Chapter I

Introduction

Section A: Indo- Anglian Introspective Poetry and

Sri Aurobindo: An Overview

Section B: Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Life- Sketch
Indian English literature is achieving new heights day by day and leaving its mark on the world literature. In the changing global scenario of English language and literature, contemporary Indian English writers seem to be more confident and successful than before. If we are asked to name a few prominent personalities who have dominated the scene of world English literature today, without much stress on memory, the list will comprise names like V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and now Kiran Desai to name the few.

To find out the roots of the success of Indian English literature, we have to scan the pages of history and see how this foreign language was made the means of expression by Indian poets and developed the new poetry in India called Indian English Poetry or Indo-Anglian Poetry.
The historical survey reveals that Indo-Anglian Poetry was imitative in its early stages. But it was also natural while dealing with poetry written in the foreign language. The same thing is observed in the literary history of America, Canada and Australia. A similar aspect of English literary movements is noticeable in their early literary periods. So while writing in English, they had to go by the best models in that language. The impact of English poetry was needed to stimulate the Indian poetic mind, which had fallen into a groove and had been atrophied for some time. Most of Indo-Anglian writers of pre-Independence period either had passed formative period of their life in England or had intimate relationship with native speakers of English and their literature. Post- independence Indian -English poetry seems to come out of this impact.

The historical survey of Indo-Anglian Poetry reveals that the poetry written by Indians in English begins with Derozio, who was half Indian, half Portuguese. As a teacher of English in Hindu College, Calcutta from 1818 onwards, he inspired and guided many young Indians with a love of English language and literature.
The first quarter of the 19th century was the period of incubation for Indo-Anglian poetry. Derozio was the moving spirit in this period till his premature death in 1831. The publication of Indo-Anglian poems by Indian poets like Kaliprasad Ghose, Guru charan Dutt, Raj Narayan Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshi Chandar Dutt assumed prominence during the second quarter of the century. The famous Minutes of Macaulay on Indian education further helped to promote these “hours of idleness” in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry.

The birth of Indo-Anglian poetry is associated with romanticism in British literature. Verse of Derozio, M.M. Dutt and others reflect unavoidable impression of Byron, Scott and other romantic poets. During the third quarter of 19th century, the deeper tone and accents of Romanticism were caught by poets like Govind Dutt. The process of assimilation of Romanticism in all its aspects continued into the century even later. At the same time, the impact of Victorian poetry was being felt on the Indo-Anglian scene. The glorification of the heroic deeds and of domestic virtues which has a concern of Victorian trait, appealed to the imagination of Indo-Anglian poets.
Genuine lyric poetry and narrative poetry of Romantic and Victorian type flourished in the last quarter of the 19th century with the generation of Toru Dutt. *A sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* by Aru and Toru Dutt, was published in 1875. Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads* came out in 1882. R.C. Dutt’s *Lays of Ancient India* and his renderings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were published in 1894 and 1898. Manmohan Ghose’s *Love songs and Elegies* was published in 1898 and Sri Aurobindo’s *Songs to Myrtilla* in 1895. Sarojini Naidu’s *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905. Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda were also active in this period. As K.R.S.Iyengar observes, “Swami Vivekananda’s lyrics like *Kali the Mother, The Song of Sanyasin, Angels Unawares* introduced metaphysical longing and depth in Indo-Anglian poetry.”

Other poets who wrote during this period were Malabari, J.M. Tagore, A.M. Kunte, Brajendranath Seal and I.L. Roy. Many poets of this quarter continued the Pre-Romantic or Victorian manner of Gray and Goldsmith and the satirical tradition of Dryden and Pope. At the same time, Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, who spent impressionable years in England when the “Decadent” poets dominated the scene revealed the influence of this trend in their early
Poems. It was the main feature of Manmohan Ghose’s poetry. Sarojini Naidu’s poetic style was also modelled on it. Sri Aurobindo very soon outgrew the manner of his *Songs to Myrtilla* and blazed a new trail in poetry which many other poets followed.

Poets of this period successfully expressed their intimate joys and sorrows in verse. Indianness of theme, utter authenticity and perfect self-revelation reach their high water mark of excellence in Toru Dutt’s *The Casuarina Tree*. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo who belong to this generation, represent the topmost achievement in Indo-Anglian Poetry. By the time that *Gitanjali* was awarded the Nobel Prize, Indo-Anglian poetry had been considerably evolved. Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu had mainly contributed to build the image of Indo-Anglian poetry of this period.

The trend of writing poetry in the Romantic and Victorian manner remained continue in Indo-Anglian poetry in the first quarter of the 20th century. Meherjee, A.F. Kabardas, N.V. Thadani, Nizanmut Jung, Harindranath Chatopadhyraya, Anand Acharya were the important poets of this period who wrote on Indian thought and legend in typical Indian manner. Anand Acharya, who seems to be considerably
influenced by Tagore’s English translations of his own Bengali poems, wrote prose poems in the manner of Tagore. At the same time some other Indo-Anglian poets responded the new trend of “Georgianism” in then English poetry. P. Sheshari, J. Vakil, G.K. Chettur and Kabraji reveal a Goergian love of the colloquial idioms and of a simple and forthright handling of poetical themes.

The second quarter of the 20th century produced the richer variety. The poets like V.N. Bhushan, S.R. Dongerkery, T.P. Kailasam, M. Krishnamurthy and A. Menezes continued the humanistic trend. The tradition of mystical poetry instigated by Sri Aurobindo was carried forward by Nolini Kant Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, T.L. Vaswani, J. Krishnamurti, Nirodbaran, K.D. Sethna, Nishikanto and Themis. Some other poets like Manjeri Iswaran and P.R. Kaikini took the note of the changing scenario from romantic to modernistic poetry changed orientation of their poetry and adopted modernistic techniques. Some other poets like Nilima Devi, B. Rajan, P.R. Shreshtha and B. Dingra, show a love of compact expression. Nirodbaran produced few surrealist lyrics.
The third quarter of the 20th century saw the further strengthening of modernist as well as neo-symbolist trends. Poets like B.B. paymaster and Adi K. Seth continued to write in the well-established Indo-Anglian tradition. But the Calcutta poets like P. Lal, Kamala Das, V.P. Trivedi, Mary Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan and others, revealed significant developments on modernistic lines in Indo-Anglian poetry. Nissim Ezekiel and S.R. Mokashi belong to the same trend. The trend of neo-symbolism is seen in the work of poets like Nahar and Prithvindra.

The last quarter of the 20th century has seen considerable development in the writing of Indo-Anglian poetry. It has given some promising figures in this field like Jayant Mahapatra, R. Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar, K.N. Daruwala, Dilip Chitre, Eunice Desouza, Adil Jussawala, Gieve Patel, Vilas Sarang who have contributed to the development of Indo-Anglian poetry of this period.

The question of modernity becomes complex if one looks at it as the opposite of the Romantic in some ways; for modernism has been a continuation of Romanticism. If one regards a concern with the depths of the self, inwardness, as the hallmark of the Romantic-symbolist -
Modernist tradition, it has been very strongly present in modern Indian English Poetry. Ezekiel’s poetry is essentially introspective, but in an intellectual, rational almost neo-classical manner. The inwardness of Dom moraes, R. Parthasarathy and Kamala Das is closer to the nineteenth century Romantic tradition with its expression of intense, conscious feeling. Kamala Das believes in the spiritual evolution of man. In a poem entitled *Death Brings No Loss* she treats death as a temporary phase, which brings no loss. In the poem *Ghanashyam* she speaks not only of physical but spiritual evolution. Her poem *Radha* is about spiritual love and evolution through self-surrender which is the first and perhaps the most important step in spiritual evolution. Kolatkar, Mehrotra and Mahaptra bear the heritage of French symbolism and surrealism, with an inwardness that focuses sharply upon the unconscious.

Since our main concern is Indio-Anglian introspective poetry, we have to go back and take a review of this important trend in Indo-Anglian poetry.

Most of the poets of pre-independence era believed in spirituality as the dominant note of Indian life, whether the poet gave only an
occasional expression to it or was probe in it. They drew upon Indian Myth, legend and history liberally for their plays, narrative poems or lyrics. They believed that an integral philosophy, the philosophy based upon the finest perceptions of East and West, would be the philosophy of the modern world.

Indo-Anglian poetry is Indian first and everything else afterwards. It has focused the aspiration, the joys and sorrows of the Indian people and remained sensitive to the changes in the national climate, striving to express the soul of India. Similarly, its constant endeavor was to express humanity and universality, which has a global appeal.

Generally, poetry like any other literature is concerned with nature, love, man, myth, legend and history. When it is about ideas concerning the external reality, it is reflective poetry and when it reveals the inner self, is termed as introspective poetry. It is the world of poet’s dreams and aspirations. With the internal impact further sustained: metaphysical, devotional, mystical and spiritual poetry, has come into being.
Indo-Anglian poets of this period can be divided into two groups, neo-modernists and neo-symbolists. These two groups of poets employed modernist poetic techniques for conveying their own vision of life. The outlook of the neo-modernist is coloured by humanism and irony. That of neo-symbolist is imbued with mysticism and sublimity. Needless to say, the poets who have felt the impact of Ramkrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Raman Maharshi, Theosophy or Vedanta wrote neo-symbolist poetry. These two groups occasionally seemed to come together in the realms of beauty. But the neo-symbolists thrived because they had a living heritage, which fed their cultural sensibility.

Introspective poetry begins when the searching gaze is turned inward as in Govind Chunder Dutt’s *A Farewell to Romance*. In one of his sonnets, Derozio contemplates on the idea of death and finally takes him as his best friend. Sri Aurobindo goes further in this context and thinks that we fear Death because of our ignorance of the real aim of life. For him, death is a process of evolution in a greater life. Death will die with the experience of Divinity. In his poem *The fear of Death* he writes:

\[
\text{Death is but changing of our robes to wait} \\
\text{In wedding garments at the Eternal’s gate.}^2
\]
In his other poem of six lines *Life and Death*, he dealt with the problem of life and death which are thought for ages as ‘opposites’ to each other. But Sri Aurobindo points out the Vedic conception of rebirth which tells that death is life disguised. So Destruction and Death are essential for the creation of new life.

In *Savitri*, he describes death as –

Death is stair, a door, a stumbling stride
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
A grey defeat pregnant with victory,
A whip to lash us towards our deathless state.³

Sarojini Naidu’s *To my Fairy Francies* is a farewell in which she brings out the tragedy and pathos of her life. Harindranath Complains of the loneliness of heart from which he suffers. But he has realized that this loneliness is a significant prelude to a wroth-while realization. This is so because a divine voice lures him on through the void.

In *Aham* V.N. Bhushan proclaims that he is not a mere mortal but the symbol of sacramental ecstasy.

In J. Krishnamurti’s *The Immortal Friend* Philosophic argument is made poetic through a dramatic presentation. The same device is
adopted in Tagore’s *The Child*, Naidu’s *The Soul’s Prayer* and Harindranath’s *The Earthen Goblet*. Swami Vivekananda’s *The Cup of Kali* draws its poetic sap from its symbolism and its dramatic form. It is symbolism as a contrastive device that is used in Sri Aurobindo’s *The Tiger and the Deer*.

In *The Bird of Fire* Sri Aurobindo delineates the bird as a symbol of divine being, a creature surcharged with divine fire. The idea of supermind is presented through the bird in such a poetic words that the bird looks living, bright and a thing of joy forever. Harindranath’s *Attainment* and Sri Ananda Acharya’s *True Immensity* are remarkable because of their imagery and Nolini Kant Gupta’s *There is no Darkness* because of its paradox and antithesis. Harindranath’s *Dependence* is memorable on account of the striking novelty of its ideas and K.D. Sethna’s *What is Truth?* is noticeable because of the relevance and originality of its reply.

G.K.Chettur’s *Lord of Unnumbered Hopes* and Nizamat Jung’s *Spirit of Light* are charming devotional poems.
There is a kind of fierce exultation and devotion in Swami Vivekananda’s *Kali the Mother*. He writes:

Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction dance,
To him the Mother comes.  

Sri Aurobindo’s *Rose of God* is devotional in its outer form. Spiritual vision is at the core of its inspiration. It is mystical in its symbolism of colours and metaphysical in its implication.

Mystical poetry is the poetry in which a deep and intense inner experience is expressed through images and symbols that flash upon the inward eye of the poet.

Toru Dutta has described her mystic experience in her poem, *The Tree of Life*. She describes how once stood by the side of a tree of spreading branches, an angel who was an image of pity and Divine love, crowned her head with “a few small sprays.”
Mystical poems come from Sri Aurobindo and quite a few from Aurobindonean School of poetry. The poets of Sri Aurobindo Ashram communicate successfully in Indo-Anglian poetry the magic of an inner psychic or overhead perception. Sri Aurobindo’s Revelation conveys transparently the impression of image that has come from Overhead consciousness. On the other hand Thought the paraclete is a highly complex lyric that invites us to witness the gradual disappearance of the many coloured mystical experience when it culminates in bare and naked spiritual vision.

Nirodbaran’s Resurrection tells of the bird that, weary for a while, is moved to voyage toward the lost world by a gold-dripping sun that melts the snow. His Primal source catches mystical vision at a point where it is almost merging into spiritual vision. His The Unknown Creeper is a surrealistic poem. K.D. Sethna’s Pool of Loneliness and Tree of Time offer each a fascinating symbol which becomes the centre of a number of suggestive images. Romen’s The Tree of God, unlike Sethna’s Tree of Time, refers to the cosmic manifestation and is full of vast and sublime imagery. Nahar’s The Winds of Silence and Nishikanto’s Threefold Flower employ mystical imagery to build a consistent philosophic theme. Themis presents mystical illumination
in *Renewal*. In *The Eternal Child* Prithvindra records a mystical perception or dream-experience.

Swami Vivekananda describes Peace as a concrete spiritual experience in his poem *Peace*. In *Trance of Waiting* and *Transformation* Sri Aurobindo describes the human consciousness climbed into the supramental plane and changing so as to be a native of those heights. In *The Burning Truth*, Nolini Kant Gupta speaks of the delight and glory of heaven which is the burning truth opened out to him. These poems can be regarded as poems of the spiritual vision.

Spiritual poetry is illustrated by the story of the soul and the ego in the *Upanishadas* - that of two birds sitting on the same tree, one observing silently and the other enjoying the fruit of the tree. Spiritual poetry is naked and unadorned in its expression. It has the clarity of daylight. The perception is conveyed through a concrete image and with the help of a clearly outlined intellectual substance. In itself the perception is profound and descends from the higher level of inspiration. “The spiritual vision”, says Sri Aurobindo, “must never be intellectual, philosophic or abstract, it must always give the sense of something vivid, living and concrete, a thing of vibrant beauty or a
thing of power.... poetry uttered with the spiritual clarity may be compared to sunlight, poetry uttered with the mystic veil to moonlight.”

The poetry of spiritual vision cannot always be separated from mystical and philosophic poetry. The clarity of spiritual vision can also animate and colour the other two kinds. In fact spiritual vision is seen more in the root than in the flower and fruit, in general conception, plan and approach than in the execution.

Spiritual vision also means a specific degree of attainment or enlightenment. The Soul realization is one step. So the realization of the Individual cosmic, or transcendental Divine has also to be considered. Spiritual vision begins when the individual is in quest of any or all of these realizations. Sri Aurobindo has described these realizations in *Savitri*:

The Superconscient was her native air
Infinity was her movement’s natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time.

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5. The quotation is from Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Hinduism*.
6. The passage is from *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo. The complete excerpt is: "The Superconscient was her native air
Infinity was her movement’s natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time."
The spiritual vision behind poetic creation is perceptible in lines like the following in which the journey of Savitri’s soul, pursuing Death and his victim, Satyavan, is described:

A heaven bird upon jewelled wings of wind
Borne like a coloured and embosomed fire,
By spirit carried in a pear-hued cave,
On through the enchanted dimness moved her soul.7

We may now consider Sri Aurobindo’s poetry of metaphysical argument. Some of his early poems like Who, Rebirth, Parabrahman, Rishi and In the Moonlight are good examples of his metaphysical poetry. The Nine Poems, The Mahatmas and Ahana especially, indicate that this manner is already familiar to the mystical as well. This blending is all the more pronounced in Transformation, Though the Paraclete and Rose of God.

Rishi emphasizes the urgency of evolution of human consciousness towards the divinity. In Ahana Sri Aurobindo talks about the gradual widening of human consciousness from ignorance to perfection. Lastly he experiences that he is also the part of the Divinity or Perfection.
In *Transformation*, Sri Aurobindo expresses divine transformation of his entire being. The poet inspires us with his evolution of consciousness, symphony of words and stream of lyrical rhythm. The poet says:

> My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight.\(^8\)

*Rose of God* is the intense prayer of the seer poet for divine transformation. In this poem, Sri Aurobindo invokes Divine to arise from the yearning heart of mankind to divinize it as well as earth. The flower rose symbolizes not only divine beauty, colour and fragrance but it is the rose of light, power, life and love.

The poem is remarkable for its word music and lyrical harmony. To quote some lines of this poem to see Aurobindo’s lyrical expression:

Rose of God, vermillion stain on the
Sapphires of Heaven,
Rose of bliss, fire –sweet, seven- tinged with
The ecstasies seven.\(^9\)

In all these poems, spiritual vision animates and fuses together thought, passion and visionary power, the last of which gives to
mystical poetry its predominance of symbol. All great poetry shares this quality of fusion.

Sri Aurobindo’s most of the poetry, particularly *Savitri* provides us many fine examples of metaphysical poetry. In this kind of poetry, doctrine should incarnate as imagination, philosophic idea as image. This miracle has been achieved in a sustained manner in Sri Aurobindo’s epic. In the debate between Savitri and Death many systems of philosophy are reviewed. It is discussed in five parts of this journey such as Nihilism in Eternal Night. Idealism in the Twilight of the Ideal, Shankarite Adwaita or Buddhism in the Dream Twilight of the Earthly Real ending in Nirvana, Dwaita in the realm of Eternal Day and Sri Aurobindo’s integral evolutionism in the ineffable world of the Infinite. In Sri Aurobindo’s poetic work, the metaphysical imagination is fused with metaphysical longing and emotion which has produced poetry of the high quality.

Ecstatic lyricism may be the poetry of *bhakti* or eightfold devotion which views Reality as mother, wife, husband, child, servant, master, friend, or beloved. It can also be the poetry of metaphysical longing or anguish, rapture of agony. This kind of ecstasy has always at its back a
metaphysical idea or a mystic perception or both. But it is first and foremost the poetry of passion.

*The Vedantin’s Prayer* is one of Sri Aurobindo’s early poems in this line. *Ahana* and *Rose of God* are two of his well-known utterances, blending metaphysics, passion and mystical experience. There is no end to the wealth of ecstatic passages in *Savitri*. In Book I, canto I, the poet presents in a few lines an unforgettable image of man and his precarious existence:

> And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
> Alone who stares at the future’s covered face,
> Man lifted up the burden of his fate.  

Thus there is major contribution of Sri Aurobindo and Aurobindonian School in pre-independence Indo-Anglian introspective poetry.
Section -B

Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Life- Sketch

While drawing the biographical sketch of Sri Aurobindo one remembers the saying of Shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa, “a doll of salt went to measure depth of the Ocean and dissolved in it.” The only common feeling of all the biographers of Sri Aurobindo is, the fathomless depth of his personality is difficult to decode in words.

Sri Aurobindo has once said, “Nobody except myself can write my life - because it has not been on the surface for man to see.”

From 1910 to 1950- a Span of forty years he led a life of outer retirement in his “Cave of Tapasya” at Pondicherry practicing his ‘integral yoga’. But during this period, he has expressed himself in many ways. He has left for us bulky literature of art, literature, poetry, philosophy, education, politics, psychology, sociology, yoga which emit bright light of a Versatile genius called Sri Aurobindo. Besides, number of letters written by him to his curious disciples answering their questions and clarifying their doubts in the light of his vision, his talks on various subjects recorded by his disciples are important sources to know him
better. This visionary Yogi has written many books for the welfare of humanity.

Philosophers have described him as the greatest synthesis between the East and the West. For critics, he is a poet of versatile genius and a critic with new vision. Social scientists regard him as the builder of a new Society based on enduring values of the life of the spirit. For Yogins, he is the *Mahayogi* in the sunlight of whose splendour they can kindle their own suns. He was the visionary Yogi with unusual power who was working all over his life to bring perfection in the world. His followers believe that in the tranquil benignity of his spiritual presence their hopes, keenest and noblest aspirations can be fulfilled. They believe that forces of light, truth, joy, beauty and sweetness are busy in their task to carry out his will in the creation. They call him ‘avataric incarnation’ known by the world as Sri Aurobindo. There are two famous homages of Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate and an international figure to Sri Aurobindo. The first is to the Aurobindo Ghose, a heroic fighter, new hope for Indian Politics in 1907. The occasion was the arrest and imprisonment of Aurobindo in connection with the editorship of the nationalist paper, *Bande Mataram*. 
Tagore says when he sees Sri Aurobindo’s face he hears, “Mid bondage, pain and wrong and black indignities, the soul’s great song of rapture unconfined.”

The second homage is to the Yogi Aurobindo of Pondicherry Ashram. He saw Aurobindo again twenty-one years later, on 29 May 1928 and has recorded the impressions of this meeting in which he claims that at ‘the very first sight’ he realized that Sri Aurobindo ‘had been seeking for the soul and had gained it’ He found his face ‘radiant with inner light’. His speech reminded Tagore ‘Utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi’ related to the freedom of the human soul. He was sure that Sri Aurobindo had something very significant to say to the world which has to be accepted by it. For Tagore, Sri Aurobindo’s voice was so authentic and representative voice of India that he said to Sri Aurobindo, “India will speak through your voice to the World.” This shows how even senior contemporaries of Sri Aurobindo were deeply influenced by him. Romain Rolland, an eminent French Savant, thinker and writer, a Nobel Laureate has described Sri Aurobindo as “one of the greatest thinkers of modern India” and “the most complete synthesis achieved up to the present between the genius of the West and the East.” Gabriela Mistral, Chilean Nobel Laureate, diplomat and writer expresses his debt to Sri Aurobindo for bringing him to religion and opening the way to his
religious consecration. He regards Sri Aurobindo as “the master, the highest of mystics” and “a unique synthesis of a scholar, theologian and one who is enlightened.”

The powerful spiritual movement started in Bengal with Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa representing Indian spirituality in its true sense and extended by Swami Vivekananda in the world was continued by Sri Aurobindo. It has been mentioned by Sri Aurobindo on several occasions that he was inspired, guided and directed by Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda many times in his sadhana. Perhaps he was the right man to continue and complete their work.

He was the heroic soul, rare spiritual master, the messenger of the light not only for any particular community or country but for the whole World. Tan Yun-Shan, a Chinese scholar and China’s cultural Ambassador to India in 1939 was sure that the history will be repeated and as in the past, China would be once again spiritually conquered by another great Indian, Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo. According to him Sri Aurobindo was “the bringer of that light which will chase away the darkness that envelops the World to -day”. Thus he has given him the place next to Lord Buddha.
Another Frenchman and Philosopher, Paul Richard after meeting Sri Aurobindo left the following record before a Japanese audience:

The hour is coming of great things, of great events, and also of great men, the divine men of Asia. All my life I have sought for them across the world, for my life I have felt they must exist somewhere in the world, that this World would die if they did not live. For they are its light, its heat, its life. It is in Asia that I found the greatest among them the leader, the hero of tomorrow. He is a Hindu. His name is Aurobindo Ghose.

In its issue dated 8 July 1944, Times Literary Supplement, London under the editorship of D.L. Murray, comments on Versatile genius of Sri Aurobindo and his work in the following words. “Of all modern Indian writers Aurobindo-successively poet, critic, scholar, thinker, nationalist, humanist is the most significant and perhaps most interesting.”

It also praises Sri Aurobindo for ceaseless working on his ideals for the better future of the humanity. It regards Sri Aurobindo not only a bookish Philosopher but an activist throughout his life, whose influence is inevitable in future. Further it comments:
Sri Aurobindo is no visionary. He has always acted his dreams... so from individual self discipline he has gone to the life of humanity. *The Psychology of social Development, Ideals and progress* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* should be carefully considered by all those who are busy preparing blueprints for the future.

*Collected work* of Sri Aurobindo reveals the outside world a glimpse of his external personality and give the seeker some idea of its richness, its many-sidedness, its uniqueness. One can also form some notion of Sri Aurobindo’s personality from the books in which the height, the Universal sweep and clear vision of his integral ideal and thought can be seen. His writings are, in a sense, the best representative of his mental personality. The versatile nature of his genius, the penetrating power of his intellect, his extraordinary power of expression, his intense sincerity, his utter singleness of purpose— all the discovery is, Sri Aurobindo has brought the unlimited into the limited. His life, works and action is the revelation of superamental personality.

Aurobindo was the third son of Swarnalata and Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. He was born on 15 August 1872 in the early hours of that Thursday in the aristocratic area of Calcutta. It was the centenary year of the birth of Raja Rammohan Roy, the father of modern India. Nobody knew that his birth date would coincide with the date of freedom of India.
for which he himself had striven. He was named Arobindo meaning Lotus : Symbol of beauty, symbol of divinity.

Aurobindo’s father, Krishnadhan was a very kind hearted and generous man. He worked as a Civil Surgeon at Khulna and Rangpur, towns now in Bangladesh. After receiving his M.D. degree from England, Dr. Ghose developed a strange fancy, almost a mania that lifestyle of English people is ideal and exemplary. He became so English that he did not like anything Indian: neither Indian ways of life nor Indian Education. Nor did he believe in God. Speaking of his father in a passing comment, Aurobindo once said, “My father was a tremendous atheist.” He was brought up in a highly Anglicised atmosphere at home, to the extent that he did not know his mother tongue Bengali. His father intended to bring up his sons in the perfect style and manner of the English society imitating its way of life and thought process. Hence five-year old Auro was put in Loreto convent school in Darjeeling which was otherwise exclusively meant for English children. In 1879, at the age of seven, he along with his brothers was taken to England where he mostly stayed for the next fourteen years with an English family. These fourteen years, from 1879 to 1892, Sri Aurobindo lived in England, partly at Manchester, partly in London, and finally at Cambridge.
Since the age of five Aurobindo lived mainly with English children, he learnt to speak English naturally. At Manchester, he stayed with English friends of his father, William H. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett. He learned from them Latin, French, history, geography and arithmetic. As per the instructions of Dr. Ghose, these children were carefully isolated from the Indians and Indian ways even in England. Thus they grew up practically as English children. These extreme efforts of his father to keep his children away from Indian way of life to make them accomplished Englishmen reminds us extreme efforts of King Siddhodhan, father of Lord Budha to keep him away from all harsh realities of life. Both the fathers wanted to shape future of their sons as per their aspirations, both bright boys came out of this artificial arena created for them and chose their own ways. Both resisted all the temptations of physical life successfully and found the truth by following their own path and enlightened humanity.

Records show that before going to any English school in England, at the Drewtt’s Aurobindo used to spend all his spare time in reading the Bible, the works of Shelley, Keats and Shakespeare. In his tender age, he travelled to his heart’s content in the realms of gold of European literature.
After five years at Manchester, Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul’s, London, in 1884 and studied there for another six years. Finding him a bright and clever student, Dr. Walker, Head master of the school took personal interest in him, taught him Greek and pushed him rapidly into the higher levels. All his abilities found their flowering at St. Paul’s; he took part in discussions, gave talks and lectures. In these five years he read classical literature. Along with proficiency in classics, he acquired some intimacy with French and acquaintance with German, Italian and Spanish. He won the Butterworth prize for literature and the Bedford Prize for history. His school record mentions that he went up to Cambridge with a scholarship to enter King’s college. He had also begun to write verse in English.

Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, was an extremely generous man. He served the poor people of Rangpur, Khulna and wherever he lived, worked for them, cared for them, spent his own money lavishly on them. But many times he could not send money for his sons in England. The fourteen-year old Auro and his brothers faced this most difficult time in England. Two years, specially, passed in great hardships. There was not enough to eat, for there was hardly any money. Auro ate everyday in the morning: a cup of tea and a slice or two of bread. Afternoon: only a cup of tea. Evening: a penny sausage or a sandwich. No hearty dinner for
two long years. In biting, freezing cold of England he had neither an overcoat, nor a fire at home to warm himself, nor a room of his own to! Amidst all these difficulties, he went on studying with single orientation, with great concentration. There he read English poetry and fiction, French literature, the History of Europe, Italian, German and Spanish literature. He surprised all by taking away all the prizes meant for the classics. At King’s college too, Sri Aurobindo did very well. There his scholarship made him financially stable, and, having passed his preliminary test for the ICS, he had a probationer ship stipend as well. One of his tutors, G.M. Prothero certifies this bright student as, he displayed, “very unusual industry and capacity....Besides his classical scholarship he possessed knowledge of English literature for beyond the average of undergraduates and wrote much better English than most young Englishmen.”

Oscar Browning remarked that, although he had examined papers at thirteen examinations, he had never during that period seen such excellent answer papers as Aurobindo’s; and the ‘essay’ a comparative study of Shakespeare and Milton- had been “Wonderful.”

In May 1892 Aurobindo passed the first part of the classical Tripos examination in the first class and proved himself as a classical scholar. Earlier he had also won prizes for Greek and Latin verses.
In August 1892, Aurobindo passed the ICS final examination which opened the way to join the golden service. There was only one more formality left, that of passing the riding test. Between August and November, four different chances were given to him to appear for this test and on, each occasion, he failed to put in an appearance. Evidently he had made up his mind not to go for ICS. Later on justifying decision he said:

I appeared for ICS because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand it. Later I found out what sort of work it was and I had no interest in the administrative life. My interest was in poetry and literature and the study of languages and Patriotic action.  

On the day of last chance to appear for the riding test, he chose to wander in the streets of London. His senior tutors at Cambridge thought it as “a very real loss to the Indian Government.” At the young age of less than twenty one, he had thrown away a glittering prize like ICS for the love of his motherland. Nirodbaran thinks that Subhash Chandra Bose, when he rejected the ICS in 1920, drew his inspiration from Aurobindo’s example.
Eager to return to India, Aurobindo was in search of a suitable job, that came to him by chance. He met the Maharaja of Baroda, Sir Sayajirao Gaikwad in London. He immediately recognized the worth of this young man and engaged him for Rs. 200 a month.

The S.S. Carthage, with Aurobindo on board, duly arrived at Bombay on February 6, 1893. Happenings in this year affected the destiny of India for long time in future. It was the year of Aurobindo’s arrival as well as Swami Vivekananda’s departure to the West. It was this year, Annie Besant arrived in India to do her work for India’s freedom, and Gandhi sailed for South Africa to fight for his compatriots in that country. Tilak started the Ganesh festival for reviving national consciousness, and Aurobindo wrote his first article on Indian nationalism challenging the whole outlook and policy of the then Indian National Congress.

The very touch of the soil of motherland after long period gave him unexpected spiritual experience. When he stepped on the soil of India, “A vast calm descended upon him....and surrounded him and remained with him for long months afterwards.” This was but the auspicious beginning of his long spiritual life.
He experienced on a later occasion a sense of the vacant infinite while walking on the ridge of the *Takht-I-Sulemani* in Kashmir, and Mahakali’s living presence once filled him with rapture on the banks on the Narmada.24

Aurobindo joined his duties in Baroda on 8 February, 1893. His versatile genius was used by Maharaja in different services of the state. He started in the survey settlement Department and then shifted to the stamps office, then to the Central Revenue office and the secretariat, and so at last to the Baroda college, first as lecturer in French, and later as Professor of English- and Vice-Principal. He also used to prepare public speeches for Maharaja.

Aurobindo was a wonderful teacher. Fortunately, a few of his students at Baroda have recorded their impressions. One of his students, R.N. Patkar, writes in his memories:

> It was a treat to hear him on the platform without any gesture or movements of the limbs. He stood, and language flowed like a stream from his lips with natural ease and melody that kept the audience spell-bound. Though it is more than fifty years since I heard him, I still remember his figure and the ring of his melodious voice. 25
Everyone in the college was impressed by Aurobindo. Dr. C.R. Reddy, a colleague, recalls: ‘Dr. Clark, the principal, remarked to me, “So you met Aurobindo Ghose. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond. If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.”’

Aurobindo was loved and highly honored by his students at Baroda College, not only for his profound knowledge but for his saintly character and gentle and gracious manners. Calm and reserved, gentle and kind, he became the centre of respectful attention in Baroda.

During this period Aurobindo read much and studied deeply. His first book of poetry, *Songs to myrtilla* was published. Then *Love and Death* was rapidly written along with other verse. The earliest version of *Savitri* was begun in this period. He read Homer, Dante, Vyasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti and many other great writers. He learnt Sanskrit all by himself and Gujrati and Marathi which were used in Baroda state. He called the well-known author Dinendra Kumar Roy to help him perfect his knowledge of Bengali. During these two years with Aurobindo, he saw number of books arrived by railway parcels, packed in huge cases. There were books in all languages. English, French, German, Italian, Greek, Latin which Aurobindo read up as fast as they came. When he went for his holidays he would take trunkful of books. His Luggage was
“There was not a trace of worldly ambition or of any human selfish motives. He had but one deep yearning, rare even among the gods - to give his whole being as a sacrifice that humanity’s sufferings may disappear.”

At Baroda he studied the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, works of Kalidasa and other authors. He also mastered Vedic, Upanishadic and other spiritual writings to the extent that he wrote extensively on these subjects and issues concerned with them. He was a modern, intuitive thinker with new outlook who disclosed their deeper and truer sense by reinterpretting them very independently and differently. His creative talent was revealed in his interpretations and translations. When Ramesh Chandra Dutt, the well-known Poet, novelist and historian, saw some of his translations of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* during a visit to Baroda, he is said to have remarked: “Had I seen them before, I would never had published mine. It now appears that my translations have been child’s play before yours.”

Besides translations, Aurobindo wrote some notes on the *Mahabharata* as well as comments on the poetic genius of Vyasa and Valmiki. He has taken much from *Mahabharata* for number of his
narrative poems. *Love and Death* is the most outstanding example of it. The story of his supreme creation *Savitri* was taken from *Mahabharata*.

While studying Sanskrit literature, Aurobindo was greatly drawn to the poetic genius of Kalidasa. He became so interested in Kalidasa that he had planned to write a separate book on Kalidasa and also drew an outline. But he couldn’t spare enough time for it and left the attempt. However, he wrote extensively on Kalidasa. He wrote on his important works, the characters in the play, his age and other aspects of his genius. Moreover, he also did some translations of Kalidasa. Of these, *Vikramorvasie* was later published as *The Hero and the Nymph*. Nirodharan reports “ but the manuscript of his translation of Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* could not be discovered, I remember, once talking on the subject Sri Aurobindo said, It is a pity that the translation cannot be found, for it was well done.”

In addition to poems, both short and long, Aurobindo wrote number of plays in blank verse. One of these, *Perseus the Deliverer*, is based on a Greek myth with the idea of evolution and progress.

He was an exceptional classical scholar. In his recently published biography of Sri Aurobindo, *Beyond man*, Georges Van Vrekhem reports, “ An Englishman in later years travelling in India asked: Do you
know where Ghose is now, the classical scholar of Cambridge, who has come away to India to waste his future? "30

Over all, the Baroda period was very productive both in terms of interpretation of ancient Indian culture as well as his literary creations. He had acquired wonderful authority on both Ancient Greek and Ancient Indian literature. In his old age when he dictated a series of articles to Nirodbaran, he remembers:

As he was dictating, I marveled at so much knowledge of Ancient Greece and Ancient India stored up somewhere in his superconscious memory and now pouring down at his command in a smooth flow. No notes were consulted, no books were needed, yet after a lapse of so many decades everything was fresh, spontaneous and recalled in vivid detail.31

During the period of only six months in India, he had studied everything about the political movement, the conditions of the country, the patriotic activities, the leaders, their ways, and their ideas. Aurobindo was invited to write a series of articles in *Indu Prakash* on all these subjects. Seizing the opportunity, Aurobindo contributed his views in it and thus began his first political activity. He entered into politics in 1903 and continued it till 1910. He worked in Politics with the single aim to prepare mind of people for settled will of freedom and the necessary
struggle to achieve it. He was the first fearless advocate of complete independence at the time when most of the congress leaders, would talk only of colonial self Government. He was also the first revolutionary leader who gave a strong substitute for the policy of mendicancy, of self-help and passive resistance to achieve the goal followed by the then congress. He advocated these bold ideas publicly at that time when all these things were considered by majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible.

In the series of articles titled as New Lamps for old, he criticized the subservient attitude of the congress towards the British rulers in bold words. During his last years in Baroda, his political activities grew more intense. He met with like-minded people and started to guide revolutionary young men like his brother Barin, Jatindranath Banerjee. He used his holidays in Bengal for revolutionary purpose. In April 1901, he married Mrinalini, daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose. The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905 caused turmoil in India, particularly in Bengal. Aurobindo was in close touch with the situation. He soon became one of the Leaders of the nationalists, often called ‘extremists’, who strongly worked for India’s unconditional and total independence. Because of his writings in Bande Mataram, he had already became nationally known political personality. Within the
congress, he worked with other extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal for the acceptance of a radical programme. “He preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public” 32 but his prosecution in 1907 spoiled his policy and he became a national celebrity.

In 1907 when Aurobindo travelled in chartered train to Surat, “the whole thousand mile route from Kharagpur to Surat,” remembers Barin, “was a triumphal journey of lights, crowds and continued cheering.... at very small and big station a frantic crowd rushed about in the station platform looking for him...” 33 He had become so powerful leader in the group of extremists that it was he who gave the order without consulting Tilak that led to the breaking of the congress in Surat. In his letters to his wife, Mrinalini later- on discovered by police, we come to know about the first statement of the burning aspiration of his soul, his thirst for God, his intense yearning to see him, and his passionate love for his motherland. In a letter dated August 30, 1905, Aurobindo says:

I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race.... This is not a new feeling within me, I was born with it, and it is in my very marrow. It is to accomplish this great mission that God has sent me to the earth. 34
In another letter he wrote, “In these dark days, the entire country is seeking refuge at my door. Among the thirty crores of my brothers and sisters many are dying from hunger and starvation...They must be helped.”

Aurobindo was thinking with the missionary spirit exactly like Swami Vivekananda. In this dynamic pursuit, and accepting its dangers without a second thought, he attempted all and achieved all. On April 30, 1908 at Muzzaffarpur, there was an attempt to throw a bomb at the District magistrate. Though Aurobindo had no hand in it, he was arrested along with several revolutionaries, and taken to Alipore Jail. During his imprisonment, Aurobindo spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation. During the year in Jail, he had several spiritual experiences which gave him new direction in life. Among which the most important experience was the ‘Vasudeva Darshan’ everywhere and in everybody. During this period a new and glorious transformation came upon him. This one year in Alipore jail was very significant for his future. The nationalist and political leader was now changed wholly into a mystic and a Yogi. Another world opened out in front of Aurobindo.
Barrister C.R. Das defended Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb case.

In his concluding argument, he made an inspired appeal:

My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History. And my appeal to you is this: that long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. 36

Aurobindo was acquitted but still, Viceroy of India Lord Minto called him ‘the most dangerous man’ in India.

In the beginning of 1910 Aurobindo was warned by Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda about the trap set for him. It was the time for him to leave the scene. As a farewell he wrote an article, his political testament in the Karmayogin the weekly he had started after coming out from the jail. His inner voice gave him ‘marching orders’.

Less than half an hour after the warning, he was on the Ganges in a boat that took him to Chandernagore, a French enclave a few miles to the
North of Calcutta. After more than a month in absolute seclusion, he travelled, on “SS Dupleix” from Calcutta to Pondicherry. He arrived there on 4 April 1910 and lived there for the rest forty years of his life.

Thus the political period of Aurobindo’s life had come to an end. This was the brief period of 8 years. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose remembers that despite Aurobindo’s exile he was very popular and almost a legendary figure in Bengal.

In Pondicherry, his ‘cave of tapasya’, a new chapter had opened. In meditative hours, he was busy with his yogic pursuit. In a letter dated 12 July 1911, a year after his coming to Pondicherry, he tells us what he was busy with:

I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the Spiritual on the material plane...What I perceive most clearly, is that the principal object of my Yoga is to remove absolutely and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness...It is for this reason that I have been going through so long a discipline and that the more brilliant and mighty results of Yoga have been so long withheld. I have been kept busy laying down the foundation, a work severe and painful. It is only now that the edifice is beginning to rise upon the sure and perfect foundation that has been laid.
As he was moving forward in his yoga-Sadhana, his whole personality was being mystically changed. Outward results of that inner journey towards the light could be easily seen. Alexandra David Neel, a lady related with Tibetan Occultism, met Sri Aurobindo in 1912. She reports that she was deeply impressed by “the special magnetism that flew out of his presence, and the occult hold he had over those who surrounded him.”

While travelling through different phases of spiritual life he had variety of rich yogic experiences. Sri Aurobindo meticulously observed it as a scientist. Glimpses of this phenomenal yogic journey are recorded by him in his diary. It contains the period between 1912-1920. This unique record, collectively called Record of Yoga is like a laboratory record book on experiments in Yoga. It provides authentic information of the day to day growth of the spiritual faculties of an advanced Yogin in unliterary language.

In 1914, Mirra Alfassa, the destined collaborator of him came to Pondicherry from France and joined his divine venture. The day after her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo on March 30, she wrote in her Meditations:
It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the deepest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is here on earth. His presence is enough to prove that a day shall come when darkness shall be transformed into light when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

Her husband, Paul Richard, a French thinker and scholar, persuaded Sri Aurobindo to start a Philosophical journal to give the World his vision and knowledge in terms of intellect. Thus *Arya* Philosophical Review, was started on August 15, 1914, Sri Aurobindo’s forty-second birthday. Between 1914-1920, in one vast sweep, Sri Aurobindo wrote almost the whole of his work, nearly five thousand pages, and most strangely, not one book after another, but four, five even six books serialized at a time! It went on for seventy-eight months. Sri Aurobindo’s main works all except his great epic, *Savitri* were first written for *Arya*.

*The life Divine* (1955) is the philosophical masterpiece of the Century. In *The synthesis of Yoga* (1948), Sri Aurobindo describes in detail the synthetic yogic method, worked out by him. The secret of the *Veda* (1956) gives a reinterpretation of the *Vedas*, the most meaningful revelations ever received by mankind. His translations from the Vedas were later collected under the title, *Hymns to the mystic fire* (1946). Articles about a future mantric poetry were published as *The Future*
Poetry (1953) In Essays on the Gita (1926), he wrote down his interpretation of Bhagavad Gita. The human cycle (1971) and The ideal of Human unity (1950) are his social writings about man as social being and key to bring unity and harmony in the world.

Though the world acclaim him as a philosopher, he denies it. Once he said, “let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher” 39 The life Divine, says Sri Aurobindo, “is not philosophy but fact. It contains all that I have realised and seen. I wrote the Arya, really speaking, for myself. I wanted to throw out certain things that were moving in my mind. I did not write it for others and so I did not care to write with that purpose” 40 This is how the Arya came out. His philosophy is closely associated with philosophy of Upanishadas and the Gita.

To his major works should be added his vast number of letters, poems, plays and essays, compressing thirty volumes of his collected works. They show the range and extent of his literary creations. His files of manuscripts contain a surprising variety of his writings, especially poems - dramas and narratives - in English, French, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and Bengali. He wrote Sanskrit grammar for the mother.
Sri Aurobindo had started writing epic *Illion* in Alipore jail. He took it up again and worked upon it at Pondicherry. In the midst of his multi-dimensional *Arya*-writing, Sri Aurobindo also worked on his magnum opus *Savitri*, which became a poetic record of his Yoga. He was not only a poet but a poet maker. Inspired by his poetry and new poetic theory, a new ‘Aurobindonian school of poetry’ developed in Ashram of Pondicherry.

In his yogic Sadhana, his attempts were chiefly directed towards supramentalisation of the mental planes that presently govern our evolutionary consciousness. November 24, 1926 was called the day of Victory in Ashram for the higher power descended on the day. It was a great step in Sri Aurobindo’s work. Later it is believed that the supermind was manifested in the earth’s subtle physical on 29 February 1956.

Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5 December 1950, Tuesday at 1.26 a.m. In crimson-gold splendour it lay there for 111 hours before it was put in the samadhi.
In *Vivekchudamani*, Sri Shankara says that Atman and Brahma which is ever present reality make themselves manifest, provided certain conditions are met and does not depend upon either place, or time, or ceremonial purity. This kind of unity manifested in Sri Aurobindo in true sense.
References


14. Ibid P.10

15. Ibid P.11

16. Ibid P.11


20. Ibid P.22


22. Ibid P.19


26. Ibid P.27


29. Ibid P.28


35. Ibid


