Intellect, in spite of its limitations and imperfections, poses to be all-knowing and wisdom penetrates the cover of illusion and untruth to reveal the ray of truth. The poet feels an intuitive urge to know that man is infinite. He even hears the voice of ancient wisdom and that voice decides the issue with a soothing apostrophising: "'For Thou, O Splendour, art myself concealed'" (85). Though the solution is intellectually soothing and satisfying it is not inwardly convincing. In some other poems the poet also attempts to offer intellectual solution to spiritual problems.

The theme of the immanence of the Infinite has a number of variations. In "Parabrahman" the poet attempts, through intellectual perception, to arrest the idea of the Almighty who is veiled in His creation: "a veil He chose/To half-conceal Him" (34-35). He controls and directs all the activities of Nature and the whole creative process: "A Force within decides. That Force is He" (10). The drama of becoming is His divine sport and the Creation, "the triune playground" (41), flows from His bliss: "And high Delight, a spirit infinite,/That is the fountain of this glorious world" (37-38). Thus the
splendour of the One in its aspects of existence-consciousness-bliss has been highlighted in the poem. In some passages the philosopher's wisdom and the poet's inspiration combine to portray the elusive and unimaginable Parabrahman:

"He is not anything, yet all is He;

He is not all but far exceeds that scope.

Both Time and Timelessness sink in that sea:

Time is a wave and Space a wandering drop. (29-32)

"To the Sea" dramatises a confrontation between the aspiring spirit of man and the perils of life that hinder him. The voice that hails the sea is a voice of deep self-awareness, the voice of the "unconquerable soul" (38) of man. It discerns intuitively a challenging invitation in the roar of the waves. In the beginning the physical sea is apostrophised, but soon it becomes a symbol. The term "wild" in the address "O grey wild sea" (1) sets the tone. The vastness and boundless watery expanse of the sea stands for outer infinity and its "monstrous" and "battering" billows remind the dangers an aspiring spirit "who set eternal godhead for its goal" (28) confronts. The invitation of the sea is challenging and at the same time inspiring. But without exhibiting any frenzied haste and with an unruffled calm the voice responds: "I sink below / The bottom of the clamorous world to know" (23-24). Life with its "adverse Fate" (38) becomes his school that leads to wisdom. He accepts the "giant snares" (32) of God that manifest in the form of pains and perils not to be mastered by them, but to be the "King over
pain" (36). He will rather transmute the perils into steps of ascent, i.e. "way to climb the heavens" (40). Ultimately the hidden infinite in him defies the outer challenges and the poem ends with a "note of heroic self-assertion" (Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo* 32). He seeks to unravel his own infinity and immensity:

I will seize thy mane,
O lion, I will tame thee and disdain;
Or else below
Into thy salt abysmal caverns go,
Receive thy weight
Upon me and be stubborn as my Fate.
I come, O Sea,
To measure my enormous self with thee. (41-48)

In serenity of expression, suggestive richness and symbolic significance Sri Aurobindo’s treatment of sea approaches that of Tennyson’s. While the later’s hope to see his "Pilot face to face" (15) sends one into deep contemplation, the former’s aspiration to measure his "enormous self with thee [the sea]" stirs one’s mind strongly. Though Sri Aurobindo’s poem is not free from the touch of the intellect the poetic expression carries the thought convincingly.

The opening lines of "Life and Death" sound like an intellectual statement informing us the fact that life and death are two opposite things.

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16 The poem referred to is Tennyson’s "Crossing the Bar."
A sudden turn is suggested with the proclamation "long-hidden pages / Are opened" (3-4). The term "liberating" suggests another exciting turn pressing us to feel as if some far-reaching secret has been revealed and we are conveyed the idea to overcome the seeming opposition between life and death. But the poem does not overcome its "severely intellectual cast" (Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo 151). The last couplet conveys the poet's contention: "Life only is, or death is life disguised,-- / Life a short death until by life we are surprised". Death is here the expression of the life-power in "one mode of its multifarious functioning." At the same time it brings us the awareness that the present form of life is not the true expression of this life-power. We have to be "surprised" by or awakened to "another mode of vitality." In the face of this awakening our present "lease of vitality may be regarded as a living death" (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 102).

"Evening" implies end of activities and the consequent hush and calmness. The expression "and a wide silent sea" (5) suggests the culmination of silence. This hour is likened to old age when human mind is supposed to be calm because the tumults and tempests of life have already been experienced. The poet wants to drive the idea home that "such hour is nearest God" (5).

The poet presents the predicament of the soul through a brilliantly conceived image in "A Tree." A tree growing upward inspires in him the thought of the aspiring soul of man. The aspiration of the tree ends in failure as that of the soul of man because like the tree it is also "earth-bound,
heaven-amorous" (4). The barriers apparently seem unsurpassable. The intended statement comes in a rather straight way in the ending couplet:

"This is the soul of man. Body and brain / Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain" (5-6). Attachment for earthly life forestalls the "heavenly flight," ie spiritual journey of the aspiring soul. The "sandy river-beach" (1) remains to be crossed.

The poems like "Invitation" and "The Vedantin’s Prayer" express in no uncertain terms the yearning of the poet. In "The Vedantin’s Prayer" a yearning desire to be in touch with the "Eternal gleam" (3) or the "lonely Truth" (19) and an acute awareness of imperfection or lack of fulfilment prompts the enquiry: "Ah, wherefore with this darkness am I veiled, / My sunlit part / By clouds assailed?" (5-7). It seems that the poet’s intense prayer will tear asunder the veil of ignorance and defeat the dictates of intellect and "fitful passions" (11) and lead him to the gleam where he will "hear the eternal voice and know / The eternal Will" (23-24). The poet yearns to proceed gradually to the hidden door of knowledge: "O hidden door / Of Knowledge, open! Strength, fulfil thyself! / Love, outpour!" (34-36). This onward journey is perhaps prompted by the eternal Will. The Vedantin here is not self-lost in the supreme Bliss thereby making prayer irrelevant. He rather prays and aspires in a mood of surrender to the eternal Will. Thus the poem gives some hint of the Aurobindonian yoga. "We may say this is the Vedantin," writes Sethna trying to make the idea clear, "of the manysided Upanishads and especially of the synthesising Gita, standing on
the verge of the spiritual vision and discipline inspired by the Aurobindonian Supermind’s integrality" (Sri Aurobindo 353).

Though composed during the poet’s solitary confinement in Alipore jail, "Invitation" breathes “freedom and spaciousness” (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 352). Of course, it is a well known fact that Sri Aurobindo turned the dark cell of the jail into a cave of ṛapasyā. As the poem indicates, in consciousness the poet was far above his surrounding and his mind had attained a transcendent solitude. The poem is an invitation to adventure in the spirit’s domain and to freedom. The poet’s challenging call echoes in one’s heart:

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?

The words like "wind", "weather" "brook" and "snow" are suggestive of obstacles in the path of spiritual ascent. The "hill" indicates the height of spiritual attainment. The poet rejects petty selfishness of civilisation and of darkened minds and surrenders himself completely to the protecting care of God. That is why he proclaims with firm faith: "Over me God is blue in the welkin" (7). Out of this surrender he gains will power and fortitude to face and overcome the rebellious wind and storm. Hollowness of "misadventure" or wordly adventures has prompted him to look within
and the result is an undisturbed solitude of a sovereign Kingdom far above the din of the world. With the attainment of this new awareness the poet sends out inspiring invitations though the interrogations impose some qualification: "Who would live largely? Who would live freely?" (11). Largeness implies self-expansion or arousing in oneself a sense of universal love. Freedom suggests rising above bondage and attachment. With deep conviction the poet or the ascending soul discloses: "I am the lord of tempest and mountain, / I am the Spirit of freedom and pride" (13-14). Simultaneously he spells out clearly and sternly the last requisites for becoming his fellow-traveller: "Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger / Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side" (15-16).

To explicate the last stanza of the poem V. Gurunadha Sarma writes:

When the descent has taken place in proportion to the ascent at a particular stage wherein the soul is ‘stark’ the spiritual aspirant overcomes duality and identifies himself with all that is existing temporarily and spiritually. Then only can he say that he is the Lord of the tempest (movable) and the mountain (immovable matter) in nature. He is the Parabrahman (Spirit of freedom) and also its antithesis in its gross form, ‘Pride’ which can be equated with ‘ego’ or ‘Ahamkara’.

The word ‘stark’ is used in the sense of freedom of the soul from egotism which still clings to it even after it has realised the personal God. . . .
In addition to the freedom of soul from egotism of every sort, the poet says that the spiritualist should be prepared to treat danger as his own kinsman. . . . (The Advent Feb. 1990: 40-41)

Philosophical ideas and intellectual convictions at times send the poet into an inner solitude. He returns to us with some profound tidings and expresses them in a delightful speech supported by an inspired imaginative force. A superb combination of sublimity with simplicity makes such poems still more delightful. They seem to be the communications from a different world beyond our sense-perception. Such are the poems like "God" and "Revelation" which hold before us "a self-sufficient mystical symbol or atmosphere" (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 30).

With a vivid imagination which borders on vision the poet seizes the essence of God in its Transcendent and Immanent aspects in the eight lines of "God". The whole poem touches the deeper self of the sensitive reader. God is the Supreme Master, all-powerful, omnipresent and infinite. Yet he yields to Love: "Master of all who work and rule and know, / Servant of Love!" (3-4). Expounding the lines Sri Aurobindo himself writes: "The idea is that Work and Knowledge and Power can only obey the Divine and give him service : Love alone can compel Him, because of course Love is self-giving and the Divine gives himself in return." Further God’s greatness shines through His unsurpassable humility which is manifest in His following
gesture: "... disdainest not the worm to be / Nor even the clod" (5-6). To explain those lines Sri Aurobindo writes: "He who is the greatest of the great--'Mahato Mahiyan'--does not disdain to dwell in the clod and the worm, and the vast impartiality shown in this humility is itself the very sign of the greatness of the Divine, that was the idea behind the verse" (qtd. in Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 352). But the expression "who disdainest not" does not project the Divine as a non-despiser. "The idea is that," again writes Sri Aurobindo, "being omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, supreme, the Divine does not seem to disdain to descend even into the lowest forms, the obscurest figures of Nature and animate them with the Divine Presence: that shows His Divinity" (qtd. ibid 353).

"Revelation" is a "direct imaginative symbolisation of a suprasensuous experience" (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 31). The whole vision leaps out like a flash of lightning--"Like a startled bright surmise" (3). The suddenness of the occurrence is not only startling, it also brings in an unexpected bliss. The authenticity of the experience is asserted in the expression "visible to mortal eyes" (4). But the assertion comes more convincingly with its accompanying wonder and bliss in the following lines in which the poet attempts to capture the elusive being with a unique simplicity and vividness and with some striking images:

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,—as a thought
Escapes the mind ere it is caught. (5-10)

Thus the poem seizes a vision that comes in a flash. Such pieces express a different reality and stir one to look deeper.

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?

("Who" 1-4)

The earnestness of feeling hidden in the question and the simplicity, sweetness and straightforwardness of expression awaken one to the glory of the master-painter and supreme creator. These lines constitute the opening verse of the poem "Who" which is cast in the question-answer form. The answer is delightfully startling, yet strongly convincing:

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 flowers He is woven,
In the luminous net of the stars He is caught. (5-8)

The supreme creator pervades the whole creation. Similar unflinching faith fills the whole poem. The noise of reasoning intellect is subdued and silenced as the lines of simple and melodious strain continue to flow affirming again the antisean answer. The whole poem is, as Manoj Das
comments, a "successful marriage of depth of realisation with simplicity of expression" (Sri Aurobindo 43).

The exploration continues further. Again the question rises:

But where is He then? by what name is He known?
Is He Brahma or Vishnu? a man or woman?
Bodied or bodiless? twin or alone? (14-16)

The questions raise issues, bring in dualities and contradictions. The revealing answers flow as if from the peak of a deeper conviction. The burden of philosophy melts away in the delightful ease of poetic utterance:

All music is only the sound of His laughter,
All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.

In the sweep of the worlds, in the surge of the ages,
Ineffable, mighty, majestic and pure,
Beyond the last pinnacle seized by the thinker
He is throned in His seats that for ever endure.

It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless,
And into the midnight His shadow is thrown;
When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,
He was seated within it immense and alone. (25-28, 33-36, 41-44)
As these lines show the poet looks beyond the manifest and the visible and discloses a reality based on his conviction. The universe turns into the very being of God. We find such revealing expression bringing out the poet’s inner perception about the mystery of existence in the poems of the Irish poet A.E. [George Russell]. For example we may quote from his poem "Oversoul":

And earth and air and wave and fire
In awe and breathless silence stood;
For One who passed into their choir
Linked them in mystic brotherhood. (5-8)

Or

These myriad eyes that look on me are mine;
Wandering beneath them I have found again
The ancient ample moment, the divine,
The God-root within men. (Star Teacher" 5-8)

Wordsworth, in a moment of elevated awareness, feels "a presence in the creation:

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. ("Tintern Abbey" 97-102)
For further elucidation of these ideas and issues, though in a different manner, and for a closer comprehension of the working of the poet’s mind we have to move to "The Rishi," the longest of his shorter poems. It stands not on the strength of its length; but on the seriousness and weight of its content. The poem, a colloquy, carries the dialogue, as the prefatory remark informs, between King Manu, who seeks knowledge and the Rishi of the Pole, the enlightened one. All this took place in the "former ages of the world, when the Arctic continent still subsisted." The ancientness of the incident adds authenticity to the process of seeking that opens the door to the hall of mystery and knowledge. The prefatory remark further reveals that the Rishi "after long baffling him [King Manu] with conflicting side-lights of the knowledge, reveals to him what it chiefly concerns man to know" (Aurobindo 5: 297). But poetry here is not always burdened by the wise and weighty discourse on essential knowledge. "The Rishi" at times shows how poetry suffuses philosophy and carries on its wing the burden of thought changing it into a delightful poetic expression.

The "scriptural magnificence" (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo 34) of the poem and the Upanishadic cast of the colloquy and the characters are immediately discernible. The beginning of the poem with Manu’s calm invocation and the serene closing grip the reader’s mind. The middle portion with frequent questions and the Rishi’s brief and baffling answers seem somehow jerky, yet not less absorbing. Manu’s search is not dramatic and dynamic enough to make him the symbol or representative of the seeking human spirit. It is
a personal search, but the sincerity and the goal of his seeking is inspiring. He braves the bitter chill and frozen snows, and the dangerous and unfrequented heights to meet the "trance-held" Rishi. He seeks "the still and perfect One, --/ The Sun, not rays" (487-88). Even in the beginning he is aware of his limitations: "But ours are blindly active and thy light / We have forgone" (19-20). The pride of an emperor and warrior is silently shed. His eager questions externalise his inner quest. Thus he presents a veritable picture of a Upanishadic seeker like Sukesha, Satyakama, and Gargya. The Rishi of the Pole with his "immense outlook / On life and death" (15-16) and his "silent mind and bright" (17) appears to be an Upanishadic Rishi established "in the spirit's hold / Of unalloyed / Immortal bliss" (3-5). His answers flow as if from the womb of wisdom.

The poem opens with Manu's invocation:

Rishi who trance-held on the mountains old
Art slumbering, void
Of sense or motion, for in the spirit's hold
Of unalloyed
Immortal bliss thou dreamst protected! Deep
Let my voice glide
Into thy dumb retreat and break that sleep
Abysmal. Hear! (1-8)

These lines not only focus on the spiritual glory of the Rishi, but also Manu's aspiration for knowledge. The word "Hear" packs in it the seeker's
accumulated zeal and restlessness. The Rishi announces like a divine surveyor "I know thee" (27) and again "I know / Thy purpose" (46-47). The Rishi goes on describing his own early quest and dilemma:

I too, O King,

In winds and tides
Have sought Him, and in armies thundering,
And where Death strides
Over whole nations. (57-61)

God still remained an imagination for him. Fleeting glimpses occurred, but mind failed to retain the blissful vision: "Often I found Him for a moment, stood / Astonished, then / It fell from me" (67-69). Life lost its colour for him. Inner torture increased. Restlessness gripped him. Ultimately he came to those forlorn and silent summits where "pride could not follow, nor the restless will / Come and go" (85-86). Amazing result followed: "My mind within grew holy, calm and still" (87).

Manu's quest becomes more intense. He queries with wonder and with a subtle feeling of shock if the cold, immovable hill has "a mightier presence, deeper mysteries / Than human men ?" (93-94). The same idea, perhaps intending to assert the purposefulness of life, recurs to his mind with greater intensity: "Alas ! is life then vain?" (255). The Rishi harps on the bliss of silence: "The One is silence; on the snows we hear / Silence tread" (107-108). Manu is still in haze. He seeks to know the achievements and attainments of the Rishi in more concrete terms. The Rishi details his further
spiritual journey in quest of God. A moment approached in his life when he dispelled the fear of death. This resulted in the sudden release of his hidden potentialities and his "winged soul went up above the stars / Questing for God" (115-116). Then followed Rishi's meeting with the celestial beings. He came to know the mystery of creation: "I perceived the Law, / The Truth, the Vast, / From which we came and which we are" (179-81). But all these disclosures fail to still Manu's restlessness. The queries and answers follow--reassuring, puzzling, hazy and revealing in turns:

i) He dwells within us all who dwells not in
   Aught that is. (219-20)

ii) Dare on thyself to look, thyself art He-(227)

iii) Through glorious things and base the wheel of God
   For ever runs. (279-80)

iv) Yes, He creates the worlds and heven above
   With a single word;
   And these things being Himself are real, yet
   Are they like dreams,
   For He awakes to self He could forget
   In what He seems. (315-320)

This long and apparently tortuous dialogue is definitely redeemed by Manu's unremitting quest and the Rishi's calm and untiring effort to quench the seeker's thirst for knowledge. Crossing the curves of conflicts and contradictions the Rishi slowly and unceasingly leads Manu to the pinnacle
of Truth, ie the main concern of man when his quest is the deepest. The enlightened one ultimately utters his final words:

Shrink not from life, O Aryan, but with mirth
And joy receive
His good and evil, sin and virtue, till
He bids thee leave.
But while thou livest, perfectly fulfil
Thy part, conceive
Earth as thy stage, thyself the actor strong,
The drama His.
Work; but the fruits to God alone belong,
Who only is.
Work, love and know,—so shall thy spirit win
Immortal bliss.
Love men, Love God. (465-477)

The pronouncement of the Rishi sounds inspiring and convincing. Yet it is spoken "a trifle sententiously." Consequently, one feels that it stands on intellectual conviction. This may be "the 'truth' but it is hardly poetic truth" (The poetry of Sri Aurobindo 70), remarks Ghose probing into the statement of the Rishi. Manu seeks further assurance and a definite guidance. Rishi's reply is quite inspiring. Thus comes the Rishi's final utterance:

Seek Him upon the earth. For thee He set
In the huge press
Of many worlds to build a mighty state
    For man’s success,
Who seeks his goal. Perfect thy human might,
    Perfect the race.
For thou art He, O King. Only the night
    Is on thy soul
By thy own will. Remove it and recover
    The serene whole
Thou art indeed, then raise up man the lover
    To God the goal. (489-500)

The life-accepting, affirmative strain in the Rishi’s last-ly uttered lines is, indeed, unusual. The final spiritual injunction for self-exploration indicates the summit of attainment that the seeking human spirit can probably aspire after. This glory is to be attained in spite of man’s present imperfections. Life is to be transformed. The Rishi insists on manifesting divine glory in life and raising life to divinity, "to God the goal." The conclusion at least is Aurobindonian though echoes from the Upanishads and the Gita pervade the poem.

Throughout the poem the Rishi’s statements gain prominence. Mostly his words are the words of "idealised wisdom." Sethna harps on the unparalleled poetic beauty, at least in the first hundred and nineteen lines, of the poem. Ghose thinks that the poem’s importance is "more as a document than as a poem" (Sri Aurobindo: Poet 25). But the poem shows a shift
between poetic excellence and philosophic statements. At times we find poetic utterances which show how philosophy mingles with poetic felicity. Even as a poetic document the significance of "The Rishi" cannot be dwarfed. It brings to one's mind the picture of the initial restless spiritual quest of the poet. Besides, the painstaking travel of the Rishi in the world gives a faint impression of Aswpathy's extensive travels through the world-stairs.

If "Invitation" sends an inspiring invitation for spiritual adventure and "The Rishi" discloses mysterious realities and exhorts man to rise to the spirit's summits, "Life" promises an adventure that dwarfs the exploits of a Pururavus or a Ruru: "All thy bliss I would explore, / And all thy tyranny" (13-14). It also makes an inspired proclamation with a conviction supported by a deep soul-feeling:

Even in rags I am a god;
Fallen, I am divine;
High I triumph when down-trod,
Long I live when slain. (25-28)

Life is viewed by the poet as a "Mystic Miracle" (1) which is created out of "Delight" (1). Its essential nature is delight. He intends life to undertake a challenging spiritual adventure: "Let the radius of thy flight / Be eternity" (3-4). Life is full of contradictory features: "Glory and disdain, / Godhead and mortality, / Ecstasy and pain" (6-8). Yet it possesses an indomitable spirit to explore and to conquer "like a Titan" (17) and an inner
ability to enjoy "like a God" (18). Paradoxes of life cannot puzzle and cramp him. The final proclamation unveils the spiritual glory of man.

The poems like "The Rakshasas," "Kama" and "The Mahatmas" are poetic expressions of different age-old ideas of psychological import mixed with the poet’s fresh look and imagination. As the poet discovers more of Indian spiritual wisdom in the process of self-exploration, these ideas impress him deeply. He shapes them into speculative poetic utterances and presents them in a fresh context.

Kuthumi, the mighty yogin of Dwaipayana's school, is presented dramatically in "The Mahatmas." He reaches the peak of human knowledge by leading the life of a Yogin for a hundred lives. Yet in the wise eyes of Vyasa he is not pure enough to have freedom from the bondage of life and to attain "'the eightfold powers'" (27). Unhesitatingly Vyasa declares: "'Thou art not pure'" (45). On Vyasa's advice Kuthumi undertakes a stupendous spiritual adventure. He performs Hathayoga as was practised by Ravan, Dhruv, Hiranyakashipu and the Lemurian Kings. He sits in meditation on the snowy peak of Himaloy so that knowledge begins to dawn on him. He also performs Rajayoga as done by Bali and the old Atlantic kings which is the means of "perfect knowledge, purity and force" (55). Then only Vyasa benignly assigns him the epoch-making work:

"Now seek the world's Great soul,

Sri Krishna, where he lives on earth concealed,

Give up to him all that thou know'st and hast;
For thou art he, elect from mortal men
To guard the knowledge, yet an easy task
While the third age preserves man's godlike form.
But when thou seest the iron Kali come
And he from Dwarca leaves the Earth, know then.
The time of trial, help endangered men,
Preserve the knowledge that preserves the world,
Until Sri Krishna utterly returns." (59-69)

With the help of knowledge attained through tapas he plunges into the search of Sri Krishna. Ultimately he is led by a star to the verge of a mountain where in a bare hut lives a hermit:

A hermit mad
Of the wild Abhirs, who sat dumbed or laughed
And ran and leaped and danced upon the hills
But told the reason of his joy to none,
In him I saw the Lord, behind the man
Perceived the spirit that contains the world.
I fell before him, but he leapt and ran
And smote me with his foot and out of me
All knowledge, all desire, all strength was gone
Into its source. I sat an infant child.
He laughed aloud and said, "Take back thy gifts,
O beggar!" and went leaping down the slope.
Then full of light and strength and bliss I soared  
Beyond the spheres, above the mighty Gods  
And left my human body on the snows. (81-95)

This passage reveals the core of Mahatmahood. As the hermit strikes Kuthumi, all the latter's knowledge and strength go into their source. This is no less an experience than that of complete merger with the source. Consequently as he sits "an infant child" his separative ego is totally washed away and he becomes pure. When he re-emerges radiant with the hermit giving the gifts back, his egoless, purified human consciousness is "full of light and strength and bliss" and he becomes the instrument of the Divine. He "soared beyond the spheres" only to return, after being transmuted into a divine instrument, to work among men, the vessels of the Spirit. Thus we get a distinct hint of transformation, ie human consciousness becoming egoless and pure and filled by "light and strength and bliss." The poet himself has hinted in the prefatory note: "This poem is purely a play of the imaginative, a poetic reconstruction of the central idea only of Mahatmahood" (Aurobindo 5: 83). Yet the central idea of Mahatmahood as expressed in the poem seems to be a revelation and one feels that Sri Aurobindo's intellectual conviction thickens into faith. The poem ends with a lofty ambition:

The Yoga shall be given back to men,  
The sects shall cease, the grim debates die out  
And atheism perish from the Earth,
Blasted with knowledge; love and brotherhood
And wisdom repossess Sri Krishna's world. (104-108)

Kama, in the poem "Kama," stands for Desire the creator as indicated in the prefatory note. It is a power flowing from the "Bliss of the Divine Reality." (Prefatory Note, Aurobindo 5: 80). Its creative zeal finds equally felicitous expression in the poem:

Out of my heart

Suns shall flame up into the pitiless void
And the stars wheel in magic dances round
Weaving the web of mortal life. For I
Am love, am passion. I create the world.
I am the only Brahma. My desire
Takes many forms; I change and wheel and race
And with me runs creation. (9-16)

Kama sustains the things as well--"I preserve, / For I am love" (16-17). At the same time he causes a veil of Ignorance that separates us from the ultimate and undifferentiated Divine. Kama's blessings are thrilling enough. But his beauty and bliss are to be abandoned and transcended, not to be clasped. By giving up Desire one transcends Ignorance and consequently one will possess the bliss of the Divine. After presenting an enthusiastic account of his exploits, Kama offers at the end of the poem an unpretentious and open statement: "'They who abandon Me, shall to all time/ Clasp and possess; they who pursue, shall lose'" (40-41).
"The Rakshasas" portrays God as visualized by Ravan. To him God is Rudra, the Rakshasa Almighty:

O Rudra! O eternal Mahadev!
Thou too art fierce and mighty, wrathful, bold,
Snuffing Thy winds for blood of sacrifice
And angrily Thou rul'st a prostrate world.
O Rakshasa Almighty, look on me,
Ravan, the lord of all Thy Rakshasas,
Give me Thy high command to smite Thy foes;
But most I would afflict, chase and destroy
Thy devotees who traduce Thee, making Thee
A God of Love, a God too sweet to rule. (22-31)

Ravan sees God in his own image. Ravan, the Rakshasa, represents "the violent Kinetic Ego" (Prefatory Note, Aurobindo 5: 77) which replaces the animal Soul. The poet has already made it clear in the prefatory remark that each type and level of consciousness sees the Divine in its own image. It is, no doubt, a biased and imperfect image.

Engrossed in his wish-fulfilling sacrifice Ravan sends prayer to heaven. His prayer expresses a Rakshasa’s pride and crude craving, ie desire for power, strength, enjoyments:

"Glory and greatness and the joy of life,
Strength, pride, victorious force, whatever man
Desires, whatever the wild beast enjoys,
Bodies of women and the lives of men--

I claim to be my kingdom." (1-5)

He proudly proclaims his conviction: "'Thou and I are one'" (33). Sri Krishna lucidly points out his failing: "He sees himself as Me, not Me in him" (64). The seers and sages grow apprehensive when Sri Krishna asks them if Ravan will be granted his prayers. He decides in favour of granting the boons as it will advance the process of evolution. But Ravan is denied eternal possession of the boons. His limitation is clearly spelt out: "He cannot last" (66). Kali, the Rakshasi—the World-Mother—appears to pronounce the desired boon. She also indicates in no uncertain terms her replacement by the Asuri, another form of the World-Mother, along with the birth of the Asuras representing another level of consciousness, i.e. "controlled and intellectualised but unregenerated Ego." To make the ideas clear the poet explains that "each such type and level of consciousness sees the Divine in its own image and its level in Nature is sustained by a differing form of the World-Mother" (Prefatory Note, Aurobindo 5 : 77). Thus the poem hints at the gradual evolution of man as well as the rise of differing forms of the World-Mother. The prefatory remarks throw ample light on the cardinal ideas of the poem. But the ideas contained in the poem do not seem to find adequate poetic expression. Thoughts seem to hinder poetic felicity.

The three above mentioned poems create an impression that the poet is nearing the theme of his search. One may sense a breath of inadequacy in
these poems. To Ghose these poems are mere "exercises." But the exercises, though inconclusive, are not futile. They rather serve as steps to poetic glory. Many great poets had to wait till the ripe moment for the efflux of their highest poetry. Wordsworth had to wait for the growth of "that serene and blessed mood" ("Tintern Abbey" 41) in which he could "see into the life of things" (49). Walt Whitman had to pass through his early experimental poems and through strange and varied experiences of life to develop a "new spirit" in him so that "the man and his poetry became one" (Untermeyer, ed. 36). Sri Aurobindo also continued to grow towards perfection.

In relation to the poet’s progressive spiritual journey the shift in Baji Prabhou is significant. In this poem we are taken to a different world. The locale here is no more the huge Himalayan peaks "o’verwhelmed / Under the vast illimitable snows" (Urvasie 2. 191-92) or "woodlands of the bright and early world" (Love and Death 1) with something idealistic and romantic hanging around them. The locale is Deccan plateau oppressed with the "tyrant glare" (Baji Prabhou. 1) of the burning noon that suddenly awakens us to the harsh reality of life. In this backdrop the poet leaves men like Shivaji, Baji, and Malsure to act. They blaze with patriotism and are ready for any sacrifice. They transform themselves into the instruments of the divine. In them burns, as Baji’s words convey, the flame of self-identity. Besides, from the pages of mythology Sri Aurobindo turns to the pages of living history to pick worthy heroic characters and to show ordinary man’s
extra-ordinary exploits. Of course history has been transmuted and spiritualised in the light of the poet’s convictions and faith.

After fighting a disastrous battle Shivaji is retreating to Raigurh in anguish and dismay with his slender surviving army. They are "panting and sore oppressed and racked with thirst" (24) with the mighty enemy at their heels. On the way, Shivaji's searching eyes discover a tiger-throated gorge in the mountains: "Narrow and fell and gleaming like the throat / Of some huge tiger, with its rocky fangs / Agrin for food" (78-80). It is strategically important and offers a promise to save his army from rout and thereby to save his nation's destiny. At this point the victorious advance of the hostile army can be checked till Shivaji returns from Raigurh with extra force and weapons to face it. At this moment of crisis only a few lion-hearted men can rise to the occasion and delay the advance of a formidable hostile army comprising "all Rajasthan and Agra and Cabool" (105). Shivaji's insight does not fail to discover in Baji the iron heart to lead the dedicated and selected few to perform superhuman feats of daring. Hence Shivaji appeals Baji, ignoring Malsure's anger and annoyance, to save his nation's destiny. He is convinced of Baji's determination and heroism. In the battle field Baji is "like a wild wave / Of onset or a cliff against the surge" (46-47). Baji bears the great responsibility with an eloquent and spontaneous reply to Malsure. His reply is obviously meant to pacify the irritated Malsure. But in reality it opens the key to the secret that inspires and sustains Shivaji's numerically inferior soldiers:
"Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
Is a man’s manhood seated. God within
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
And covers One alone. We but employ
Bhavani’s strength, who in an arm of flesh
Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm." (107-16)

These confidently uttered lines carry a deep conviction. A close observation will not fail to catch Krishna’s voice, as articulated in the Gita in these lines. Lord Krishna had exhorted Arjuna to take part in the battle with a total surrender to and as a mere instrument of the Lord. Shivai’s heroic band of selected few are not only instruments of Bhavani, but are also possessed by Bhavani. Thus with their power of surrender the mighty Mahratta warriors enter into a holy alliance with the divine’s protective grace. In addition, Gods omnipresence and sense of transcendental impartiality is distinctly proclaimed here. The robe image also unpretentiously carries the echo of the Gita. Baji’s conviction that the body is a container where the One is throned is a significant pointer.

In Baji’s scintillating words one can discern the subtle presence of the poet’s own convictions. It is because when Baji Prabhou was written the
poet was gradually realising that his life was a "field of the Divine" and "man is only an instrument of the Divine " (Purani, The Life 126). Besides, his conviction about the spiritual identity of his mother-country was clear and firm. To him his mother-country, ie India is a mighty Shakti, Bhawani Bharati. He himself writes:

What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is mighty Shakti.

... The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of Tamas we have but to wake the Brahma within." (qtd. in Purani, The Life 71)\(^1\)

Baji has awakened the Brahma within. He is aware of the "One" who is residing in his "living net / Of flesh and nerve" (107-08) and also of the fact that he is Bhavani's instrument. He is aware that his "five feet or more of bone and flesh" (123) is separate from his inner Self. His leader Shivaji is also deeply aware that his fight for the nation is but a work entrusted to him by the Divine. His parting words to Baji vibrate with his conviction and awareness: "'We part, O friend, but meet again we must, / When from our

\(^1\) This is an extract from the famous revolutionary booklet Bhawani Mandir written by Sri Aurobindo around the time when Bengal was partitioned, ie July 1905.
tasks released we both shall run / Like Children to our Mother’s clasp’” (128-30).

Throughout the brief but grim and breathless battle Baji and his men have never been oblivious of Bhavani’s will. They are ready even to give their lives as sacrifices for the freedom of their country: "‘But let us die with the high-voiced assent / Of Heaven to our country’s claim enforced / To freedom’” (189-91). In Sri Aurobindo’s view, to work for India’s freedom is to work for the Divine because it is India "who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul" (qtd in Purani, The Life 72 from Bhawani Mandir). To accomplish this divinely ordained task India should be free. With greater emphasis and a deeper conviction he proclaims in his Uttarpara speech: "India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great" (Aurobindo 2: 4). Awakened souls like Baji ready to make extreme sacrifice can lead a nation to freedom and greatness. Baji’s vision is clear. He is free from any kind of hesitation that induces a great hero like Arjun to lay down arms. His determination to give his life as a sacrifice for the country is unflinching. His conviction is firm, unshakeable. His spiritual awakening inspires him to act as an instrument of the Divine.

As in the Western epic, Sri Aurobindo takes us straight into the middle of the things. From the beginning till the end his energetic blank-
verse lines run ahead like the march of the warriors narrating events with unremitting particularity and without allowing the reader a small respite. With precision and compactness the poet recreates the battle scenes before us bit by bit that seem to be an eyewitness account. To cite an example, the following passage describes the forward movement of the victorious Mogul army and the ruthless attack on them by only a handful of Mahratta warriors hidden behind the trees and rocks:

For like the crest of an arriving wave
The Moslem van appeared, though slow and tired,
Yet resolute to break such barrier faint,
And forced themselves to run:—nor long availed;
For with a single cry the muskets spoke,
Once and again and always, as they reared,
And, like a wave arrested, for a while
The assailants paused and like a wave collapsed
Spent backward in a cloud of broken spray,
Retreating. Yielding up, the dangerous gorge
Saw only on the gnarled and stumbling rise
The dead and wounded heaped. But from the rear
The main tremendous onset of the North
Came in a dark and undulating surge
Regardless of the check,—a mingled mass,
Pathan and Mogul and the Rajput clans,
All clamorous with the brazen throats of war
And spitting smoke and fire. (141-58)

The opening lines of Baji Prabhau make us feel the "tyrant glare" of the Deccan noon, the oppressed earth, the bronze and brilliant sky so vividly that we seek an escape "from that wide trance of heat" (7). But we are caught by the power of the portrayal. One after another the horror ("on his limbs / The swords drank blood, a single redness grew / His body, yet he fought" [431-33]) of the battle, barking of the cruel guns, occasional ominous silence, grim and breathless grapple, horrid dance of death (blast on blast / The volleyed death invisible hailed in / Upon uncertain ranks" [169-71]), and ever-mounting suspense are unfolded before us without showing any sign of tediousness and monotony. The martial mood is prevalent throughout the poem. The poet’s diction carries to our ear the shrill cry of the muskets, the clank of swords, the clatter of horse-hooves, the cry of thrill and anguish by the battle-locked fighters and the groan of the wounded. Emotions and actions mingle and roll along the lines with "a sheer energy of movement appropriate to the life and death struggle" (Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo 110). Few Maharatta warriors wielding Bhavani’s swords are poised against the formidable Mogul army—"a mingled mass, / Pathan and Mogul and the Rajput clans, / All clamorous with the brazen throats of war" (155-58). Their total dedication to the high cause of mother
country's freedom, complete surrender to the protective power of Bhavani and their soul power mixed with the heightened awareness of their leader Baji make them equally formidable. Though few in number, in soul power they grow lofty. It becomes a battle of "force with soul" (384). But the poet does not project Baji as an extraordinary hero by diminution of his enemies. The heroism and bravery of the antagonists have been properly recognised. Rajputs have been described as "playmate of death" (219) and "clambering lions" (245), the Pathan infantry as "Tall and large-limbed, a formidable array" (181), the city-dwelling troops form Agra as "Agra's chivalry glancing with gold / And scimitars inlaid" (357-58). These epithets and phrases of admiration disclose the essential characteristics of the concerned groups. With similar insight and aptness the poet seizes the distinguishing features in the personality of the Mahratta heroes and warriors. Shivaji is the "Panther of the hills" (17), Tanaji Malsure "a living sword" (94), Baji, calm and firm, "a wild wave / Of onset or a cliff against the surge" (46-47). The Mogul army was determined to put the Mahrattas to rout. But only fifty chosen Mahratta warriors led by Baji could contain the vast Mogul onslaught till Shivaji's return from Raigurh. This was possible because, besides their strategically advantageous position, they were on the crest of soul-power and were firm in their faith that they wielded Bhavani's sword and were thus the instruments of the Divine. This faith resounds in Baji's exhortation to his fellow fighters:

"Make iron of your souls.
Yet if Bhavani wills, strength and the sword
Can stay our nation’s future from o’erthrow
Till victory with Shivaji return.” (332-35)

Thus the central theme of Baji’s self-sacrifice at the Rangana pass is spiritualised. Sri Aurobindo picks this fact of great exploit, a very thrilling episode of the seventeenth century Mahratta history, ie, "the historical incident of the heroic self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhou Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji’s retreat, held the pass of Rangana for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls" (Author’s Note, Aurobindo 5: 279). His poetic imagination and vision turn it into a legend. Baji Prabhou grows into a "national epic of the Mahratta race" (Lotika, Mandir Annual 19: 137). The poem conveys a subtle suggestion that Bhavani, the Mother of the Universe, in her aspect of Bhavani Bharati, the Mother of India, controls and directs the whole situation. Baji, who is possessed by her and who proves himself her fit instrument, recognises "the goddess formidable / Who watches over India till the end" (416-17).

The poet captures some tense and significant moments and horrid facets of battle and depicts them vividly. We receive the shock caused by death’s destructive dance and feel as if death stands visible playing his murderous game as we read the following lines:

blast on blast

The volleyed death invisible hailed in
Upon uncertain ranks. The leaders fell,

The forward by the bullets chosen out,
Prone or supine or leaning like sick men
O'er trees and rocks, distressed the whole advance
With prohition by the silent slain. (169-175)

or

On came the Pathans running rapidly,
But as the nearmost left the rocky curve
Where lurked the ambush, loud from stone and tree
The silence spoke; sideways, in front, behind
Death clamoured, and tall figures strewed the ground
Like trees in a cyclone. (301-306)

To see Baji gradually over-powered by death and surrounded by the dead and yet going on fighting is an unusual and complex experience at once gruesome and thrilling, perplexing and revealing:

By his side fell fast
Mahratta and Mogul and on his limbs
The swords drank blood, a single redness grew
His body, yet he fought. Then at his side
Ghastly with wounds and in his fiery eyes
Death and rejoicing a dire figure stood,
Moro Deshpande. "Baji, I have seen
The Raigurth lances; Baji, I have heard
The trumpets." Conquering with his cry the din
He spoke, then dead upon a Mogul corpse
Fell prone. And Baji with a gruesome hand
Wiping the blood from his fierce staring eyes
Saw round him only fifteen men erect
Of all his fifty. But in front, behind,
On either side the Mogul held the gorge.
Groaning, once more the grim Mahratta turned
And like a bull with lowered horns that runs,
Charged the exultant foe behind. (430-47)

The entire battle excluding the final moment of close fight is an account of repeated Mogul assault on the "stubborn mountaineers" (291) and their repeated collapse. As immense loss of life infuriates the surviving Moguls, the Mahrattas discover to their dismay that their store of shot and powder is exhausted by unsparing use. In this situation their sole weapon is Bhavani's will and their strength and the sword. Hidden in their secret position and grasping the hilts they are waiting for Mogul assault. The entire area is submerged in profound silence. The Moguls are perplexed by this ominous silence as they grow apprehensive of the probable death hidden in the womb of silence. Thus this is a moment of inaction as well as one of growing suspense and excitement. The poet captures this moment of unusual silence splendidly:

And so they waited without word or sound,
And over them the silent afternoon
Waited; the hush terrestrial was profound.
Except the mountains and the fallen men
No sight, no voice, no movement was abroad,
Only a few black-winged slow-circling birds
That wandered in the sky, only the wind
That now arose and almost noiselessly
Questioned the silence of the wooded sides,
Only the occasional groan that marked the pang
By some departing spirit on its frame
Inflicted. And from time to time the gaze
Of Baji sought the ever-sinking sun.
Men fixed their eyes on him and in his firm
Expression lived. (336-50)

Sri Aurobindo’s penetrating mind and intuitive assessment do not miss
the symbolic potentiality in Baji’s personality. Simultaneously, the touch of
his inspired imagination adds a symbolic significance to this brief but
glorious episode. Baji’s enlightened awareness that God is throned in his
frame and in that of all and his total surrender to the Divine make him a
living spiritual symbol. Thereafter throughout the frightful battle he has
never lost his spiritual identity. Rather he has transmuted the whole action
into a Divine action by his total surrender to the Divine will or Bhavani’s
will. He, as an instrument of the Divine, wields only Bhavani’s sword. As
a flame lights many lamps, he has enkindled the same awareness in his
associates. Baji has attained a complete identity with the goddess and she has
chosen him as her seat and instrument. Only after the Divine's will is done, the goddess deserts his corporal frame:

Then wrath
Rose in the Prabhou and he raised himself
In soul to make an end; but even then
A stillness fell upon his mood and all
That godlike impulse faded from his heart,
And passing out of him a mighty form
Stood visible. (404-410)

By virtue of his selfless and heroic fight for his mother land he shines as a symbol of patriotism, or rather by virtue of his sacrifice for the cause of freedom he stands as a symbol of man's aspiration for freedom. G.S. Pakle appropriately observes that Sri Aurobindo "lifts the human hero in Baji to the divine being of a myth to set an illustrious example before the political activists seeking India's freedom" (Mother India, May 1986: 299). Sri Aurobindo's choice of this theme and projection of Bhavani as Bharat Shakti distinctly brings out his intense nationalism. But in his view, nationalism is not divorced from the aspiration for spiritual transformation. To act for India's freedom is a divine action as India's freedom is essential for the spiritual transformation of the humanity. That is why a fighter for India's freedom, like Baji, should not only have patriotic zeal, but should simultaneously possess soul-power and aspiration for spiritual growth.

After a fateful moment's superhuman toil under a "godlike impulse"
Baji saw a mighty form passing out of him:
Titanic, scarlet-clad,
Dark as a thunder-cloud, with streaming hair
Obscuring heaven, and in her sovran grasp
The sword, the flower, the boon, the bleeding head,—
Bhavani. Then she vanished; the daylight
Was ordinary in a common world.
And Baji knew the goddess formidable
Who watches over India till the end. (410-17)

In an attempt to analyse the symbolic significance of the image of Bhavani as portrayed in the passage quoted above, Pakle writes:

The sword in her hand symbolizes her role as the protector of mankind as also of India, the flower her inherent tenderness of heart, the boon her spiritual potentiality to bless the devotees, and the bleeding head symbolizes her tremendous might to punish the evil. (Moter India, May 1986: 300)

Ultimately Baji’s heroic frame sinks to death. But the gorge remains unconquered. The vacuum is immediately filled by the Raigurh lances and, of course, by the song of Ramdas, the inspiring force behind Shivaji’s formidable army. But in the midst of the dance of death, shouting and slaying Shivaji stands silent, an unusual and mystic silence, beside the immortal hero’s empty frame and beholds the mighty goddess:

But Shivaji beside the dead beheld
A dim and mighty cloud that held a sword
And in its other hand, where once the head
Depended bleeding, raised the turban bright
From Baji's brows, still glittering with its gems,
And placed it on the chief's. But as it rose
Blood-stained with the hiroic sacrifice,
Round the aigrette he saw a golden crown. (493-500)

The "turban bright" represents the glory of Baji, the eternal spirit fighting for the cause of freedom. His glorious and heroic sacrifice contains in it the seed of the "golden crown" ie the rise of a glorious India.

Baji's awareness of God's immanence (God within / Rules us [109-10]) gradually becomes the poet's realisation. But Baji's spiritual vision of the goddess in the battlefield is not the final revelation. His inner journey brings many spiritual revelations unveiling the mystery of existence.