Chapter – II

Sri Aurobindo: A Poet and a Critic

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Poetic Career of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry stands apart in Indo-Anglian poetry and offers scope for critical assessment. Sri Aurobindo was not merely a writer who happened to write in English, but really an English writer. English was close and natural language to him more than his mother-tongue and his belief that “Many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen”\(^1\) is proved by his own writings.

Sri Aurobindo himself has once declared that he had been first and foremost a poet, that the poet was the earliest-side of his personality, the primal aspect. None of the other aspects of his personality coming later clouded the poet. “The poet grew along with them (other aspects of his personality). Possibly they grew out of him and it was the poet who exceeded himself with their coming. Sri Aurobindo the poet chose to transcend his art. The wielder of the poetic art was basic to Sri Aurobindo’s grand whole.”\(^2\)

His poetic career spreads over a period of sixty years from 1890 to 1950 during which he has enriched the poetical literature of English
language. In this long and versatile poetic career, we have on one hand poetry inspired by the Romantic poets and the Victorians and on the other hand poetry distinctly futurist in aim and influenced by achievement flowing spontaneously from his yogic experiences.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic career began in England, developed in Baroda, Calcutta and reached its height at Pondicherry. Along with his yogic life, his poetic career also went through a process of gradual evolution. His poetic development followed the evolution of consciousness in his life and thus his poetry reveals ‘the Adventure of consciousness’.

While his earlier poetry is sensuous and romantic, his later poetry reveals him as a prophet and seer - poet. It is delightful to observe and analyse the evolution of his poetry from the sensuous poetry to the inwardly growing prophetic, spiritual and mystic poetry. The poetic genius began as the spontaneous lyrical impulse, grew and matured in narrative and dramatic poetry and reached to perfection in epic. Throughout his long career in different fields like teaching, journalism, politics, Yoga and philosophy he never abandoned his first love, poetry. He has written - lyrical, narrative, dramatic, epic, which, in volume and in variety, in quantity and in quality can be compared with the work of the
greatest poets who have enriched the poetic field of the world. He tried to use the English tongue for the highest spiritual expression. It was his confirmed view that English language has flexibility and adaptability, and thus a greater potentiality of development for the expression of the spiritual truth of the New Age. In his writing he constantly tried to realize this potentiality. Undoubtedly, the worth of his poetry, which in its outbursts of spiritual inspiration and vision achieves the utterance of the Mantra. The Muse had touched his lips in his teens and drawn from them some fine lyrics. He was writing poetry since his stay in England but he could not get due recognition among the critics. He was well known as a philosopher, Yogi, Prophet of nationalism, journalist but very few knew him as a poet before his publication of *Collected Poems* on his 70th birthday. It is partly because his aim was not success and personal fame, but to express spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry. It was in 1942 that Sri Aurobindo appeared prominently as a poet with the publication of his ‘*Collected poems and plays*’. The publisher’s note states:

> The work presented here is only a small portion of what he has actually written, but bulk of which has not yet seen the light of day. Yet it is hoped that even this fragment will serve to give an idea of the poetic genius that seeks expression in it. Sri Aurobindo, once said that he had been first and foremost a poet and politician, only later he became a Yogi. We can safely amend the statement by saying that even before he became a
politician he had been a poet, indeed he was born as a poet and
he is a born poet.3

After the *Collected Poems and Plays* his poems were published in book form - *Poems, Past and Present* (1946), *Last Poems* (1952), *More Poems* (1950), *Savitri*, including the author's letters on the poem, (1954) and now all his poems, excluding *Savitri* are published in one volume *Collected Poems* (1972). With the publication of these works the large number of readers had an opportunity to know Sri Aurobindo, the poet. K.D. Sethna’s *The poetic genius of Sri Aurobindo* (1947) was the first book exclusively devoted to the critical evaluation of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. K.D. Sethna, a poet and a critic had the unique privilege of having an intimate correspondence with Sri Aurobindo about his poetry. He has done great work by raising so many questions due to which Sri Aurobindo could express his views on many angles of poetry and criticism. There are works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, A.B. Purani, V.K. Gokak, K.R.S. Iyengar, M.P. Pandit, Nirodbaran, Dilip Kumar Roy on the life of Sri Aurobindo and they had the privilege of being the associates of Sri Aurobindo. Later on many scholars attracted to the study of his poetry and literary genius. Some prominent scholars who explored commented upon his writings are - Sisirkumar Ghose, Ravindra Khanna, Romen, Rajanikant Mody, Rakhaldas Bosu, V.Madhusudan Reddy, T.V.
There are three main sources of study of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic theory- *The Future Poetry*, *Letters* and his *Talks* with his disciples. His essays in criticism were provoked by the books of others or written in reply to the request of literary minded seekers at his Ashram or recorded as an illustration of his own method of study and translation of the Indian Classics. *The Future Poetry*, his principal book of literary criticism, originally a long serially- written essays published in the *Arya* from 1917 to 1920, was published in book form in 1953. Except *The Future Poetry* all his critical opinions and views are to be found mostly in his letters. The third series is exclusively devoted to his views on poetry and literature; there are *Letters on Savitri* and *Letters on Life, Literature, Yoga*. These letters carry their unique wisdom and vast knowledge. They are addition to his aesthetic pronouncements. His talks, recorded by two disciples A.B. Purani and Nirodbaran, bring forth many of his illuminating comments on his own poetry and poetry in general. His critical writings show him to be a literary critic of great power and range. As a critic, moving with case among the literatures of the East and the
West, he has given us a theory of poetry which combines the insights on the past, the self questioning of the present and the vision of the future.

The poetry of Sri Aurobindo has been responded in three ways; one that shows absolute ignorance about Sri Aurobindo as a poet, as George Sampson has referred to Sri Aurobindo as “more famous as an exponent of Indian nationalism than as a poet.” The concise Cambridge History of English Literature in an article on Indian Literature in Cassell’s Encyclopaedia of Literature, Vol. I (1953) refers to Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu but fails to mention Sri Aurobindo at all. Second, there is a group which shows the appreciation of his poetry in superlatives. Critics and writers like Nolini Kant Gupta, M.P. Pandit, Nirodbaran, K.D. Sethna and most of the scholars belonged to this group. And finally, there is the denouncing criticism condemning Sri Aurobindo’s poetry as ‘blurred and rubbery sentiment’ which is the ‘most dangerous thing that infects our poetry today.’ P. Lal, Nissim Ezekiel and K.N. Daruwalla fall in this group. K.R.S. Iyengar has tried to make a balance between these extreme views. He thinks that a new kind of poetry like Sri Aurobindo’s demands a new mentality in readers as well as in critics. He firmly states, “Without question, Sri Aurobindo is the one incontestably outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian literature.” According to K.D. Sethna, Sri Aurobindo has done three exceedingly rare
things. Firstly, he has to his credit a bulk of excellent blank verse. At least five thousand lines in the collected poems and plays are charged with beauty, power and superb frenzy. The huge epic Savitri, which contains another twenty four thousand lines, places him in the company of top-rankers of first-rate quality. Secondly, he was a fine practitioner of quantitative hexameter. Thirdly, he stands as the creator of new Vedic and Upanishadic age of spiritual and mystic poetry.

Though Sri Aurobindo himself was the best judge of his poetry, he was deeply aware of the estimation of his work by others. He understood the fact that the present age with its limitations cannot respond adequately to the spiritual inspiration and vision his poetry brings. In his remark on the criticism of his poetry he says:

It is a misfortune of my poetry from the point of view of recognition that the earlier work forming the bulk of the 'Collected poems' belongs to the past and has little chance of recognition. Now that the aesthetic atmosphere has so violently changed, while the later mystical work and Savitri belong to the future and will possibly have to wait for recognition of any merit they have for another strong change.\(^4\)

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry cannot be properly judged by the traditional canons of criticism. He has created his own aesthetics, the ‘Overmind’
aesthetics as he calls it. A proper estimate of his poetry, ‘overhead poetry’, is possible only on the basis of his poetic theory. There is an unparalleled harmony between his poetic aim and poetic achievements. Both his theory and poetry extend our sensibilities to new areas of thought and feeling.

T.S. Eliot in his famous essay Tradition and Individual Talent says that poet should not be judged isolated from his predecessors and tradition that has great significance to poets. In this essay Eliot, in his own words says, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.” Sri Aurobindo is no exception to this tradition. When we study Sri Aurobindo's poetry from this point of view, we can trace such influences in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry which must have been assimilated in his ideas loosing their identity in his emerging genius. We cannot find in the realm of literature anything that escapes the suspicion of ‘heard before’. Absolute originality is rare, almost non-existent for, as Sri Aurobindo, says, “We are all those who went before us with something new added that is ourselves, and it is this something added that transfigures and is the real originality.”

Sri Aurobindo has acknowledged the influence of the poets that inspired him. He writes in a letter:
Some influence of most of the great English poets and of others also, not English, can be traced in my poetry- I can myself see that of Milton, sometimes of Wordsworth and Arnold; but it was of the automatic kind- they came in unnoticed. I am not aware of much influence of Shelley and Coleridge, but since I read Shelley a great deal and took an intense pleasure in some of Coleridge’s poetry, they may have been there without my knowledge. The one work of Keats that influenced me was *Hyperion* I dare say my blank verse got something of his stamp through that.  

He accepts the influence of Stephen Phillips, Meredith, Tennyson, Swinburne, Arnold and others in his letters:

The only romantic poets of the Victorian Age who could have had any influence on me, apart from Arnold whose effect on me was considerable, were Tennyson perhaps, subconsciously, and Swinbume of the earlier poems, for his later work I did not at all admire.

He dedicated his Love and Death to his elder brother Manmohan Ghose, who was a classmate of Laurence Binyon, and a friend of Oscar Wilde, and who must have been a great inspiration for him in England. He was also very intimate with Stephen Phillips. Manmohan's influence stimulated Aurobindo to read the classical poets.
Sri Aurobindo expresses his gratefulness to Manmohan Ghose in a letter to him,

Unknown to yourself, you taught and encouraged me from my childhood to be a poet. From your sun my farthing rush-light was kindled, and it was in your path that I long strove to guide my uncertain and faltering footsteps. 

Manmohan Ghose was working as a professor of English in Presidency College when Sri Aurobindo was busy in national Movement. In those days, he used to rush in utter anxiety to his brother Aurobindo to remind him that he was a born poet and should not plunge into politics.

At Baroda, He was greatly influenced by classics from Sanskrit literature of India. Literature of Vyasa, Valmiki, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bhratrihari, Vidyapati, Tulsidas, Chandidas introduced him to Indian way of life, culture, philosophy, literature and spirituality. Sri Aurobindo had not only the historical sense of Indian tradition but he had drunk the nectar of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

In Sri Aurobindo’s relation with the poets of the Vedas and the Upanishads we may again remember T.S. Eliot’s concept of Tradition according to which tradition is not something hereditary, one has to acquire it by much labour. Sri Aurobindo is a descendent of the Vedic
seers. He has hastened the Vedic poetic tradition in his own poetry, particularly in Savitri. Like Vedic and Upanishadic seers, he rose up and faced the Absolute light and came down to transcribe this soul experience and God experience in poetry.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetic genius bloomed softly at an extraordinary tender age in an alien land. At the age of nineteen he was an unmistakable poet. In the span of nearly fourteen years in England, the most formative time in his cultural make-up and intellectual set-up, he read with great fondness and keen interest English poetry, literature and fiction and as he himself says, “spent much time too in writing poetry.”

His first book of verse, songs to myrtilla, contains poems written mostly between the age of 18 and 20. These are the youthful poems, mainly secular and rich in experiment. These are poems of love and beauty, youthful outburst of joy and despair and of patriotic zeal. As Rameshwar Gupta rightly observes,

His earliest poetry is a lyrical impulse.... a joyous reaction to the beauty of nature and the grace and charm of human feelings; the reaction of a fresh, pure poetic sensibility when youth only half-opens itself to the world around; reminiscent of the early lyrical Milton, Spencer, and the sensuous Keats. The Shelley of unpremeditated strains.
His lyrics such as *Songs to Myrtilla* and *Night by the Sea*, for having sensuous imagery, remind early poems of Keats. *Love in Sorrow* is filled with the sense of misery and despondency. The poem has a lyrical note close to Shelley. The Sonnet *To the Cuckoo* is typical, thoroughly English, reminding one of Wordsworth's address to the bird.

The poems of this period are inspired by not only the creative emotions like joy and melancholy, but by episodes of violence like the Irish fight for freedom. The poems like *Charles Stewart Parnell, Lines on Ireland* were inspired by his sympathy for the misfortunes of Ireland.

There are some memorial poems in which he pays tributes to Goethe, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Madhusudan Dutta and his grandfather Raj Narayan Bose. With classical scholarship he calls Goethe

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\text{A perfect face amid barbarian faces,} \nonumber
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\text{A perfect voice of sweet and serious rhyme,} \nonumber
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\text{Traveller with calm, inimitable, paces,} \nonumber
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\text{Critic with judgement absolute to all time.} \nonumber
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In the poems *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee* and *Madhusudan Dutta* he paid his tributes to the literary glory of these two great writers of Bengal. He
addresses Bankim Chandra as ‘Master of delicious words’ and ‘The Sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.’ 12 And Madhusudan Dutt –

    Poet, the first with skill inspired did teach
    Greatness to our divine Bengali Speech. 13

His More Poems (1957) reveal the poet's deep interest in the classics. The poems have classical form and pastoral setting. These sonnets are significant as they mark a departure from the poet’s early romantic poetry and provide a foretaste of the future poems.

The poet himself was not satisfied with these early writings. In his own estimate of these poems in the last poem Envoi, he calls them:

    Pale poems, weak and few, who vainly use
    Your wings towards the unattainable spheres
    Offspring of the divined Hellenic Music,
    Poor maimed children born of six disastrous years. 14

As Sri Aurobindo says:

    What these poems express is the education and imaginations and ideas and feelings created by a purely European culture and surroundings. In the same way the poems on Indian subjects and surroundings in the same book express the first reactions to India and Indian culture after the return home and a first acquaintance with these things. 15
In *Songs to Myrtilla* we find Sri Aurobindo in the early work-shop reminiscent of the Elizabethans and the Romantics. Whether we find him moved to joy or touched to melancholy by the hues and harmonies of life, there is a quality in him which proves that there is the first utterance of an exceptionally gifted mind.

The Baroda period reveals considerable literary activity marked by a variety of inspiration. After a concentrated study of the great literature of India, he started writing poems on Indian subjects and surroundings. He revealed some of the beauties of Bengali and Sanskrit literatures. From Sanskrit he made translations of three remarkable works Kalidasa's *Meghduta*, *Vikramorvasie* and *Niti Shataka* of Bhratarhari. He translated or rather transmuted into English many lyrical verses of Chandidas and Vidyapati and many other Vaishnava poets. Iyengar observes, “Indeed, some of these so called translations are so good and so feast the ear and chasten the mind that they may more appropriately be described rather as transfigurations in terms of colour, sound and in wrought imagery.”

One of the early works of this period is *Urvasie*, a narrative poem in four cantos, written in 1893. He recreates the eternal nymph of *Rigveda*, the story of ‘Godess won to mortal arms.’ King Pururuvus falls in love with this banished Apsara from Heaven. They live together on earth for
may years but bound by the laws of Heaven, she unwillingly returns to Heaven. Then follows the agony of Pururvus and his long wanderings in search of her and finally their conditional union. But the intensity of the hero's love, the strenuous penance he is ready to undergo and - Urvasie's response compel the compassion of unwilling Gods and the lovers are rewarded the boon of permanent natural union.

With *Urvasie* Sri Aurobindo started his adventure in the narrative realms and seems to be spreading his wings for a mightier flight. It is a rich and beautiful romantic work raised to epic heights. We have in the poem abundance of sensuous passages and exaltation of love and passion of beauty. There is effective use of epic similes and impressive sweep and flow of blank verse. *Urvasie* is the first achievement in the field of narrative poetry and in many ways it seems to be a presage to *Savitri*. It has subtle fusion of the earthly with the celestial and suggestion of the union of earth and heaven.

Sri Aurobindo comes forward as a mature narrative poet with *Love and Death* (1899), a companion poem, somewhat shorter than *Urvasie*. It is on the same theme and possesses the same intensity of emotion and richness of music. The theme is Ruru’s visit to the nether regions to bring back his beloved, Priyamvada, who died untimely of snakebite. The poem
ends with victory of love over Hell. “In *Love and Death* the Hellenic story of Orpheus and Eurydice is transformed into a tale of love, Hindu in setting, sentiment and expression.” As Sri Aurobindo remembers, the poem is written in a heat of inspiration during fourteen days of continuous writing in the mornings. The poem is full of youthful vitality combined with an intense love of life. Secondly, the picture of Hell in words is described with such vividness that it reminds Milton's vivification of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. Thus, the sole theme of the poem is that love can conquer all, not only terrestrial obstacles but the invisible dark hell also.

Then he wrote the patriotic poem *Baji Prabhu*. The poem deals with one of the most memorial patriotic incident happened in the history of Marathas. It is the story of heroic self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhu Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji's retreat, bravely stopped twelve thousand Moghuls at the narrow pass with a small company of dedicated soldiers. The poem was written when he himself had taken part in national activity. Thus no wonder that he was inspired by the glories of Maratha History. According to Prof. Nirmalya Ghatak, “This long historical poem symbolizes his own spirit of revolution against the British Government.” *Baji Prabhu*, written in blank verse is Sri Aurobindo's
important contribution to patriotic literature. K.R.S.Iyengar has ranked it “among the best heroic poems in English language.”

**Vidula** is another poem having national significance in which Sri Aurobindo connects this idea to Mother India and her disheartened children. Sunjoy is a dethroned king by enemy. He becomes so disheartened and dejected that he loses his heart to regain his lost Kingdom. Vidula, his mother, in a flaming spirit, rouses the unmanly son to action.

Then comes phase of his lyrical poems. In these days he was experiencing various stages of Yoga, and his best lyrics are expressions of spiritual states, truths or experiences.

These later lyrics may be divided into two groups- the philosophical poems and the lyrics of spiritual realizations.

Some of the early philosophical poems are inspired by his growing familiarity with Vedantic ideas and ideals. They are rhythmic and poetic expressions of the ponderings over God, man and Nature, providence and fate and other philosophical generalizations. They occupy a roughly middle place in the evolution of Sri Aurobindo's poetic art. The poem
Rishi presents the *Upanishadic* philosophy. There are number of short poems which are poetic and condensed expressions of philosophical truths. He has rendered his mystical experiences into these poems.

*The Nine poems* ending with *Ahana* carry us a step further in the poetic development of Sri Aurobindo. Here imagination and inspired thoughts are deepened into vision and realization. These poems express his ideas of evolution, creation and Mahatmahood. In *Ahana*, the long poem in rhymed hexameter, all the attempts of man to know the unknowable are presented and discussed. There is the idealist Vedanta philosophy. Materialistic philosophy, idea of conscious *Shakti* and unconscious *Prakriti*.

The lyrics of spiritual realization published in *poems: past and present* and *Last poem*. It was a step further in Sri Aurobindo's poetic evolution. Unlike the poetry of problem, debate and criticism, here is a new world of insight and subjective experiences, Yogic and mystical experiences are presented in rhythm and music. *Descent, A God's labour, A Bird of fire, Thought the paraclete, The Rose of God* are excellent poems of this kind of poetry. They reveal Sri Aurobindo's mystic experiences. These poems aim to achieve the status of Vedic Mantra. These poems translate Sri Aurobindo's theory of Overhead poetry into
practical achievement. Most of his later lyrics are sonnets. They express substance of his philosophical concepts. Ideas like ‘The Kingdom within’, ‘The inconscient’, ‘Liberation’, ‘Cosmic consciousness’, ‘Immortality’, ‘Evolution’, ‘Transformation’, ‘Nirvana’ are the contents of his sonnets. They are the examples of Sri Aurobindo's opinion that “there is also a poetry which expresses things with an absolute truth but without effort, simply and easily, without a word in excess or any laying on of colour, only just the necessary.”20
Section- B

Savitri- An Introduction

Sri Aurobindo considered Savitri as his “main work.” This poem is a many-hued thousand petalled lotus in the history of poetry. As greatly influenced by Greek and Roman literature at the impressionable time of his life in England, no wonder that he wrote the poem out of myth and legend. It contains symbolic and epic qualities and the inner drama of a growing soul through various stages of human life to the supramental world of light, love and immortality of all divine forces. Love has been placed on the highest level by which Savitri conquers even Death, the oldest Dark Force.

Sri Aurobindo was engaged with the composition of Savitri for fifty years though with some long gaps in between. The epic poetry written in blank verse form running almost to twenty-four thousand lines. Divided into twelve Books as is the tradition for an epic, it has forty-eight Cantos and an Epilogue. Part I consisting of the first twenty-four Cantos was published in September 1950; Part II and Part III as a single volume appeared in May 1951. Savitri with its 23,813 lines is the longest poem in the English language. In Savitri Sri Aurobindo has symbolized a
legendary episode from the *Mahabharata*. By his spiritual attainments and realization precisely he has shown the ‘quest for perfection’ and the descent of supramental force and consciousness on this earth through Savitri and Satyavan. In one of the letters on Savitri Sri Aurobindo writes that, “What I am trying everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced.”

He worked upon it again and again until the kind of Yogic as well as literary perfection he wanted was achieved in it. Thus Savitri is also a Yogi's spiritual autobiography, the mirror of his quest for Perfection.

Sri Aurobindo called *Savitri*—‘a legend and a symbol.’ The original legend of Savitri narrated in three hundred verses, appears in the *Vana Parva*- *The book of the forest*, of the *Mahabharata* The Legend goes as follows: Savitri, daughter of King Aswapati, understates in her magnificent ‘Carved Car’ a journey to choose for herself a husband, as was the custom of the time. At the edge of a forest, she meets Satyavan and they fell in love. Satyavan is the son of the blind King Dyumatsena who has lost his throne to a usurper and been banished to the forest. Savitri returns home to tell her parents that she has found the man of her choice and that she wants to marry him. However, she hears from the heavenly singer and seer Narad that a curse rests on Satyavan: He must
die in exactly a year's time. In her love for Satyavan, Savitri refuses to go back on her decision. The marriage takes place and she goes to live with her husband and his parents in their hermitage in the forest. There she shares the hermit's way of life and performs assiduously all the duties of an Indian wife. On the appointed day of Satyavan's death, Savitri accompanies her unsuspecting husband who goes to cut wood in the forest. There Yama, the God of Death, awaits him with the noose with which he leads the souls in the realms beyond. Satyavan dies but Savitri keeps closely following the two. She is able to do it because of her occult and spiritual powers, acquired through severe ascetic discipline. Threats and promises of Death fail to move Savitri or change her mind. So great is Savitri’s strength that Yama at long last lets Satyavan return to life on earth. When Savitri and Satyavan return to their hermitage in the forest, a messenger arrives to inform Dyumatsena, who has miraculously regained his eyesight, that the usurper has died and that the people want him back as their King. In this happy ending, Savitri alone knows of the drama that has taken place in regions inaccessible to human eyes and thought.

This legend of Satyavan and Savitri is so powerful and popular that even in these modern days it is believed that it strengthens marriage bonds. The legend is memorable because it ensures the human victory over the death. The very idea to fight against death and regain life is
uncommon. In other epics, the story ends with the death of the hero. In _Savitri_, the real story begins after the death of the hero. The battle is fought after his death and Savitri, the heroine, perhaps the bravest of all epic heroes and heroines, fights against death itself and wins the victory for the life of her husband.

As Sri Aurobindo calls _Savitri_ a legend and a symbol, characters, dialogues and actions are symbolic. They symbolize something that is beyond their mortal existence. As per Aurobindonian philosophy which is based on his Yogic realizations, there are forces of light and forces of darkness working in this world. They affect human life. Characters in _Savitri_ are incarnation of such forces. They have taken human shape to teach something to man and to help him. They symbolically show him the way from his present mortal stage to immortal life.

So far the legend, used by Sri Aurobindo as a symbol, Satyavan represents the embodied soul of humanity and Savitri an incarnation of the Great Mother, descended upon earth to save that soul from the night of suffering and death.

In the Mother’s words _Savitri_ is the “Supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision.”

Its subject is universal and its revelation is
prophetic. ‘Quest for perfection’ in this long and difficult evolutionary process and a divine fulfillment is its theme. The words of the story of Savitri-daughter of the Sun or light of the Supreme, can illumine us with the truth. R.Y. Deshpande says, “Savitri is a song of joy....the mantra of the Real in whose body of silence is enshrined the soul of Rapture, Anand Rasa following in the ocean of Shanta Rasa.”

Raymond F. Piper, professor of Syracuse University in the USA has given the following appraisal of Savitri:

During a period of nearly fifty years Sri Aurobindo created what is probably the greatest epic in the English Language.... I venture the judgement that it is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a Primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence, and metaphorical brilliance. Savitri is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute.

Savitri deals with the Vedic idea of the struggle between powers of light and powers of darkness. Focusing on this aspect as a theme of the poem, A.B.Purani, one of the prominent scholars on Savitri says:
In raising this basic problem of elimination of the Inconscient, the cause of man's subjection to his imperfection, suffering and evil, *Savitri* is unique, and goes deeper than other epics towards its solution. It calls out the Divine that is hidden at present in the human mould to deal direct with the problem of man's emancipation and of establishment of the divine kingdom on earth.\(^{26}\)

*Savitri* is about the problem of man's imperfection and his quest for perfection. It is about how Paradise is lost and how to regain it. *Savitri* gives us the message that ‘The life Divine’ can be established not by escaping into Heaven but by bringing it down on earth, not by retreating from life but by confronting, mastering and transforming it. The poem presents the essential *upanishadic* philosophy, the ultimate purpose of human life. Sri Aurobindo's long poetic career finally achieved its peak in the cosmic epic *Savitri*. Perhaps epic could be the only form where his poetical consciousness found fullest expression. Sri Aurobindo's wealth of consciousness is embodied and conveyed in this grand epic. For the expression of his cosmic vision, he had to choose equally noble poetic form and that was none but epic. So far he had written almost all type of poems and was in search of such a poetic form in which he could translate his unrevealed spiritual and mystic experiences of Yoga. To narrate symbolic and significant legend of Savitri he chose epic form in which he could assimilate so many things at a time. His other poems are
the flashes of time to time inspirations but *Savitri* is the record of his yogic life which is inseparable from his real life and it is a record by the poet who had achieved the fullest maturity and perfection in the poetical art. Nature, beauty and sensuousness, music of his early lyrics, flaming, adventurous spirit of *Vidula* and *Baji Prabhu*, intense and powerful love of *Urvasie* and *Love and Death*, Yogic and mystic experiences of his later poems, philosophy of his sonnets, Dramatic elements of his dramas, thoughts of his prose writing, poetic theory of his criticism, all is finally assimilated in the oceanic *Savitri*. When one reads Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* one opens oneself to the infinity of sight. It is not only an inspired mantra but also a revelatory vision that gives luminous shape to the superamental manifestation. S.K. Ghose writes, "*Savitri* proves Sri Aurobindo, to be the laureate of poetry. It is a truly original, astounding extension of our modes of perception, consciousness and the limited notions of poetry that have rules so far. Here is poetry of vision of such width, breadth and height as the world has rarely known." 

*Savitri* was first drafted quite early in his poetic career in Baroda. “I made some eight or ten recasts of it originally under the old insufficient inspiration” he wrote in 1934. It is the fruit of almost 25 years’ labour, revising and re-revising, making additions and corrections, he always aspired to raise *Savitri* to the mantric level, the ‘Perfect Perfection’ as he calls it. Thus writing *Savitri* itself is a ‘quest for perfection’ in writing poetry.
Both in quantity and quality *Savitri* can be ranked with the great epics of the world. In the period when epic tradition has become an age old history, he wrote *Savitri* with equally high spirit and energy and achieved all that is claimed by any great epic poet of the world.

The canvas of *Savitri* is as wide as cosmos. The poem envelopes past, present and future in it. It talks about man, superman, demi-god and god. Its action takes place at not only Earth, Heaven and Hell but different planes of light, consciousness and bliss, the worlds of truth. In this magnificent work he has represented the whole universe and the forces which run it. Like all epics, wide comprehension is the distinguishing mark of *Savitri*. We find this comprehension in its encyclopedic grasp of the totality of human experience and knowledge, human evolution from the lowest plane to the highest plane, external actions and living forces working behind it. We find in it mysticism, occultism, philosophy, history of evolution and history of man. It records in poetic terms man's and earth's ultimate destiny. It is a record of human quest for perfection at different levels and its achievement.

In an age of modernist poetry, composition of an epic is unthinkable. According to critics epic poem is solely proper to primitive
ages. But Sri Aurobindo rejects the idea and shows a way to revival of epic poetry:

The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action.... The epics of the soul most inwardly seen, as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are its greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future.²⁸

An epic, particularly primary epic, deals with a story from the heroic age concerning some great War or exploits of the hero. An objective story is the dominant feature of this epic. The literary or secondary epics do not have a strong and pure story element. Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* has neither a mythological nor a historical story. It is allegorical in nature. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, too, a strong and pure story element is missing. It seems that as the epic moves away from expressing the outer life, the objective story element has been dwindling. From Milton to Sri Aurobindo, a span of about three centuries, the epic tradition has completely revolutionized. From objectivity of the past the epic writing moves to pure subjectivism in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Milton and other epic poets narrated the outer life of others in their epics but Sri Aurobindo’s epic has symbolic meaning which is based on mystic experiences of his deep meditations, not any outer story element. To quote the poet himself:
Savitri is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often far from what the general human mind sees and experiences. You must not expect appreciation or understanding from the general public or even from many at the first touch; as I have pointed out, there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry.  

If we seek for an adventure in Savitri as it is the epic tradition, there is not traditional adventure like exploring new continents or participating in Trojan War; the poet has shifted his epic adventure within to explore enormous realms of consciousness.

A greater world time’s traveller must explore.

It is not to fight the enemy in the battle-field of Troy, but the struggle is within:

But though to the outward eye no sign appears,
And peace is given to our torn human hearts,
The struggle is there and paid the unseen price;
The fire, the strife, the wrestle are within.

The epic describes the battle of the human soul against the omnipotent powers of the Inconscient, the descent of the soul into abysses of the Night, and finally the battle royal against mightiest Death itself.
There can’t be braver adventures than this. Besides, there can be no more authentic epic adventures than those narrated in *Savitri*. For these are the records of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind. The narrations of the epic are not based on any objective story element; they are poet’s experience - spiritual and occult. It is this pure subjective element which enters the epic for the first time and this is the newness of *Savitri*. It has brought a new mode in epic tradition.

Speaking about the plan and design of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

It has been planned not on the scale of *Lycidas* or *Comus* or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor, *Ramayana*; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world -vision or world interpretation, one artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination and understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like, architectural is to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness; that is the method I have chosen in *Savitri*.  

It is this feature of the epic that holds the reader's attention with awe and wonder. Each sentence fits in the para, the para in the canto and
the cantos in the book, as stone after stone is laid upon each other to construct a huge superstructure.

Part I of *Savitri* comprises the first three Books of the poem. This part of the epic deals almost entirely with the Yoga of King Aswapati, Savitri’s human father. It is this aspiration that compels the Divinity to incarnate itself in the form of Savitri: “A World’s desire compelled her mortal birth.”

The Yoga of Aswapati may be classified into three stages. In Book I he strives for individual perfection and victory through Yoga. In Book II again it is individual victory and perfection by attaining all the planes of consciousness, though as a typical representative of the race. In Book III he seeks for universal realization and a new creation on earth.

In part II of the poem (Books Four to Eight) the poet brings the story of Savitri and her Yoga, whom he introduces in the opening canto, into the mainstream of the epic. This part of the poem covers Savitri’s birth, her quest for Satyavan and their meeting, her foreknowledge of the death of Satyavan after one year of their marriage and finally her yoga Sadhana to prepare herself with Divine Force to Vanquish Death.
Part III of the epic (Books Nine to Twelve) describes the battle royal between Savitri and the God of Death after Satyavan dies, and how Death is Vanquished. Both Savitri and Satyavan, ‘return to earth after the Triumph of love over Death’. With the return to earth of Satyavan and Savitri, “the united two began a greater age.”

*Savitri* begins with the primordial symbol Dawn and ends with ‘a greater dawn’ for the future:

She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.

Mystic poetry is like unmasking the Divine, unveiling the great Mystery or part of it, either in clear transparency or in a translucency or in a vague and hazy manner. To be a mystic poet, it is not necessary to be religious, even atheist poets may in their inspired moments leap up to express a sense of the mysterious Unknown. But higher the plane of consciousness from where the inspiration comes, the more transparent becomes the unveiling of the face of the mysterious Unknown. In the mystical poetry from the spiritual plane, the inspiration, according to Sri Aurobindo, comes from the Overhead planes of consciousness. Here the
poetic speech is the direct and naked experience of the seer poet, a thing actually seen and felt and even experienced:

    Across a void returning sky he glimpsed
    Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars.
    The superconscient realms of motionless peace
    Where judgement ceases and the word is mute
    And the unconceived lies pathless and alone.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Savitri} is mystical poetry and “it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other”.\textsuperscript{37} The visions may appear as ‘Technical Jargon’ or ‘Intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations’ because they are foreign to the ordinary mentality but they are realities, concrete powers and living experiences for Sri Aurobindo. All visions and vibrations of the consciousness pervading those worlds are transmitted by the poet with utmost poetic power.

Great epics in English literature like Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost}, \textit{Paradise Regained} are written in blank verse. Sri Aurobindo adopts blank verse as the medium of expression for his epic. He finds blank verse the most pliant and plastic medium to express subtle variations of his poetic vision from different planes of inspiration.
Savitri employs “blank verse without enjambment (except rarely) - each line a thing by itself and arranged in paragraphs of one, two, three, four, five lines (rarely a longer series), in an attempt to catch something of Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement, so far as that is a possibility in English...” 38 It expresses the mystic truth in direct rhythmic movement. Take for example, the opening line of Savitri:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

Sri Aurobindo is of the view that in Savitri, “...each line must be strong enough to stand by itself, while at the same time it fits harmoniously into the sentence or paragraph like stone added to stone.” 39

Thus Sri Aurobindo has attempted the Mantric poetry out of his perfect use of blank verse.

No one else is a greater authority on Savitri than the Mother. In her talk she says, “He has crammed the whole universe in a single book. It is a marvelous work, magnificent and of an incomparable perfection.... Savitri is a revelation, it is a meditation, and it is a quest of the infinite, the Eternal.” 40
Sri Aurobindo- A Critic

As a literary critic - Sri Aurobindo reveals his astonishing power and range. He is a critic who moves with ease among the literature of the East and the West. We can say that he not only fulfils Arnold’s requirement of an ideal critic knowing ‘the best that is known and thought in the world’ and creating ‘a current of true and fresh ideas’, but he has also achieved a fusion between creation and criticism. He has made the art of literary criticism as fully creative literary activity as poetry itself and like other arts, an instrument of illuminating and uplifting human consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo has discussed basic terms of poetry like inspiration, creation, beauty, truth, vision, symbol, language, rhythm, style, technique with a new and original interpretation. In course of our discussion, we will see them one by one. He has also reinterpreted Indian as well as English literature based on his own critical theory.

The influence of his Yogic consciousness and higher planes is all pervasive on his views on art and poetry. Particularly, the discovery and
description of the higher planes of consciousness from which our inspiration generally comes is a unique contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the history of aesthetics.

The word ‘poet’ originates from a Greek word, ‘Poiein’ which means ‘to make’. The poet feels ineffable ecstasy to make something antereal from the terrestrial, subliminal from the universe, supramental from the mental, the divine from the actual and the eternal from the ephemeral by pleasing forms in expression.

Sidney supports the ancient word, ‘vates’ for poets which means a sort of prophet. Sri Aurobindo compares poetry with the Ganga flowing down from the head of God ‘Shiva’, the Hindu God. As a successful modern descendent of the Indian Vedic culture and tradition, Sri Aurobindo places the poet on the eternal throne of God. According to him the true poet is the soul and the true reader or listener is also the soul. The more the poetic word sinks into the soul, the greater is the poetry. He says:

The Kavi was in the idea of the ancients, the seer and the revealer of truth, and though we have wandered far enough from that ideal to demand from him only the pleasure of ear and the amusement of aesthetic faculty, still all great poetry preserves something of that higher truth of its own aim and significance. ⁴¹
In this sense the poet himself may be called as medium of expression of truth and delight. Sri Aurobindo says that the poet is not a logical thinker or a so called philosopher or a metaphysical reasoner: his knowledge is with his being and, by virtue of his power he feels oneness with all amidst which he lives. He follows the logic of the Infinite and intuitive judgment, not the logic of mind or intellect.

While commenting on ‘reason’, ‘Spiritual experience’ and its ‘expression’, Sri Aurobindo says that spiritual thought of India admits reason but that reason is based on spiritual experience and the Indian philosophers ascend beyond intellectual speculations. In this way they have preserved mystic and spiritual experience and allowed reasoning intellect to come after that. They have placed it as a judge of the generalized metaphysical statement emerged from a spiritual experience, but not the experience itself.

Indian philosophers also do not think that the ultimate truth is untold, unthinkable or unknowable as thought by the intellectuals. They believe that truth can be known by some special ways and it can also be expressed by some special ways. They call truth something superconscious. It can be understood and expressed directly by supermind.
Sri Aurobindo does not brush aside the influence of national freedom struggle on poets. The work of a poet is influenced by his age, mentality of nation or the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment. Nevertheless the poet is expected to be a free spirit and the follower of the law of poetic truth and beauty; the age and nation can give him only some material for the free play of his free spirit. Between the eternal and time elements, the eternal element is the soul of poetry. For high poetry Sri Aurobindo emphasizes two main things-visions and beauty apart from power of expression, In respect of beauty Sri Aurobindo's view is that beauty may not be in the object but the artist's vision captures beauty and conveys it through art.

Many English critics and poets, especially the Romantics have emphasized imagination in poetic creation directly or indirectly. But to this poet, imagination emerges from mental level, it does not exceed mental span towards other planes of consciousness or to spiritual kingdom of light and bliss. Art is visible expression of inner life or soul. Sri Aurobindo believes that the divine spark in man is the highest bliss. Spirituality is the conscious contact with the divine. It is the highest art, the art of life. Then poetry, as expression of such soul, is a life of pure beauty, light vibrant with delight, a dance of speech.
Sri Aurobindo speaks about the role of poet’s inner being in the process of creation. In his view, true poetry springs from subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other outer instrument for transmission only. He finds three elements in the poetic affair- the original source of inspiration, the vital force ‘of creative beauty, and the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. But the most perfect poetry comes when the original source pours its inspiration pure into the vital and there takes its true form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration and the outer consciousness, transmits only what it receives from the inner or the superior spaces. In other words, it comes ready made from the original source; substance, rhythm, form, words come together from the plane of poetic creation. It is the perfect type of inspiration in which the human being is only a medium though he feels the joy of production and joy of enthusiasm which is essential for poetry.

There is a certain Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer. He can see beauty in things which are common to the common people. He can perceive unrevealed beauty of this universe through his gifted vision. In this sense the poet’s function is the revelation of beauty to bring pure delight and beauty in human life.
This pure delight and beauty is one with the highest truth, the perfection of life. It is also one with the joy of the self revealing spirit.

Sri Aurobindo has distinguished between a literary man and a Yogi who writes. The former is one who loves literature and literary activities for their own separate sake, he says “A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner will and word wants him to express. He is a channel and instrument of something greater than his own literary personality.” 42 In him we find a literary man developing in later life into a ‘Yogi who writes’. He finds a close relationship between Yoga and poetic development. He says in a letter, “Certainly if you want to achieve a greater poetry, more unique, you will yourself have to change, to alter the poise of your consciousness” 43 further he says, “The expression in poetry and other forms must be, for the Yogi, a flowing out from a growing self within and not merely a mental creation or an aesthetic pleasure. Like that the inner self grows and the poetic power will gross with it.” 44

It does not mean that the poet should sit idle waiting for the arrival of inspiration from above. He should keep himself ready and alert and active to give the response to the call of inspiration.
‘Vision’ has a significant place in Sri Aurobindo's poetic theory. Though “Vision”, in his words “is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and the analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist.”

In his view, ‘poetry must attempt to make us see’ because it is a great formative power and the psychological instrument of this power is ‘inner seeing and sense.’ So “sight is the essential poetic gift.” The poet is fundamentally occupied with the activity of the eye. Vision is actually the inner sight which the poet opens in us and this “inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.” The perceiving, feeling, understanding conscious of the poet comes to an active point through the seeing; his concentration and merging of all sense in vision. This vision and inner sight may be of Nature and life and man. The poets who had large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision reached the supreme and fundamental greatness in poetry.

Viewing inside or vision is different from outward sight, even the most objective presentation starts from an inner view and subjective process of creation “For the poet really creates out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly : that outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its work.”
The poetic vision follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its levels with the evolving intellect and aesthetic sense, a vital poetry appealing to the imagination through the senses, mind and emotions emerged. A higher level comes when the mind of man begins to see more intimately the forces behind the life. And a yet higher level is attained when the soul in things comes nearer to man or other worlds than physical open themselves to him. “At the highest he himself disappears into sight: the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets.” 49 It is this eternal eye which is at the back of all poetic perfection and this eye views the Divine presence taking different shapes in the world.

Intensity of vision is a must for poetry and according to Sri Aurobindo it depends on age and environment, level of thought and experience and the depth of spiritual attainment. Mantric poetry is not possible without the intensity of the soul’s vision.

Sri Aurobindo’s mystical inspirations has introduced a new age in poetry. Encyclopedia Britannica defines mysticism as “the immediate experience of oneness with ultimate Reality.”50 According to Chamber’s Dictionary, mystic means “sacredly obscure or secret, involving a sacred
or a secret meaning hidden from the eyes of the ordinary person, only revealed to a spiritually enlightened mind.”

Sri Aurobindo has explained at many places the mystic’s approach to life and distinguished it from other terms. He uses the word ‘mystic’ in the sense of a certain kind of inner seeing and feeling of things, a way which to the intellect may seem occult and visionary. For being it is not necessary to have spiritual experiences. One may be mystic without being spiritual, one may have spiritual experiences but not mystic sense; or one may be both spiritual and mystic in one. He says, “The mystic feels... truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations” The mystic poet uses words and images to convey the world what he has felt, seen or experienced and leave it to the general reader to understand or misunderstand according to his capacity.

For him, poets are the greatest revealers of knowledge and poetry-the best medium to carry to the larger humanity the message of a realized soul. Therefore he chose poetry to be the vehicle of transmitting his visions and realizations.

Spirituality for Sri Aurobindo is not an escape from life but it is to transform life through transformation of consciousness. He considers
human life as a field of possible transformation in which its divine sense will be found. Its potentialities will be highly evolved, and the now imperfect forms will be changed into an image of the divine perfection. The meaning of spirituality is found in new and greater inner life of man founded in the consciousness of his true, his inmost, highest and largest self and spirit by which he receives the whole of existence as a progressive manifestation of the self in the universe. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the role of deeper intuitive poetry which will help in probing of inmost things, Divinity of man. He says:

The voice of the poet will reveal to us by the inspired rhythmic word the God who is the self of all things and beings, the life of the universe, the Divinity in man, and he will express all the emotion and delight of the endeavor of the human soul to discover the touch and joy of that Divinity within him in whom he feels the mighty founts of his own being and life and effort and his fullness and unity with all cosmic experience and with Nature and with all creatures.  

In the ‘Kingdom of spirit’ which may be established not only in a man’s inner being but in his life and works, “poetry also may have its share in that revolution and become part of the spiritual empire” Poetry and literature “like anything else can be made an instrumentation of the Divine Life.”
According to Sri Aurobindo, the highest power, the highest achievement of poetry is Mantra. By the word Mantra, Sri Aurobindo connotes poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, the union of the highest intensity of rhythmic movement, the highest intensity of verbal form and thought and the highest intensity of the soul’s vision of the truth. Thus Mantra is “the highest intense revealing form of poetic thought and expression.”

Sri Aurobindo’s idea of Aesthetics is based on his own philosophy. He believed that all forms of art, literature (Poetry) music, painting, sculpture, architecture are manifestation of beauty created by the soul’s Delight. The artist in the fit of delight receives words and rhythm and creates a work of art. Through this work of art the reader recaptures his delight and art becomes a medium. So all the arts, according to him, are parts of the ascent of man, towards the bliss of pure Being, the higher intense clarity of consciousness. They are meant to civilize, to refine, to purify, to ennoble, to divinise the creator, spectator and listeners.

According to Sri Aurobindo, “Aesthetics is concerned mainly with beauty, but more generally with Rasa, the response of the mind, the vital feeling and... taste.” This relation of the consciousness which receives taste, Rasa, Bhoga, can awake even soul in us and go deeper than mere
pleasure or enjoyment and give us spirit's delight of existence or *Ananda*. According to Sri Aurobindo, Aesthesis is the very essence of poetry and of all arts since all arts deal with *Rasa, Bhoga, Ananda*. Its dullest reaction is indifference, its highest is ecstasy. These are the two sides of the same coin, a reaction of our consciousness.

He speaks of the ascent and descent of consciousness. The general sign of descent from the supreme levels towards insconscience or insensibility or Negation is always diminishing intensity of ecstasy, intensity of force, intensity of the delight in things and the delight of existence. And so as we ascend towards the supreme level these intensities increase. As we ascend beyond the regions of mind, everything alters. “As we climb beyond mind, higher and wider values replace the values of our limited mind, life and bodily consciousness. Aesthesis shares in this intensification of capacity.”

His theory of aesthetic is not merely concerned with beauty but with truth - the higher truth of spiritual thought, spiritual feeling and spiritual sense. For in the overmind ultimately “truth and beauty come together and coincide.” This reminds us Keats’ philosophy of poetry ‘Beauty truth, truth beauty’ in his famous poem *Ode on Grecian Urn*. In Sri Aurobindo’s integral vision, beauty is not divorced from Truth. The
Poetry and life are intimately connected as he points out, “Poetry is the rhythmic voice of life, but it is one of the inner and not one of the surface voices”. And that the “Poet’s first concern and his concern always is with living beauty and reality of life.” Poetry in its course has reflected the life as it has evolved from one stage to another—physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and now the spiritual. Art is not divorced from life; it is all inclusive and integral. He always insisted on the need of life-experience for literary creation. Art gives something more than what already is in real life. For art is not simply reproduction or imitation of life. It enriches life by attributing to it something which it lacks in reality, something more inwardly true and beautiful than the external life. He states, “The poet’s greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the World’s and he does it even when he is dealing with actual things.”

He strongly refutes the tendency to ignore art and poetry as mere refinements, luxuries of the rich rather than things that are necessary to the mass or useful to life. The aesthetic faculties entering into the enjoyment of the world and its good things have “done more than
anything else to raise man from the beast, to refine and purge his passion, to ennoble his emotions and to lead him up through the heart and the imagination to the state of the intellectual man.”63 In his essay, The National value of Art Sri Aurobindo speaks of three uses of art. The first and lowest is the purely aesthetic, the second is intellectual or educative, and the third and highest is the spiritual.

Sri Aurobindo considers technique to be inseparable. “Certainly in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection”.64 But poetry is not merely a matter of correct technique, for “technique is a means of expression; one does not write merely to use beautiful words or paint for the sole sake of line and colour; there is something that one is trying through these means to express or to discover.”65 The best or highest technique, he believes to be descending from above, from the Yogic consciousness. But the human instruments of verbal expression have to be perfected through knowledge, understanding and practice. And it is here that the technique enters. Sri Aurobindo stresses on a proper balance between technique and substance of poetry. He says, “The search for technique is simply the search for the best and the most appropriate form for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it.”66 He warns that attention to
technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it and he becomes indifferent to substance.

“Without style”, he mentions in a letter, “there is no literature”.67 Style is the fusion of all those constituents of a work of art- language, thought, rhythm, imagery, mood and attitude, which express the poet's vision. Style, Sri Aurobindo believes, is a living organism which is 'born and grows like any other thing.' Therefore style can not be manufactured. He remarks:

I never manufactured my style... of course, it was fed on my reading ...for the rest it is yoga that has developed my style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuitive discrimination (self-critical) of right thought, word- form, just image and figure.68
Section –D

Theory of Overhead Poetry and Savitri

It is ‘inspiration’ which moves a poet and rouses the creator in him. Poets have used the term while attempting to describe their creativity. Encyclopedia Britannica defines inspiration as “the experience of a possession by the divine that enables the inspired person, to see and communicate supernatural truth.”

Plato seems to be sure, that the poet is not poet until he receives inspiration from the outside which hardly has to do anything with his senses. He says:

For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him. When he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles.

It has become a point of controversy in modern times whether inspiration is the force of unconscious mind. Modern psychoanalytical theory suggests the source of inspiration in the unconscious, which is the spring of repressed emotions craving expression. John Press points out the doubtful nature of the modern mind about the reality of inspiration:
It is possible to mention that inspiration comes from God, from Heavenly wisdom, from seraphim, or from any member of the angelic hierarchy who chances to strike a responsive chord in the myth-making faculty of the poet. Possible but not essential. It is equally plausible to hold that inspiration is the product of mental disequilibrium, dreams, or of the unconscious activity of the mind.⁷¹

Sri Aurobindo reveals his implicit faith in the power of inspiration. He declares, “Where there is no inspiration, there can be no poetry.”⁷² His most original contribution to the theory and psychology of art is his clear perception of the deeper or higher plane of consciousness which is the originating source of inspiration. He has analyzed the characteristics of this creative force in The Future Poetry and in his Letters. He is aware of the thing that “all that has to be felt is not analyzable.”⁷³ Hence while trying his best to expose the subject he says, “These are exactly the subjects on which it is difficult to write with any precision or satisfy the intellect's demand for clear and positive statement.”⁷⁴ He believed that experience and knowledge mingled with inspiration create poetry. He also talks about the feature of inspiration, he has experienced, “Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called.”⁷⁵ In this process, the mind of the poet does not work, it only receives the inspiration and in that flow, the poems come as a stream.
Changes and corrections are also received without any initiation of the poet or labour of the brain. If the first inspiration was an inferior one, there may be recasts.

In Overhead poetry, the poet is sure of the one thing that he is working merely as a medium of the divine power and whatever he is writing is not the creation of his own intellect. Though the work is carried out by the person, the role of impersonal power in the process of creation is so strong that he has to confess so. In the poetry of Marathi saints, there are many expressions conveying this message, though they haven’t put it in the terminological terms as Sri Aurobindo. Some examples can be cited as follows.

In the last part of his Marathi epic poem *Dnyaneshwai*, Saint Dnyaneshwara says:

This is your work, carried out by me,
And whatever remains behind is merely my service.\(^{76}\)

In the similar way, Saint Tukaram in his Gatha, feels it necessary to say:

This is somebody else’ treasure,
And I am working only as a porter. \(^{77}\)
In another poem he says:

What an ordinary man like me can say,
It is the almighty that made me to do so.78

These expressions should be taken as honest confessions though they seem like humble submissions.

Sri Aurobindo might have experienced the same thing but, being a critic, he tries to analyze it. He not only experienced all levels of human consciousness, overmental and supramental consciousness but also expressed it to show how poetic inspiration comes works.

In his view poetic fount may be - physical consciousness, vital level, mental level, the higher mind, poetic intelligence, inner mind, dynamic vision, psychic being, illumined mind, intuition and finally overmind. In accordance with these levels of source poetry differs in content and form. It is difficult to comment on these subtle distinctions of psychology for it is the matter ‘to be felt’.

According to him, the levels of consciousness from which the poet draws his inspiration may be classified in brief as follows: subtle physical
mind in which the imaginative response is mainly to external movement, action etc. We find this in Homer and Chaucer. Vital mind where the play of sensation, passion and emotion is expressed directly. Kalidasa and Shakespeare are examples of this level. Intellectual mind, which contains poetic vision and it brings out thought and values, as found in Vyasa, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante and Milton.

There are other levels which, according to him are, above our brain capacity or ordinary mental levels. He calls them Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition and Overmind. Some rare lines of poetry of the past have emerged from these levels, but in future, poetry would be written from these levels. Above these levels he has expressed the supermind or supramental force and consciousness which only the perfect yogi can reach. Poetry written out of the above inspiration is called as ‘Overhead Poetry.’

The imagination seems to act as a subordinate to the poet's unfathomable vision, the unknown; intellect also acts for the supply of mental terms or language as vessel of vision.

Sri Aurobindo's greatest contribution in the world of poetry is his experience of ‘overmind’ - consciousness and its expression as theory and
practice. In his *Letters on Savitri* he has expressed this as easily as possible.

In his view ordinary aesthetics mainly deals with beauty and *rasa* or a sense of certain taste and it needs no spiritual feeling because it cannot surpass mental range. It may be concerned with “Art for Art's sake”, but “The overmind is essentially a spiritual power.” It has aesthetics beyond traditional rules and canons. It sees a universal and an eternal beauty, truth and knowledge beyond thought. It concerns with spiritual thought, spiritual feeling, spiritual sense and it can have oneness with spiritual touch. So there come together truth and beauty and coincide, but Overmind places truth first, truth emerging from the inconscient as well as from the superconscient and all that lies between. The discovery of the truth is the first essential quality of overmind when it is explicit in poetry. But overhead poetry has something of overmental character, not all the time it comes from overmind. Overmind poetry may come from intuition, illumined mind or high-level thought. However, poetry manifesting overmind must have some kind of aesthetics, greater than common aesthetics between the writer and the recipient. The same condition is there for the appreciation of overhead element in poetry.
In a word, Sri Aurobindo says, “The kingdom of the spirit may be established not only in man's inner being but in his life and works. Poetry also may have its share in that revolution and become part of spiritual empire.”

Overmind has mainly two actions. One, it can form separate kingdom with all its possibilities. Two, it sees and thinks and creates in masses which reunites separate things and reconciles the opposites. In Sri Aurobindo's view the highest reconciliation of fusion takes place in the supermind. Overmind in its highest height draws supramental light in lower levels. In a lower level overmind may use the language of the intellect but on its height it uses language of its own kingdom of beauty and light beyond the intellect of mind; naturally the traditional aesthetic judgement fails here. Some greater aesthetics is needed, some deeper experience is required for its appreciation.

Yet Sri Aurobindo says that poetry depends upon levels of inspiration and each kind of poetry has its own perfection, not overhead poetry only.

His poetic theory of ‘Overmind aesthesis’ was so far much discussed and to satisfy his curious disciples of poetry, he had to give
practical example of ‘Overmind poetry’ or ‘Mantric poetry’ or ‘The Future Poetry.’ *Savitri* is the answer to all those questions. We may quote an excerpt from *Savitri* which manifests both overmental plane and overhead poetry born of overmind.

Thought there has revelation's sun-bright eyes
The word; a mighty and inspiring voice,
Enters Truth's inmost cabin of privacy
And tears away the veil from God and life.\(^{81}\)

The perfect expression of the overhead poetry is ‘Mantra’. Ancient Indian culture has a rich tradition of ‘Mantra’. Vedic Rishis used to transform their life long spiritual findings and truth into ‘Mantra’. Rhythm, verbal form, thought substance, thought's radiant soul-quality, all fuse in the Mantra to produce the effect of an incantation. The true Mantra comes out of the depths of soul and sinks into the depths of the hearer’s soul. It penetrates through analytical intellect, the sensory faculties, and the bodily limitations of the receptive ear. Sri Aurobindo describes this process as:

As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And Keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound
The hearer understands a form of words.\(^{92}\)
Thus the Mantra is a creative force which comes from the highest overhead level, charged with extraordinary power which makes words revelatory, inspired, vibrant and packed with ecstasy. Mantra is a compact structure of gifted words, which can give us experience of great powers. Mantra can carry us into the realms of mystical experience.

To appreciate and enjoy this poetry, a new method of reading approach is to be adopted. For overhead poetry can never be appreciated or enjoyed by the normal mind consciousness; there is need ‘to develop our aesthetic sense to a pitch subtler than in our normal response to poetry.’ Secondly a still receptivity of the reader’s mind, ‘a sort of receptive self-opening and calling down condition’ is required to receive the truth of the poet's vision. Thirdly, as the overhead poetry has its own rhythm of poetic expression, so in ‘the indrawn stillness’ the reader has to listen to the new rhythm. Savitri is also suggested to be read aloud as one chants mantras to feel and experience how the word sound enter the reader's inner being and create a true mantric effect.

Thus the discovery and description of the higher planes of consciousness from which our inspiration generally comes is a unique contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the aesthetics. The distinctions enunciated by him are based on his own experience and on ancient Indian
thought and have a revelatory importance, not only for aesthetics, but also for yogic psychology and metaphysics. Sri Aurobindo’s overhead creation of *Savitri* and his overmind aesthesis has opened a new age of poetry and poetics. This is the future poetry, the poetry of perfection.
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