Chapter-XII

Mystical Element in Indian poetry

Sri Aurobindo

We are living in momentous times. Never before in the long history of mankind has so much good been vitiated by so much evil. Violence and corruption are rampant all over the world. Peace, individual as well as national, has become almost hearsay. To regain our equilibrium and prevent the glorious human adventure from ending up in destruction we need spiritual guidance. Only saints and mystics can come to our rescue. Among the saints and mystics Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Kabirdas whose hearts delved into the depths of the Ultimate Reality, have cosmic vision in which all contradictions get reconciled and all problems solved.

"Poetry is sensuality of the mind". It is because poetry is in relation with the forms and images of ideas. Forms, images, sensations, impressions, emotions attached to ideas are the sensual or the sensuous side of things. Poetry concerns itself with these ideas of mind and thought. It approaches the world of ideas through their appearances, through the play of sensations and emotions around them."
Poetry is a world under the aspect of the beauty of form. It expresses the beauty of an idea, the harmony or rhythm of a thought, giving all that a concrete shape or image. It becomes a play of images, a play of sounds. Poetry is the sensual or sensuous to truth. It is meant to strike the thought and to awaken it to the perception of reality.

"Poet does not think when he writes a poem, that is to say he goes all thought and makes mind silent, silent and immobile and opens himself to inner or higher regions and writes almost automatically. It is not a common phenomenon. A yogi has the power to do that. An inspired poet is something quite different."²

Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world of beauty of the future. He came to give not a hope but certitude of the splendor towards which the world moves. The world is not an unfortunate accident. It is a marvel which moves towards its expression. The world needs the certitude of the beauty of the future. Sri Aurobindo has given that assurance. He has closed a gulf that has yawned in the human psyche for many centuries. In ancient world, poetry was above all revelation. "Its subject matter was the eternal truth which dwells in the heart of all life."³
Sri Aurobindo says:

"I am the bird of God in His blue;

Divinely high and clear

I sing the notes of the sweet and the true

For the God's and the seraph's ear

I rise like a fire from the mortal's earth

Into a griefless sky

And drop in the suffering soil of his birth

Fire-seeds of ecstasy.

My opinions soar beyond Time and Space

Into unfading Light

I bring the bliss of the Eternal' face

And the boon of the Spirit's sight

I measure the worlds with my ruby eyes;

I have perched on Wisdom's tree

Thronged with the blossoms of Paradise
By the streams of Eternity

Nothing is hid from my burning heart;

My mind is shoreless and still;

My song is rapture's mystic art,

My flight immortal will”.4

The highest poetry is but the ‘energy of the Transcendence.’ The Indian people, essentially poetic because of their belief in the archetype, the feminine mystique are lucky in that they look upon creation as the projection of Shakti, the awful shadow of some unseen power. Poetic art, for Sri Aurobindo, is `the rhythmic voice of life, yet “it is one of inner and not one of the surface voices.”5 Its emphasis will be on the evaluation of inner life than that of outer life. It aims at expressing inner beauties in immortal lines. To him poetry with an external decoration and effectiveness is inferior in value. His critical judgments on poetic art, what it is, how it comes to be, how it develops and progresses, are literally matchless; no one else has had the knowledge even to attempt such a masterly survey of the subject.
Sri Aurobindo’s original formulations on consciousness and its levels and their expression in poetry and the use of these levels by him for evaluating poets and writers are unique. His plane of consciousness in order of ascension include: physical, vital, mental (lower and higher), illumined mental, intuitive, overmind and supermind. Each level is endowed with certain powers. At the physical level, consciousness according to Sri Aurobindo operates through senses, which is the rudimentary mental contact of the embodied consciousness with its surroundings. It works primarily through sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, enabling the artist to see objects, external actions, drawing its ideas from the data given by external actions and external things. Chaucer, for instance, functions at the physical level. In his *Canterbury Tales* he makes us see, smell, touch and taste the beauty of the external words. He is well known for his rich descriptive power and for his interest in the seeking abundance of life. He expresses in the English language of his time almost all the graces, nuances and refinements he found in the French poetry. Even during the Restoration period most of the poets and writers functioned at this level.
Consciousness at the vital plane, as Sri Aurobindo explains it, functions through instincts and drives emotions of self-preservation, passions, ambitions, courage, sex infatuation, and fascination. It plans, dreams, desires or imagines what can be done. It deals with possibilities. It has the passion for novelty and seeks to extend the limits of experience for the satisfaction of desire, for enjoyment and for an enlarged self-affirmation. He is not content to describe or define the vital plane in general terms, but instead differentiates it into four sub-levels:

“There are four parts of the vital being:
First is the mental -vital which gives a mental expression by thought, speech or otherwise to the emotions, desires, passions: sensations and other movements of the vital being; the emotional-vital, the seat of various feelings, such as love, joy sorrow, hatred and the rest; the central-vital which is the seat of the stronger vital longings and reactions, e.g.; ambition, pride, fear, love of game, attractions and repulsions, desires and passion of various kinds and the field of many vital energies; last, the lower-vital
which is full of small desires and feelings e.g., food desire, sexual desires, vanity, quarrels etc."^6

According to Sri Aurobindo, most of the "poetry is mental or vital or both, sometimes with a psychic tinge. The power from above mind comes only in rare lines and passages lifting up the mental and vital inspiration towards its own light and power." In specific, he is of the opinion that poetry represents the vital appeals to emotions and passions. In such poetry usually, the sense remains subordinate to the sound, the idea or mental representation to the image and the symbol.

Next in the levels of consciousness in Aurobindonian schema comes the mental plane, which arises from the physical and the vital. It is faculty for seeking knowledge. It is a truth which interprets truth of universal existence for practical uses of a certain order or things. It is a reflective mirror which receives presentations or images of pre-existent truth. It represents to itself the phenomena that is, or has been, from moment to moment. It is a preparatory form of our consciousness. It is an instrument of analysis and synthesis, but not of essential knowledge. Mission of the mind is to train our obscure consciousness to enlighten its blind instinct,
random intuition; vague perception till it becomes capable of a greater Light. It is a passage, not culmination.

Sri Aurobindo pleads for raising human aesthesis to the overhead level of consciousness. These overhead stages, he believes, have always impacted on various fields of aesthetics. He copiously quotes the poetic utterances—of Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth Whitman, Bhavbhuti and Kalidasa to enforce his point of view. The crucial role that these planes play in the human evolution cannot be overemphasized. He holds that all the planes leading to the overhead level are not to be classed together, there are gradations which have to be clearly grasped in all their fine and subtle differentiations even as there are gradations from the overhead to the supermind level:

"These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through Higher Mind, Illumined mind and Intuition into Overmind and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the supermind or Divine Gnosis."
In his view sublimation is a purification process and it is through constant *sadhana* directed towards higher goals that success at each plane is possible. It is, he believes, only by faith, aspiration and surrender that self-opening to the divine influence above us can come in a graded manner one after another. The artist similarly rejects all that is foreign to his idea of beauty and takes every care to strengthen his conception of beauty.

In Sri Aurobindo's view human consciousness is the energy, the motion the movement of the divine consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it. For him the essence of higher mind or spiritual consciousness is the power to be aware of itself, and its objects, and in its true nature this power must be direct, self-fulfilled and complete. Spiritual consciousness is, in fact, a link, a bridge, between the lower levels and higher levels of mind and enables us to see in all things their essential reality and the play of forces and phenomena as proceeding from the essential reality.

At the higher mental plane according to Sri Aurobindo, poetic vision moves on the wings of imagination. At this spiritual plane, one has normally the realization of the self, the unity and harmony everywhere. It is the arousal of this
consciousness that enables a poet in Mathew Arnold’s view to express “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge”, through poetry which attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact.” It is for this reason that poetry is regarded by Arnold, thought and art in one. In his opinion, it is the glow of imagination that converts human emotion into true poetry.

One characteristic quality of the higher mind that Aurobindo mentions is totality of truth-seeing at a single view. As the higher mind according to him brings a greater consciousness into being through the spiritual idea and its power of truth, but ‘the illumined mind brings in a still greater consciousness through a truth-sight and truth-light, and its seeing and seizing power.’ “Illumined mind for him is one of the cherished levels of a seer-poet like Shakespeare, who may not be aware of the quality of the plane operating through his creativity.”

The poetry of the illumined mind is usually full of play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the truth vivid. It sets usually by a luminous rush. Such poetry in his view comes from the illumined mind.
The mental consciousness, however wide, cannot be the creator of the movement of the cosmos. The universe cannot be the product of a mind, however wide, however universal, however great the dimensions one may give to it. Mind has subtle limitations which cannot go with the qualities and powers which we see in this creation. If it is a mental consciousness that is the creator, then in the creation, mental consciousness would have been present. But we find that in the inconscient, the mental consciousness is not present. And what is present is not of the mental type, of the mental nature. The consciousness that is manifesting itself in infinite universal existence is a consciousness—but not a mental, not an intellectual consciousness, because if it were mental the element of mentality would be present in all the rhythms which it casts out from itself. Because it is not so, the nature of that infinite consciousness which is the essential and inherent power of infinite existence must be other than mental consciousness. This seems to be almost axiomatic. Mental consciousness, therefore, is not the rule of the material universe. We know that something in us is conscious when we sleep, when mind is not active. If the nature of that consciousness were only mental, we would retain our mental
consciousness all through. But there are conditions in which the mind is in abeyance and still, man is conscious. The nature of the consciousness is not necessarily mental or intellectual. Our waking state is only a selection from the whole range of our conscious being. When we say "waking state", it is not all-pervading. Man's psychology is like an iceberg. Perhaps four-fifth of it is below the surface in the subconscient, the inconscient, and one-fifth is visible in the waking consciousness. This one-fifth is largely governed by that which is below. So the waking consciousness cannot be taken as its characteristic, or as the whole of man's possible consciousness. The materialistic outlook is that however vast the consciousness may be extended; it is inseparable from physical organs; it is, in fact, the result of physical organs. Because one has eyes, therefore one has sight. Having the physical organism for expression, the waking consciousness attaches itself to this material organism, never realizing that there is consciousness that is free from this organized material unit or organism which it is using. Consciousness is there and is using the physical organs. Because we have the 'I', therefore we have sight. The materialist forgets that consciousness is not a result of the brain, but consciousness
is using the brain. Brain is only an instrument for transmission of thought, for acceptance of consciousness and decision by the consciousness of whether the sensation that is received is acceptable or unacceptable, pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad. Just as a typewriter that is being used is not the creator of what is typed, senses are not the creators of sensation. This is important to note: consciousness is using the brain, the brain is not producing consciousness. Sri Aurobindo gives a very fine argument: the engine does not cause or explain the motive power. It is only a mechanism for the working of a power. Power is independent of the motor, of the engine, and the engine is only mechanical device created for the operation of the power. The engine does not cause or explain the motive power either of steam or of electricity.

In the same way, the human organism does not explain the conscious-power which is working in the organism. It is only for some use, as the engine is for some use by a power. The physical, the nervous, the mental organism that is given to man is only for use by a conscious power. It is not that because the engine is there that the power comes into it. No. It may not come into it; that is what we call death. The engine is there but the power is not there. The material state is the
emptiness of consciousness or the sleep of consciousness. We say consciousness is all-pervading, yet in matter we do not see any consciousness. But just as in a man who is asleep the consciousness is there within him, in the same way in matter also the consciousness is present but it is in trance, masked, hidden. It could be said that it is asleep or gathering itself into a sort of apparent unconsciousness; and physical impact brings out the consciousness that is there. In the whole operation of this energy which is replete with consciousness there are various states of this consciousness. They are conscient, superconscient, subconscious, and subliminal states. The consciousness which is operative, active, or creative, has not just one aspect of its expression, one mode of manifestation. It can be, to the human mind, superconsceint. It can be to the human consciousness something consciousness or subconscious. It can be subliminal state is able to act independently of human senses. No outer sense instrument is needed to convey thought or impulse to someone else. Telepathy, hypnotism, faith-cures, and scores of other phenomena show that consciousness can act directly without the intervention or use of organized instruments of sensation and perception. And this conscious force has not just one
rhythm. It is not necessarily mental nor necessarily bound to the waking condition. First, this is seen in a nutshell in man, but on a large scale, in the cosmos in the whole working of this energy. In plant life and even in the metal there is a consciousness which, to our mind is subconscient, but still is present. A nervous system corresponds to the nervous response of the waking organism of either man or animal. In the animal the consciousness is not mentally conscient as in man, but is vitally conscious.

So this cosmic consciousness, which is the power of an infinite existence, works on several levels in the cosmos. They are all present in man, in a condensed, tabloid form. The unconscious, subconscious, subliminal, vital, mental, are all there. Man is the representative of the cosmos. He is the microcosm. All the cosmic energies are present in a rudimentary form, in seed forms, in the human individual. But also, one can see that this conscious power or force is operating in the plant, in the metal, and in the animal. Sometimes, even in man, it works in compartmental or tight divisions. His mind often does not know what his vital being is doing. There is a novel by R.L. Stevenson, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", that is based on, the perception of the double
personality where the same consciousness is working in one part quite unknown to another part. Not that this happens in every case, but there are cases in which the same consciousness is operating on one level unknown to another level in the same organism. This illustrates how multiple are the hierarchical steps in which this consciousness works out whatever purpose it has. We are only trying to prove that consciousness is not only mental. It is independent of mind and has several levels on which it manifests itself. "Consciousness is there as a common element in man, in animal, in plant, and in matter. This shakti-energy creates the world."9

Consciousness always implies knowledge, self-knowledge it must know. So, when we say that this operation is of a conscious-force, we grant that it has intelligence, it must have self-knowledge. It must therefore be charged with purposefulness. It must know its purpose because of self knowledge. It knows the purpose because it knows itself, therefore, it knows the direction of the movement. This is seen in the working of plant life. The energy that is working in the plant seems as if it is conscious of the purpose. The seed invariably produces the tree. We see it working in the animals,
in an instinct where the purpose of the organism is known. So consciousness implies intelligence, self-knowledge and self-awareness which, therefore knows well the direction.

The poem *Rose of God* unfolds in the succession of vibrant images of the whole mystical metaphysics and psychology exploring the secrets of the Divine Rose. The Rose is here as the supreme symbol of the essence and efflorescence of God. Bliss, light, power, life and Love are the five essences that fuse as the integral perfection of God. In every stanza the first half names a power above and second half invokes that power to inhabit. "It informs and recreates the corresponding instrument below: bliss for the human heart, light for the human mind, power for the human will, life for the body terrestrial, and love to make earth the home of the wonderful and life beatitude's Kiss."\(^{10}\)

"Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,

Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!

Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's

Abyss:

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life
Another poem *Thought the Paraclete* is a revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes. It is a mystic poem and through symbols expresses something seen—a succession of vision and experience. As thought rises in the scale, it ceases to be intellectual, becomes illumined, then intuitive, then overmental and finally disappears seeking the last beyond.

*Yoga* is for divinization of man. It is to make him more and more worthy of his great heritage and possibility, namely that he is in fact, in the process of evolving into and of unfolding himself into divine. Sri Aurobindo thought that a penultimate reality is more important than the ultimate Reality. “He called penultimate reality *the supermind* which he thought would do more work and also show gradualness in the evolution of the divine man. But according to Sri Ramachandra (Babuji) any penultimate reality will give only a penultimate result.”11
Notes

1 and 2. Nolinikantha Gupta *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.*
Vol-4, chap-Poetry and Poetic and Inspiration,(pub-1970)
pp.40, 41.


9. A.B.Purani, "*Sri Aurobindo Life Divine*, Lecture six,
Conscious Force, Delight of Existence, The Problem,
