CHAPTER 4

T.S. ELIOT AND SRI AUROBINDO AS MYSTICS AND CRITICS

The modern age has been described as the age of anxiety, the age of interrogation, the age of disintegration and the age of spiritual crisis. The mystical element is as vital an element in English poetry of this age as it was in that of the 19th century which proves the artiste’s longing for the life of the spirit. The two greatest significant mystics and critics of the 20th century were Sri Aurobindo in India and T.S. Eliot in England, well-known for their mystical tendencies. The very thing that strikes about T.S. Eliot and Sri Aurobindo is the fact that both were excellent scholars of the past deeply spiritual in their outlook and a spiritual view is always a visionary view.

It is very refreshing to note that T.S. Eliot was the only Literary artiste in the west who was influenced to a great extent by Indian thought and the entire corpus of his poetry abounds in references and allusions to Indian religious and mysticism. According to Visvanath Chatterjee, “The influence of Hinduism however is more important and pervasive in Eliot’s poetry than that of Buddhism.”1
The most obvious references and allusions of T.S. Eliot are to be found in *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*. The classical Indian influence of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* about the fall of civilisations at the end of the Wasteland in the utterance of Da, Da, Da which is alternately interrupted as Datta (give, Be generous) to Gods, Dayadhvam (Be compassionate) to the Spiritualized humanity and Damyata (self-control, Be restrained) to unspiritualized humanity and the concluding lines of the poem ‘Shantih, Shantih, Shantih’, show how vital is the role that the Hindu scriptures play in his writings. According to Swami Tatagathananda, “Eliot understood the story to mean that if one’s interpretation of religious experience is in proportion to one’s evolution in life, the effect of a ‘wasteland’ can be avoided. Physical evolution must be balanced by spiritual evolution.”

The greatest Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is a meeting place of the Asiatic Universalism and European classicism. His poetry is inspired by the philosophy of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. What strikes mostly in his poems is the difference between his focal point of poetic vision and that of all but a very small minority of writers of verse in English. The transcendent vision is the be-all and end-all of a mystic’s life and it is this vision Sri Aurobindo had in his mind. The exquisite lines from his magnum opus *Savitri* gives a rare insight into the nature of mysticism:
"A light not born of sun or moon or fire,
A light that dwelt within and saw within
Shedding an intimate visibility,
Made secrecy more revealing than the word:
Our sight and sense are a fallible gaze and touch
And only the spirit’s vision is wholly true."³

The Bhagavad Geetha’s revelations about the function of ego in human affairs deeply influenced Eliot. He had great esteem for the scripture when he wrote his Essay on Dante which he dared to place next to La Commedia Divine of the Italian poet. T.S. Eliot says, “The Bhagavad Geetha is the next philosophical poem to The Divine Comedy within my experience”⁴

T.S. Eliot was influenced to a great extent by the speculations of Indian philosophers and consequently it becomes easy for him to speak on the subordination of tiny ego and emergence of expanded ego, consequential upon the experience of beauty. According to Mohit K. Ray, “It is this expansion of ego-boundary that constitutes the essence of Aesthetic realisation.”⁵
With the help of religious and philosophical past of mankind, Sri Aurobindo and T.S. Eliot actually explored the ways to answer the ultimate questions based on time. What has happened so far; what is happening now and what is to happen tomorrow. The enigmatic lines of Eliot in *Four Quartets* reveal that only through time, time is conquered:

“Time present and Time past
Are both perhaps present in Time future
And Time future contained in the Time past.”

These lines also justify the revelation of the *Geetha* when Krishna unrolled the vast vista of the future before Arjuna and advises not to think of the fruit of action. According to the *Geetha*, “Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds.”

What T.S. Eliot says about the beginning and the end of every word, every phrase and every poem rightly applies to the mantric value of words in the poems of Sri Aurobindo. According to T.S. Eliot, “Every phrase and every structure is an end and a beginning every poem and epitaph.”

Normally there is a high thinking quality in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry who finds salvation not through song like a poet-philosopher, but through
realisation that may or may not use verse as a means of expression. It is natural to recall here an outstanding passage from *Savitri*:

“Silence the nurse of Almighty's power’

The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal world

And of the Timeless of still brooding face’

And the creative eye of eternity...

In darkness' core she dug out wells of light,

On the undiscovered depths imposed a form,

Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,

And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths

Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought

Hewn from the silence of the ineffable.”

The understanding of one's age or its spirit and that which is the greatest and deepest in it involves what T.S. Eliot has termed in his essay *On Tradition* the historical sense, a perception which is universal in essence uplifting the vital force in a poet. In Eliot's concept, the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.
According to V.K. Gokak, “In Sri Aurobindo’s concept, the poets may have any relation with the artistes of the past but they should not repeat them instead they should try to transcend and go beyond their achievement. He justifies the modern poet’s insistence on his right to think, feel and see and even invent his own technique to express his experiences in his own way. The poet cannot be conscious of the main current unless he is aware of the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment that go to make all good poetry.”

Sri Aurobindo outdoes the ancient scriptures in the aspiration to suffuse and transform earth’s life with the Golden Immortal the Rishis saw everywhere pressing for manifestation. And in his care to get the aching externals into harmony by some power within, his concern about the poor unfulfilled trivialities that are divorced from the deep springs of consciousness, he also outdoes the modernism of T.S. Eliot. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The Upanishads are not all philosophic thinking, but spiritual seeing; these ancient stanzas are a rush of spiritual intuitions, flames of burning fire of mystical experience, waves of an inner eye of light and life, and they throw themselves into the language and cadence of poetry because
that is their natural speech and a more intellectual utterance would have falsified their vision."11

T.S. Eliot was influenced by the connotations of death in the Vedas and the Upanishads. He is said to be the chief shaper of the modern poetic impulse whose survey of historical past and his visions of death and destruction made him aware of the same truth which is his moment of mystic experience to fight for mystic's Dark Night of the soul:

"I said to my soul be still and let the dark come upon you which shall be the darkness of God."12

Sri Aurobindo does not rest with the Vedic and Upanishadic connotation of death but goes beyond the old Indian idea of what God attainment is. Unlike the old scriptures, he refuses to recognize the physical breaking up as an unescapable philosophy, he looks beyond the crucified body bringing faith to the glorified body that posits hope. Such a glorified body is Savitri, after she has performed the yoga that has ushered in the mind of Light. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The Supreme must be possessing the basic and perfect reality, the flawless archetype, of everything set going in our space and time. To couple with a liberation into the self of selves an attainment of this archetypal Truth and to evolve the divine counterpart of each side of our complex constitution is the full aim of yoga; in such an aim,
even the gross body with its energies cannot be neglected as untransmutable into a luminous and immortal vehicle."\textsuperscript{13}

T.S. Eliot is also one of the greatest literary critics of England whose criticism has been revolutionary and has turned the critical tradition of the whole England speaking world upside down. He made English criticism look different though in a simple sense. T.S. Eliot was the most powerful exponent of anti-romantic and anti-humanist reaction that began in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and his popular essays in literary criticism are Tradition and Individual Talent, The Function of Criticism, The Metaphysical Poets. He was a classicist in literature and not a romantic and one of his contributions to literary criticism is that he strengthened reaction against romanticism and paved the rise of Neo-Classicism.

Sri Aurobindo was a well-known critic of the Modern Indian Renaissance whose critical power is as great as his creative genius. Sri Aurobindo's aesthetic pronouncements are scattered in The Future Poetry and The Letters. Sri Aurobindo's criticism represents generally speaking the romantic mood in Indian literature of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and the ideas are not derived either from the west or from ancient India. According to G.N. Devy, "Sri Aurobindo's literary wisdom and critical insight have been rarely matched by another critic or critical work in modern India."\textsuperscript{14}
T.S. Eliot started his literary career as a poet but he was lured to write poetic dramas on witnessing the fatalities of the greatest period of English drama, the Elizabethan age that are not its lack of realism but its attempt on realism; not its conventions but its lack of conventions by asserting the need of a well-reasoned theory regarding the nature, function and possibility of poetic drama in the modern age. For him poetic drama is possible but it can be revived only when suitable dramatic conventions are evolved and first they must find a new form of verse which will be suitable for them as blank verse was for Elizabethans.

Like T.S. Eliot Sri Aurobindo started his literary career as a poet but he too wrote poetic dramas with a struggle between the creative and critical sensibilities in the early stage but later was strongly influenced by Elizabethan drama in which he infused his style with element of Sanskrit classical literature which undoubtedly gives the positive aspect of literary sensibility and the global consciousness. Sri Aurobindo wrote a few poetic plays in Elizabethan manner that contain many passages of poetic beauty which demanded separate treatment as poetic drama.

Sri Aurobindo in his characteristic manner created a new and complex body of rhythm that of quantitative meter. For him a poet trying to naturalize in English to achieve a new form of its greatness or beauty natural
to the English tongue must have absorbed its rhythm into his very blood, made it a part of himself, then only could he bring it out from within him as a self-expression of his own being realized and authentic. If he relies not on this inner inspiration, but solely on his technical ability for the purpose, there will be a failure. According to K.D. Sethna, "Sri Aurobindo has solved once for all the problems of quantity in English — a feat which gives the language a brave new world of poetic effects, a revelation of strange rhythm moulds of the inspired consciousness."  

T.S. Eliot strived towards the same kind of thing to bring in their work apparently and deliberately amorphous receiving something like a shape, a balance, a reasoned meaning when scanned a quantitative free verse. According to Sri Aurobindo, "But free verse cannot justify itself unless it makes a thing of beauty of every line and achieves at the same time an underlying rhythmic oneness."  

Eliot’s style is his use of quotations which are thought provoking and make the reader think and work on them. He has used the device of literary quotations and has shown how quotations from other poets can be fixed into new contexts in a manner which endows them with the novelty that distinguishes original writing itself.
Sri Aurobindo developed the element of literary allusiveness in his style rather than quoting. He has an oblique and indirect reference to famous phrases and lines of poetry which help him to gather together the revelatory hints and flashes and phrases in the poetic diction of great predecessors and to evolve in the English language, a poetic diction that builds up the atmosphere and the imagery for interpreting the subtle and soul states.

Both the critics wish to highlight the complex nature of their poetic theme through the employment of one of these techniques. According to V.K. Gokak, "There is an additional reason for Sri Aurobindo's innovation in this direction as he had to evolve a new diction in English for conveying brave, translunary, experiences which in their fullness were new in English. He has constructed this bridge of understanding out of the hints and flashes of intuition scattered in profusion in great English poetry expressed with natural magic."17

T.S. Eliot has coined a number of memorable phrases like 'objective correlative', 'unification of sensibility', 'dissociation of sensibility', which have gained wide currency. The phrase 'objective correlative' was first used in his essay; On Hamlet And His Problems which is used to express emotion in poetry to the optimum by describing it as a set of objects, a
situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for the poet's emotion so that when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked. According to Mohit K. Ray, "T.S. Eliot is the only literary artist who drives deep into the theory of aesthetic realisation and floats the concept of 'objective correlative', that is nothing but the conglomeration of the excitant and the ensuant, the permanent and the transient moods."  

The phrases 'unification of sensibility' and 'dissociation of sensibility' were first used in his essay on *The Metaphysical Poets*. For him the phrase unification of sensibility is a fusion of thought and feeling; a recreation of thought into feeling, a direct sensuous apprehension of thought which is essential for good poetry and bad poetry results when there is dissociation of sensibility i.e. the poet is unable to feel his thoughts. According to Wimsatt and Brooks, "Eliot found in the bold and often strenuous figurative language of the metaphysical poets the necessary means for achieving 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought or a recreation of thought into feeling."  

Like T.S. Eliot Sri Aurobindo too presses into service phraseology of diverse kinds like technical terms, words connected with trade, psychoanalysis and military service. He employs even mathematical terms to create spiritual awareness in the reader. God, the dramatist of the
death and life and birth, the sculptor of the living shapes of earth, the world artist who reveals in forms and colours is an adept in a thousand mysteries. According to Sri Aurobindo:

"A mathematician mind that never errs,

Though hast played with theorems, numbers, measures and cubes

Passed cells, electrons, molecules, through thy tubes

World-forces for thy Science's ministers."\(^{20}\)

T.S. Eliot's thoughts about an impersonal art arrived at their most celebrated formulation in his essay entitled *On Hamlet and His Problems*. According to T.S. Eliot, "The only way of expressing emotion in the forum of art is by finding an objective correlative, in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."\(^{21}\)

It was T.S. Eliot who brought the matter of impersonality squarely to the attention of his generation in his treatise *Tradition and Individual Talent*. Eliot gave a final shape to the modern classicistic idea of the impersonality of art i.e. the poet is as impersonal as scientist and poet is a sort of inspired mathematics which gives equations for human emotions.
Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry and art is more significant than T.S. Eliot's depersonalisation or impersonality of poetry. Sri Aurobindo in his *Future Poetry* describes the poet as seer and revealer of truth who has got an insight into the things around and is able to offer in his poetry rasa - a concentrated taste. If he is a great poet he offers a rasa which is a spiritual essence of emotion, the soul's pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Poetry in its subtlest form is the voice of reality, the vision in the eternity of which the seer himself disappears. Consequently a work of art purifies and tranquillizes the consciousness by resolving fugitive emotions into their basic human attitude, disengaging the consciousness from the particulars and accidentals of life and lifting it into the calm of generalized emotion and idealized and universalized experience."

Eliot further develops his theory of the impersonality of poetry and compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of poetic creation to the process of chemical reaction. The mind of the poet is like the catalytic agent necessary for combinations of emotions and experiences to take place, but it does not undergo any change during the process of poetic combination. The mind of the poet is constantly forming emotions and experiences into new wholes, but the new combination does
not contain even a trace of poet's mind, just as newly formed sulphurous acid does not contain any trace of platinum but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.

Sri Aurobindo compares the key to a person's creation with his inner mental personality not to his outward mind or life. The physical mind of the man may have been actual life selfish and hard; but in his creation the man may be a benevolent philanthropist reformer. An artist may be merely a medium for a creative force of, man being a multiple personality, the poet or artist in him may be only one of the many personalities in him. According to Sri Aurobindo, "It is through the poetic personality in him that the creative force works and this may be either a mere reed through which the spirit blows but laid aside after the time is over, or it may be our active power having some say even in the surface mental composition and vital and physical activities of the total composite creature."  

T.S. Eliot is a believer in the power of organization but not inspiration. He suggests that the work of art is to be regarded as an organism, alive with a life of its own. For him the greatness of a poem does not depend upon the greatness or even the intensity of emotion with the components of the poem but upon the intensity of the process of poetic
composition. T.S. Eliot writes in The Sacred Wood, “We can only say that a poem in some sense, has its own life; that its parts from something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet.”

Sri Aurobindo is a believer in the power of inspiration not merely as a theory but a fact of both personal and general creative experience. For him all poetry is an inspiration, a thing breathed into the thinking organ from above; it is recorded in the mind, but is born in the higher principle of direct knowledge or ideal vision which surpasses mind. Poetry is not really a poesis or composition not even a creation but rather the revelation of something that eternally exists. According to James Cousins, “When Sri Aurobindo escapes into pure sight and speech, he gives us a wholly delightful thing like ‘revelation’ which stands existent in its own authenticity and beauty.”

T.S. Eliot does not pass any judgements worse or better but simply elucidates and leaves readers to form their own judgements. Comparison is an important aspect of his critical method. But the purpose of his comparison is to elucidate and not to interpret the facts.
Sri Aurobindo takes into account the essential force and beauty and scope of a poet’s work as a whole while evaluating it but is careful in assessing literary work by capturing the soul of a literary epoch or an entire aspect of poetic mind by interpreting facts. According to Sri Aurobindo, “A poet need not be a reflective critic and he need not have the reasoning and analyzing intellect and direct his own poetry. The four faculties, revelation or prophecy, inspiration, intuitive judgement and intuitive reason are the perfect equipment of genius doing the works of interpretative and creative knowledge.”

In rejecting the evolutionary process of artistic perfection Eliot very remarkably states that art never improves though its material changes. Art’s materials being emotions, the change in the emotions is due to the personal or individual vision of the poets. Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry as the distinguished personal spirit of the poet permeates through whole fabric of the poetic creation. According to Wimsatt and Brooks, “Such an impersonal conception of art is almost belligerently anti-romantic. It focuses attention not upon poet but upon poetry.”

Sri Aurobindo believes in the evolutionary process of artistic creation which is a constant progress towards something greater...a greater
perfection and finally to an absolute consciousness which has yet to come. Though there is evolution it only creates new forms, brings in new principles of consciousness; new ingenuities of creation but not a more perfect perfection.

T.S. Eliot views that the end of criticism is to bring about a readjustment between the old and the new, and his own criticism performs this function to a nicety. For him criticism must serve as a handmade to creation. Criticism is of great importance in the work of creation itself. The poet creates, but the critic in him shifts, combines, corrects and expunges, and thus imports perfection and finish to what has been created.

Sri Aurobindo views that the end of criticism is based on a dynamic psychology of being. According to him, “The self of the creator very visibly overshadows the work, is seen everywhere like the conscious self of Vedanta both containing and inhabiting all his creations and this psychological observations or process lead to the rediscovery of the soul.”

Eliot’s theory of poetry marks a break from tradition and gives a new direction to literary criticism. According to Wimsatt and Brooks, “Hardly since the 17th century had critical writing in English so resolutely transposed poetic theory from the axis of pleasure versus pain to that of unity verses tradition and gives a new direction to literary criticism.”
Sri Aurobindo primarily belongs to future and his aesthetics is characterized as meta-aesthetics. Sri Aurobindo is the pioneer of the new age and the spokesman of the new truth. His Future Poetry is to fulfil the task of giving the fullest and the most perfect presentation of the creative essence of the spirit; the Supreme Reality at all levels of being and in all forms of existence which serve as the means and medium of communication between the Infinite and the finite and the language for the expression of the perfect.

Sri Aurobindo and T.S. Eliot draw close to each other at the summits of poetic recordation. Thus, T.S. Eliot holds hands with Sri Aurobindo to invoke India's ancient wisdom.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


7. Ibid., P. 135.


13. Ibid., P. 107.


17. Ibid., P. 85-86.


23. Ibid., P. 119-120.


CONCLUSION

The analysis of Indian and Western Poetics indicates the vastness of the concepts and the multiplicity of the theories adumbrated by different literary theoreticians, both Indian and Western. To compare the correspondences between Indian aesthetics and Western aesthetics is to be amazingly aware of the immensity and profundity of systematic study of Indian Aestheticians. By comparison the Western poetics appear to be perfunctory. The reason as to why Indian Poetics stands far above is that while Indian mind is guided mainly by the philosophy of spirituality, the western mind is guided by the Philosophy of materialism. As a matter of fact, all Indian artistic forms owe their genesis to spirituality and are intended to conduct man to the gateway of the good through the shady avenue of the beautiful. While Indian mind shows the path of spirituality as the path for attainment of Bliss and beauty, the western mind considers the path of materialism as the means of testing Bliss and beauty.

Indian theories on poetic art are capable of being applied to all artistic forms like dance, music, painting and drama while this does not happen in case of western theory of literary art. The great thinkers across space and time – like Aristotle in Greek and Bharata in India wrote treatises
on drama and in the process made utterances which shed light on the nature and function of poetry as well and introduced ideas in embryonic forms which are later developed into elaborate theories and Schools, both in west and in India. One of the basic issues that have engaged the attention of the aestheticians or Poeticians in the west and in India is the locus of literariness, or what constitutes the poesis of the poem.

It has been observed that Indian and Western Poetics view their subject matter from somewhat different but some are mutually complementary. If complementary angles – the latter deals with poetry as the expression of poet’s mind while the former is chiefly occupied with its culmination as a unique experience of the reader. The great contribution of Indian Poetics is the doctrine of rasa-dhvani, the process by which the reader recreates for himself and relives the Poet’s original experience while western poetics on the other hand studies how the multitudinous impression of the external world melt, alter, combine in the crucible of the poet’s mind and emerge as a harmonious whole.

Indian approach stressed more on the principle of delight than the western approach that gave the poet a more honoured and important place and who is identified with the creator akin to the romantic view of art.
The Western language Philosophy stops with sounds/meaningful sounds or words; but Bhartrhari’s Sphota – as he defines it – is a psychical (inner) entity which reveals itself through the articulated sounds. Indian theoreticians describe the experience of identity of man with the Infinite as the goal of human existence, Western theoreticians put more emphasis on individuality and consider poetry as an expression of the individuality of the artist.

Sri Aurobindo’s aesthetics contain a sovereign voice that chants a new poetry and teaches new aesthetics. Sri Aurobindo, the greatest literary critic of astonishing power and range of unsurpassed depth of insight, width of outlook, and height of vision, a seer, who moving with ease among the literatures of the East and the West, prepares for a multitudinous, full-throated uttered that is going to be the mantra of new civilisation.

In Sri Aurobindo’s idealist schema, spirituality is the truth content of a poem. The poet writes with ‘god light’, illumines ‘human sight’, and makes ‘all things divine’. He is the ‘craftsman of the magic stuff of self’ who labours... in the wide workshop of the wonderful world modelled in inward time of rhythmic parts.

Sri Aurobindo feels everything with an ‘intuitive discernment’, with a ‘mystic sense’ from the regions of ‘illumined certitude’ and seeks to
transform 'all experience to delight'. Delight, which is God's sweetest sign and Beauty's twin, is his objective, which he can achieve by seeing all objects like bodies of the God and interpret them with an authenticity of intuitive truth.

Sri Aurobindo draws his fiction from the spirit's authentic fact and utters the syllables of the unmanifest to be identified in soul-vision and soul-sense. By trying to lift the human words near to Gods, he can turn them into syllables of the cosmos speech.

Sri Aurobindo has mastered both Sanskrit and Latin considered to be the language of the spirit. But in his poetry, he has avoided both these classical languages and established that even English Language could be used as a vehicle of expression with mantric value. He has refined and recharged the English language and breathed into it the greatness and power of the so-called languages of religion and God namely, Latin in the West and Sanskrit in the East.

Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics recognizes that poetry, like the kindred arts of painting and architecture appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is meant to be mental and verbal and not material.
The spiritual quest of Sri Aurobindo lies in understanding the inner vital principle which controls and expresses the soul language of man. In Sri Aurobindo's inwardly disciplined concept of poetry, spirit is its own evidence just as thoughts and emotions coalesce and dive deep into the depths of life; the poet expresses not merely the earthly but what is beyond the visible. In Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics poetry is a means of spiritual expression that helps to open the consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo, one of the most creative and significant figures of Indian Renaissance is a multiple personality who has devoted all his life to the pursuit of spirituality revealed through his aesthetics on the foundation of Indian culture.

Sri Aurobindo has been a spiritual force not only in India but also wherever the thirst for spiritual quest is felt. He was fully alive to the mantric value of words and used them as vehicles to bridge the gap between the unuttered and uttered, thereby directing into the path of realisation of Truth. Thus the ultimate aim of Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics is to lift the humanity to the level of Supermind.