Introduction

Sri Aurobindo grows into a Kavi and a yogi-poet and in the process of this growth his poetry epitomises a journey from ego to Self. This journey is a process of self-expansion and self-enlightenment. It is a progressive movement in consciousness from division to totality or fullness, from separative sense to unity with the source, from ahām (I) to so'ham (He am I). It is a spiritual seeking that results in self-discovery removing in the process sheaths of ignorance. In his long poetic career, we come across different phases linked with different stages of his spiritual growth. The tender boy staying away from his motherland, often quietly disturbed by her memory; the brilliant intellectual churning the sources of India’s perennial wisdom and culture, partly to reconstruct his intellect already stuffed with European thoughts and ideas and mainly to rediscover her deep spiritual wisdom and the glory of her culture; the visionary nationalist who identified the inner spirit of his motherland; the philosopher recording his inner conviction authenticated by his spiritual experiences and realisations; the yogi who travelled into various occult realms of consciousness unravelling the mysteries of existence—these different facets of Sri Aurobindo’s personality mingle with the poet at different stages of his poetic growth to

1 "The Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw the Truth and found in a subtle truth-hearing the inspired word of his vision" (Aurobindo, The Future Poetry 27 fn).
form a stream of creativity. Each aspect prepares the inner man to leap to the next and the poet in him grows accordingly. To watch the growth of the poet is thus to watch the growth of the inner man. This inner journey takes him to the zenith where Truth is revealed. Poetry now ceases to be a mental creation and "rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth" and thereby acquires "a closer approximation to what we might call the mantra in poetry" (Aurobindo 9: 8). The yogi, the seer and the poet become one. Poetry becomes the medium of expression of the yogi-poet's spiritual vision, experiences and realisations and awakens the receptive soul to the light of the spirit. This study aims at tracing the process of this inner growth from ego to Self, from Ignorance to Knowledge as it is reflected in his poetry.

As the poet's inner journey from ego to Self comes within the purview of the present study the question what ego is in the context of Aurobindonian world-view naturally comes to the front. Ego is a conception about existence based on ignorance and delusion. It is the individualisation of being in becoming "to centralise round itself the experiences of the sense-mind" (Aurobindo 12: 164). Hence it implies "the identification of our existence with outer self, the ignorance of our true self above and our

Knowledge here does not refer to intellectual riches. It is the awareness by which we grow into our true being. Ignorance is "a limitation of consciousness." It is "a partial, a limiting, a dividing and, very largely, a falsifying knowledge; out of that limitation and falsification we have to grow into the truth of our spiritual being" (Aurobindo 19: 729).
psychic being within us" (Aurobindo 22: 300). It is an assertion of separate existence in maya\(^3\) by the individual soul. It is mental, vital, and physical. Ego is thus an existence in outwardness, separateness and limitation.

Ego is a "strongly separative self-experience" (Aurobindo 18: 367) that hides from us the face of Infinity, the one in all. It is like a wall that hides from us "the deeper and wider truth of our larger existence" (Aurobindo 18: 530). It distorts Truth or Reality because it is a product of avidyā, ie the ignorance of oneness. As it accepts the terms of surface consciousness as the sole reality, it becomes "a subjective substitute for the true self in our surface experience" (Aurobindo 18: 624). It gets separated from the inner divinity because of ignorance. Because of this limitation and separative individuality shaped out of the ignorance of unity man seems to be "limited, divided from others, subject to Nature and even its creation and sport" even though he is "in his essence one, divine and free" (Aurobindo 12: 74). Referring to this dividing and individualising nature of ego Sri Aurobindo elaborates:

It is nothing fundamentally real in itself but only a practical constitution of our consciousness devised to centralise the activities of Nature in us. We perceive a formation of mental, physical, vital experience which distinguishes itself from the rest of being, and that is what we think of as ourselves in

\(^3\) Working of the lower Nature, aparā prakṛti, which has put behind it the divine wisdom and is absorbed in the experiences of the separative Ego.
nature—this individualisation of being in becoming. We then proceed to conceive of ourselves as something which has thus individualised itself and only exists so long as it is individualised,—a temporary or at least a temporal becoming; or else we conceive of ourselves as someone who supports or causes the individualisation, an immortal being perhaps but limited by its individuality. This perception and this conception constitute our ego-sense. (Aurobindo 18: 367)

Brahma-consciousness is our "real self and true existence" (Aurobindo 12: 164). Ego is not the real self. It is the limitation of the universal "I" into our "imperfect individualised personality" (Aurobindo 18: 39). Self is God-centredness; but ego is self-centredness and hence veils the Reality. Self is the projection of the divine, but ego is a "misleading shadow" (Aurobindo 13: 530) of the self or spiritual individuality. Sri Aurobindo explains by a clear analogy: "Chit Shakti or Bhagavat Chetana is the Mother--the Jivatma is a portion of it, the psychic or soul a spark of it. Ego is a perverse reflection of the psychic or the Jivatma" (Aurobindo 25: 79).

The capacity of ego is limited because it is formed out of the movement of Nature. This limitation is the result of identification with the "changeable formations of Nature in the separate body, the individual life and the egoistic mind" (Aurobindo 12: 90-91). Its understanding and knowledge is imperfect. It is so because the egoistic view that helps its understanding is based on duality leading to division and disharmony. The
divine view is based on unity leading to "divine fulfilment" (Aurobindo 12: 92).

Sri Aurobindo spent his prime formative years in London absorbing Western ideas with great zeal. So while discussing ego from Aurobindonian point of view a brief reference to the Western idea of ego is rather desirable and this brings Sigmund Freud to the forefront. In Western psychoanalytic theory ego refers to that portion of the human personality "which is experienced as the 'self' or 'I' and is in contact with the external world through perception. It is the part which remembers, evaluates, plans, and in other ways is responsive to and acts in the surrounding physical and social world" (Goetz 4: 388). In his attempt to describe the dynamics of the human mind Freud assigns a tripartite structure to the mind, namely, id, ego and superego. But there is no sharp demarcation among them. Their co-operative and harmonious functioning forms a well-organised personality. The ego is thus one of these co-existent parts. The id, according to the findings of Freud, contains all the instinctual drives seeking immediate satisfaction of the innate needs of "the individual organism's life" (Wolman 243). The ego is the portion of the personality concerned with different aspects of reality, perception, cognition and executive action. The superego contains the individual's environmentally derived ideals and values. Ego plays the key role of a reasonable and sane mediator between the instinctual demands and their gratification. Freud explains that we recognize in man "a psychical organization which is interpolated between his sensory stimuli and perception..."
of his bodily needs on the one hand, and his motor activity on the other; and which mediates between them with a certain purpose. We call this organization his ‘I’ [Ego]” (62).

While id and superego are the sort of reservoirs of instincts, ideals and values, ego is concerned with the executive function. It, therefore, becomes a necessity for it to act almost as a mediator between the id, the superego and the external world. “It is just as important for the Ego to live in concord with the Super-Ego as with the Id,” finds out Freud (180). Besides maintaining this concord the ego "adjusts the organism to the external world" (Wolman 247). The ego gives consistency to behaviour and adds an identity to the individual.

The ego in Freud’s psycho-analysis is thus concerned with the workings of the mind in relationship with the surrounding physical and social world. How much intricate and complex impulses of mind and its deeper recesses Freud’s psycho-analytic studies may touch, the ego proposed by him remains restricted within the circumference of the working of the waking mind or at best the inner mind. It does not inhere any urge for or possibility of transcending the mind. But the ego in Sri Aurobindo’s view is conceived in relationship with the deeper truth of our whole existence—the total reality. Ego is a manifestation of the vast Reality or Infinity separated from it and limited by ignorance. Though a mental, vital and physical formation, it is only a temporary becoming, only “a provisional device of the Consciousness-Force in things so that the secret individual, the spirit within,
may establish a representative and instrumental formation of itself in physical nature, a provisional individualisation in the nature of the Ignorance. . . .

It can transcend the limitation brought about by ignorance when one opens to a "greater inner existence and consciousness" (Aurobindo 18: 531). Thus a possibility to transcend its limitations is inherent in Aurobindonian ego. So it cannot be properly understood through Freudian psycho-analysis. The basic difference is that Freud views ego as a psychiatrist whereas Sri Aurobindo is a spiritual seeker, a yogi. Freud bases his findings on experiments related to human situations. Sri Aurobindo’s findings are based on his spiritual realisation and intuitive ideas.

Ego, in Sri Aurobindo’s view, brings self-imprisonment or limitation. Self-discovery, on the other hand, results in self-opening and self-fulfilment. It leads to the expression of divinity in man. When the individual self achieves liberation from the limiting shackles of ego and surrenders himself to the Divine all egoistic actions cease. All work becomes divine work, work done for the fulfilment of the Divine Will. The individual self starts functioning as "a centre of operation of the creative will of the cosmic whole" (Chaudhuri 118). This process of liberation from ego leading to self-discovery is an inner spiritual journey leading the aspiring soul from _avidya_ to _vidya_, from multiplicity to unity. The consummation comes

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4 Avidya is "ignorance of the identity of oneself with Brahman" (Webster’s Dictionary 102); the consciousness of multiplicity.

5 Vidya is "transcendental knowledge leading toward Brahman" (ibid 1592); the consciousness of Unity.
with "the one manifesting Himself unveiled in the individual and the universe" (Aurobindo 12: 65). The inner journey of Sri Aurobindo, the yogi, heads for this attainment. It is a progressive journey and at each stage of his spiritual growth the inner man is reflected in his poetry. The yogi and the poet move almost in unison.

What is the role and relevance of poetry in this journey? To Sri Aurobindo poetry is an "accompaniment" to sadhana\(^6\) necessary for this upward spiritual journey. So he makes it clear that poetry must be written in the "true spirit," ie it must be written "as a means of contact with the Divine through inspiration." An inner opening facilitates the flow of inspiration into the poet. In this way poetry becomes an active part of spiritual sadhanā. He also contends that poetry must be a means of the expression of "one’s own inner being." Through this function poetry extends a positive co-operation to the Sadhak. Poetic expression confirms "a feeling like that of devotion, surrender etc. and strengthens the force of experience" in case there is an experience. Poetry thus consolidates the results of sadhanā. Poetry opens "a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital" (Aurobindo 9: 504). By adhering to the true spirit of writing poetry the poet and the Sadhak or yogi become one. Poetry written in this way becomes a service "solely of the Divine" (Aurobindo 9: 505). It deepens the spirit of surrender as the poet considers himself only an

\(^6\) The pratice of yoga; spiritual self-training and exercise.
instrument of the divine and becomes a channel to express the communication from the Divine. Thus poetry becomes relevant in the inner journey of the poet.

Sri Aurobindo adds a fresh significance to poetry by visualising a new type to be written in the days to come. He intends to elevate poetry to make it a vehicle of the Spirit and to express a vision of things based on a soul-view. Such poetry can find utterance only, as he feels, in the "inmost language of the self-experience of the soul and the sight of the spiritual mind" (Aurobindo 9: 283). It cannot be created by the mind, the intelligence or the imagination—all instruments for the working of nature or ego. The "true creator" is the soul. Highlighting the role of soul in the creative process Sri Aurobindo elaborates:

For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry."

(Aurobindo 9: 10)

To be the perfect instruments to do the work of transmission flawlessly, the mind, the intelligence and the imagination are to be transmuted. They should cease to be the instruments of ego. Further, Sri
Aurobindo holds that poetry can encourage the growth of the inner being if the act of writing it can be used to keep one in touch with the "inner source of inspiration" (Aurobindo 9: 512) or overhead source of inspiration. This touch helps one to move ahead towards the still centre of one's source. Overhead sources refer to supra-physical planes of consciousness. He charts a scheme of evolution and visualises the progressive growth of man from Mind to Supermind, a luminous state of Truth-Consciousness. He discloses the presence of a gradation of superconscient powers in between the Mind and the Supermind, namely, the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, and the Overmind. When the inspiration and truth behind a poetic creation flow from any one of these planes it is called overhead poetry. Except in some moments of intense and self-surpassing elevation poetry is ordinarily a mental creation sustained by our intellect, reason and imagination. In such moments some poets experience the touch of higher source of inspiration. But these are short-lived experiences. In order to receive a sustained flow of inspiration from these overhead planes one is required to be a fit medium through sadhana. Thus yoga becomes a part of the creative process.

How does yoga participate in the creative process, accelerate creative activity and bring perfection to it? To know the answer we should understand what yoga is. Yoga awakens one to the Truth of existence. It is a process that leads the Sadhak to a mode of consciousness higher and wider than that of the intellectual man. This implies transcending our present mode of being limited by ego. Yoga means union with the Divine, ie the Supreme
Self or the Cosmic Consciousness. This union with a larger self-existence does not end in self-extinction; rather it leads to self-perfection and blooming of the latent potentialities. Sri Aurobindo describes the goal of yoga thus:

For we mean by this term [Yoga] a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. . . ." (Aurobindo 20: 2)

On the whole yoga results in self-enlargement, heightening of consciousness and self-perfection. In the bliss of communion with the Cosmic Consciousness the yogi becomes a channel of expression of its creative will. So when a yogi is a poet, poetry ceases to be "merely a mental creation or an aesthetic pleasure." It becomes "a flowing out from a growing self within" (Aurobindo 9: 508). He writes what the inner will wants him to express. The aesthetic pleasure is substituted by or transmuted into the intense delight of the soul. The heightened consciousness of the yogi-poet becomes a source of inspiration for poetry and adds power and perfection to it. For him poetry becomes a medium of contact with the inner source of inspiration and becomes an aid in the process of the growth of the inner being. Poetry becomes a part of sādhanā and yoga becomes an inspirer of poetry. Consequently poetry becomes almost an inspired and intuitive utterance.

What is this intuitive poetry? It is an inspired and revelatory poetic utterance which is the result of a "direct spiritual perception and vision"
This supra-intellectual perception and vision is called intuition. It is a way of seeing that unveils a deeper reality covered by the truth perceived by our normal sense and intelligence. To explain how intuition leaps out Sri Aurobindo writes:

Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from a concealed identity. It is when the consciousness of the subject meets with the consciousness in the object, penetrates it and sees, feels or vibrates with the truth of what it contacts, that the intuition leaps out like a spark or lightning-flash from the shock of the meeting; or when the consciousness, even without any such meeting, looks into itself and feels directly and intimately the truth or the truths that are there or so contacts the hidden forces behind appearances, then also there is the outbreak of an intuitive light; or again, when the consciousness meets the Supreme Reality or the spiritual reality of things and beings and has a contactual union with it, then the spark, the flash or the blaze of intimate truth-perception is lit in its depths. This

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7 Sri Aurobindo envisages a four-fold order of knowledge -- "a knowledge by identity, a knowledge by intimate direct contact, a knowledge by separative direct contact, a wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact" --to show how intuition gradually changes into separative knowledge. These are "the four cognitive methods of Nature" (Aurobindo 18: 525).
close perception is more than sight, more than conception: it is the result of a penetrating and revealing touch which carries in it sight and conception as part of itself or as its natural consequence.” (Aurobindo 19: 946-47)

Intuition is thus the seizure of Truth in a flash. Such sparks of Truth-perception are turned into intuitive ideas which find expression in intuitive poetry. The creator of intuitive poetry grows into a seer. He penetrates the inmost truth of things which is the subject of his poetry. To communicate his intuitive vision he requires the inspired word. So the revelatory and inspired word is another part of intuitive knowledge. According to Sri Aurobindo a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, besides a power of revelatory truth-seeing, is a part of the fourfold\textsuperscript{8} power of intuition. Intuitive poetry finds expression in such inspired language charged with intensity and a "concentrated purity" (Aurobindo 9: 275). This language surpasses the language of intellect or imagination. So intellect and imagination play no role in finding such inspired word. At the same time he holds that "the poetic (aesthetic) value or perfection of a line, passage or poem does not depend on the plane from which it comes, but on the purity and authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense vision and

\textsuperscript{8} "Intuition has a fourfold power. A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance, which is akin to the ordinary nature of its intervention in our mental intelligence, a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth,-- these are the fourfold potencies of Intuition" (Aurobindo 19: 949).
inspiration from whatever source" (qtd. in Sethna, "Overhead Poetry"). So the poet is required to overcome the difficulty of getting "the pure untranslated language of intuitive vision out through the doors of the mind" and then only he gets a word of "intense light" (Aurobindo 9: 275-76). Sri Aurobindo calls this "first language" of intuitive illumination. He further contends that we can find "a more uplifted range" of an inspired poetic speech. A "greater moved ecstasy" of highest thought and sight and speech is inherent in this speech. The culmination of this inspired speech is the "inevitable, absolute and revealing word." To find such revealing word inspiration raises poetic intelligence and imagination to their highest possibility and even leaps beyond their touch into "a pure revelatory spiritual vision" (Aurobindo 9: 276).

Intuitive poetry with its intensity, purity, force of inspiration and power of revelation indicates a movement towards mantra. Sri Aurobindo contends that the poet should aim at uttering the mantra. He may often fail to do so; but to strive for success should be the highest trend of his poetic expression. Mantra, according to him, is the "poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality" (Aurobindo 9: 17). It is inspired and inevitable utterance bearing "a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion" (Aurobindo 9: 14). As it rises out of the soul’s sight of truth of existence it involves a process of inward seeing. This seeing is again inseparably linked with hearing. Both are one act. So mantra is an inspired rhythmic revelation. Poetry as mantra is thus possible when "three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic
movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul’s vision of truth” (Aurobindo 9: 517). Besides, as mantra is inspired word the inspiration must come from some overhead plane of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo holds that the mantra flows from the overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. The Rishi in the ancient time found such words. They saw or discovered an inner truth and put it into "self-effective language—the mantra" (Aurobindo 9: 517). Like the Rishis a poet should strive in the true spirit to manifest his soul-power and soul-vision through poetic expression.

Sri Aurobindo aspires to revive poetry as mantra. Only thus poetry can express the highest Truth or Reality. But to ascend to this peak through progressive climb he starts from world-knowledge. An extensive and penetrating knowledge of the world is the foundation-rock on which stands the philosopher, yogi and seer-poet. An uncommon intellectual exploration starting from his student days in England and continuing through his days of transition at Baroda shapes this foundation-rock. He himself contends that intellectual pursuits undertaken in proper spirit can promote one’s sādhanā and consequently one’s spiritual growth. His early poetry takes the world of sense-perception into its circumference. From there starts the poet’s spiritual journey, ie the process of his inner growth, till he touches the peak of Reality as revealed in Savitri.