

Mystical Element in Indian Poetry
With Reference to Sri Aurobindo's Poems

Chapter -I

Mysticism

Writing of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), the Mother said with all-sufficient succinctness;

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history

“is not teaching,
not even revelation;
it is a decisive action
direct from the Supreme.”¹

As a seer and yogi in Pondicherry he continued writing poetry, mostly mystic and spiritual, during the last thirty years of his life. Poetry was outer vehicle through which he expressed the beauty and vision of his vast spiritual experience.

In him we find the three terms of human consciousness arriving at an absolute fusion. His poetry is a wonderful example of that fusion. The three terms are the spiritual, the intellectual and the physical. The intellectual is the intermediary, the paraclete, as he himself calls it in a poem *Thought Paraclete*. It negotiates bridges and harmonises the two other firmaments usually supposed to be antagonistic and incompatible.

The *Siddhi* of 24 November 1926 was a decisive stage in Sri Aurobindo's mission. It was the descent of Krishna into the physical. On 11 November he had said that he was trying to bring down the world of gods. The world of the gods was the overmind world just below the supermind. When the descent of Krishna took place on 24 November it only signified the fullness of the overmental realization. It is the state of ecstasy. He describes Lord Krishna in a poem *Krishna* :

“All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He!

Many limbs sate His whims bear His sweet ecstasy”.²

Mysticism is a name for our infinite appetites. It is some particular attitude towards 'Reality.' It is also a name for the paranoid darkness in which unbalanced people stumble confidently. It is therefore a quality of life of each of us. It begins with our infinite appetites and continues with the rise and fall of our hopes. It ends with the precarious balance. The usual criterion for the mystic state is the certainty. One undergoes the direct veiled touch of reality in itself. This reality more resembles our internal experience than our simply external environment. It is like the internal experience of a single person.

“This reality is considered spiritual and essentially unified. As it is felt more and more strongly it penetrates the

self more and more deeply until self and reality become identical where all pain, fear, guilt, and anxiety vanish. It enters into an indescribable state of rapture, equanimity or wholeness.”³

In a poem *Science and the Unknowable* Sri Aurobindo says:

“The objects we would prove are their form,
Each is a mass of forces veiled as shape
Whose ends we seize, but the inner lines escape
In a fathomless consciousness above mind’s norm.”

According to Sri Aurobindo mysticism is not only a science but also, and in a greater degree, an art. To approach it merely as a science is to move towards futility. The mystic domain has to be apprehended not merely by the true mind and understanding but by the right temperament and character. It is not merely an object of knowledge, a problem for inquiry and solution. It is an end, an ideal that has to be achieved. It is a life that has to be lived. This cannot be attained by intelligence. It can be seized by a purified clear temperament. Mystic realities cannot be reached by the scientific consciousness, because they are far more subtle than the subtlest object that science contemplates. The mystic reality is subtler than the subtlest of physical things. They are more concrete than the most concrete things that the senses

apprehend. The domain is of infinitely greater potency than the domain of intra- atomic forces. If one comes, all on a sudden, into contact with a force here without necessary preparation to hold and handle it, he may get bruised, morally and physically. The adventure into the domain has its own toll of casualties. One can lose the mind and one can lose one's body. It is a very common experience among those who have tried the path.

The mystic forces are not only of immense potency but of a definite moral disposition and character. They are of immense potency either for good or evil. They are not mechanical forces like those that physical sciences deal with. They are conscious forces to act with aim and purpose. The mystic forces are forces of light or of darkness. It is most often the powers of darkness that the naturally ignorant consciousness of man contacts when he seeks to cross the borderline without training and by the sheer arrogant self-sufficiency of mental scientific reason.

Ignorance, certainly, is not man's ideal condition. It leads to death and dissolution. But knowledge also can be equally disastrous if it is not of the right kind. The knowledge that is born of spiritual disobedience, inspired by dark ones, leads to the soul's fall. It leads to pain and suffering on earth. The seeker of true

enlightenment learns to separate the true and right from the false and the wrong. It is possible when he is in touch with the light.

The search for knowledge alone, knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the path of pure scientific inquiry and inquisitiveness, in relation to the mystic world, is a dangerous thing. For such a spirit serves only to encourage and enhances man's arrogance. In the end it not only limits but warps and falsifies the knowledge itself. Knowledge, based on and secured exclusively through the reason and light, can go only so far as that faculty can be reasonably stretched and not infinitely to stretch it to infinity.

The mystic truth has to be approached through the heart. "In the heart is established the Truth," says *Upanishad*. Even if the mind is utilized as an instrument of knowledge, the heart must be there behind as the guide and inspiration. True knowledge comes out of identity of being. All other knowledge is apprehension of things but not comprehension. In the former the knower stands apart from the object. He can envisage only the outskirts, the contour and the surface nature. The mind is capable of this alone. But comprehension means an embracing and penetration. It is possible when the knower identifies himself with the object.

"The mystic's knowledge is a part and a formation of his life. It is knowledge, not abstract and remote, but living

and intimate and concrete. It is a knowledge that pulsates with delight. Indeed it is the radiance shed by the purest and intensest joy. For this reason in approaching through the heart there is a chance of one's getting arrested there. In the heart there is a golden door leading to the deepest delights. There is also a diamond door opening into the skies of the brightest luminosities. The true mystic knowledge begins with the awakening into real being. This being is pure, luminous and blissful and sovereignly real, because it is a portion, a spark of the divine consciousness. A contact and communion with it brings automatically into play. The light and the truth are its substances. At the same time it is uprising flame that reaches out naturally to higher domains of consciousness. It manifests them through its translucid dynamism."⁴

Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of *ultimates*. It is the science of union with the Absolute. The mystic is the person who attains this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to know about, but to be, is the mark of real practitioner. In the mystic this union is conscious, personal and complete. More or less according to his measure he touches the substantial being of deity. This distinguishes him from the best and most brilliant of other men and makes his science, the science of self-evident of

reality. The true mystic is the person in whom powers transcend the visionary stage. They are exalted to the point of genius. In mystic the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness and he definitely surrenders himself to the embrace of reality.

Mysticism is the most romantic thing in the universe from the point of view of the art of arts. It finds naturally enough its closest correspondences in the most purely artistic and most deeply significant of all forms of expressions. The mediaeval mind is more naturally mystical than ours. It is sharply aware of the part which rhythmic harmony plays in the worlds of nature and of grace. It gives to music a cosmic importance. "There are three kinds of music," says Hugh of St. Victor, the music of the world, the music of humanity and the music of instruments. Of the music of the worlds, one is of the elements, another of the planets, and another of time. Of that which is of the elements, one is of number, another of weights, another of measure. Of that which is of the planets, one is of place, another of motion, another of nature. Of that which is of time, one is of the days and the vicissitudes of light and darkness, another of the years and the changes of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Of the music of humanity, one is of the body, another of the soul, another in the connection that is between them." Thus

the life of the visible and invisible universe consists in a supernal fugue.

Richard Rolle of Hampole “the father of English mysticism” was acutely aware of this music of the soul, discerning in its joyous periods. It is a response to the measured harmonies of the spiritual universe. In that beautiful description of his inward experience, nothing is more remarkable than his constant and deliberate employment of musical imagery. It seems to catch and translate for him the wild rapture of transcendental life. The condition of joyous and awakened love, to which the mystic passes when his purification is at an end, is the state of song. He does not see reality, but he hears it. It is heavenly melodious.

“Song I call” he says, when in a plenteous soul, the sweetness of eternal love with burning is taken and thought into song is turned. The mind is changed into full sweet sound. He, who experiences this joyous exaltation, says not his prayers like other righteous men. It is taken into marvelous mirth and godly sound descends into him.

Mysticism is practical, not theoretical. It, like revelation is final and personal. Its vision provides material, the substance, the actual experience, upon which mystical philosophy cogitates. True mystical achievement is the most complete and most difficult

expression of life. It is at once an act of love, an act of union, and an act of supreme perception. A trinity of experience meets and satisfies the three activities of self.

Mysticism is an entirely spiritual activity. The mystic possesses God and needs nothing more. He spends himself ceaselessly and tirelessly for other men, and becomes "an agent of the eternal goodness." He, destitute of supersensual ambitions, craves no occult power. All things are gathered together in one with the divine sweetness and the man's being is penetrated with divine substance. He loses himself therein as a drop of water. Thus man's spirit is so sunk in God, in divine union, that he loses all sense of distinction.

The business and method of mysticism is love. It is one of the most distinctive notes of true mysticism. It is the eager, outgoing activity whose driving power is generous love, not the absorbent, indrawing activity. It strives only for new knowledge, which is fruitful in the spiritual as well as in the physical world. It is the word love when applied to the mystics is to be understood in its deepest, fullest sense. It is the ultimate expression of the self's most vital tendencies, not as the superficial affection or emotion often dignified by this name. Mystic love is the offspring of the celestial Venus. It is the deepest desire and tendency of the soul

towards its source. It is the condition of humble access, a life-movement of the self. It is more direct in its methods and more valid in its results. In this condition a mystic is not known by reason, not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding. But he may be loved and chosen with the true will of the heart. Love to the mystic, is active, cognitive expression of his will and desire for the Absolute and also innate tendency to the Absolute.

“Mysticism entails a definite psychological experience. It is not a theory of the intellect. It is a definite and peculiar development of the whole self, conscious and unconscious. In this condition the mystics are emphatic in their statement that spiritual desires are useless unless they involve in the movement of the whole self towards the Real.”⁵

Here the mystic consciousness is extended in two distinct directions- (a) the vision or consciousness of absolute perfection and (b) the inward transmutation. In the process of transmutation subconscious spiritual perceptions are the primary material of mystical experience. One of the marks of the true mystic is the tenacious and heroic energy with which he pursues a definite moral ideal.

Mystics are in touch with supra-sensual things. Their experiences are of a world different from the common physical

world, the world of the mind and senses. These other worlds are constituted in other ways than ours. Their contents are different and the laws are also different. There the sun, the moon and stars, do not shine.

The difficulty is further enhanced by the fact that there are very many unseen worlds. They all differ from the seen from one another in manner and degree. Thus, for example, the *Upanishads* speak of *swapna*, the *susupta*, and *turiya* beyond the *jagrat*, where the rational being with its mind and senses lives and moves. There are other systems exist, and they are practically innumerable. When we have to speak of them we must employ them as figures and symbols. Even then they may prove inadequate and misleading. They are "Mystics who are averse to all speech and expression-they are *mauni*: in silence they experience the inexpressible and in silence they communicate it to the few who have the capacity to receive in silence."⁶

The method mystics choose to commune their experience of reality is different. Figures and symbols help the mystics to commune their experience. Although there is a great divergence between figures and symbols on the one hand and the things figured and symbolized on the other, still there is also some link, some common measure. We see not unoften the same or similar

figures and symbols representing an identical experience in ages and countries far apart from each other.

There is a distinction between figures and symbols. Figures are constructed by the rational mind, the intellect. There are metaphors and similes. They are not organically related to the thing experienced, but put round it as a robe that can be changed without affecting the experience itself. For example, when the Upanishads say *atmanam rathinam viddhi* (know that the soul is the master of the chariot who sits with in it) the symbol is not mere analogy or comparison, a figure. With the very substance of experience two cannot be separated. Or when the Vedas speak of the kindling of the fire, the images though taken from the material world, are not used for the sake of mere comparison. They are embodiments, the living forms of truths experienced in another world.

When a Mystic refers to the solar light or to the fire- the light for example, is not physical or material object. It is the materialization of something. It is fundamentally not material. Some movement in an inner consciousness precipitates itself into the region of the senses and takes the form commensurably with its nature. There is such a commensurability or parallelism between

the various levels of consciousness, in and through all the differences that separate from one another.

Thus an object or movement apprehended on the physical plane, has a sort of line re-echoing images extended in a series along the whole gradation of the inner lanes. Otherwise viewed, an object or movement in the innermost consciousness translates itself in varying modes from plane to plane down to the most material, where it appears in its grossest form.

Notes

1. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar *Sri Aurobindo a Biography and a History* ,(pub-1945),p.754.
2. Sri Aurobindo *Collected Poems*,(pub-1972),p.590.
3. Ben Ami Scharfstein *Mystical Experience*, chap -1, (pub-1973),p.1.
4. Nolini Kanta Gupta *An Approach to Mysticism*, chap, 1, (pub-1970),pp.3,4,6,7.
5. Evelyn Under Hill *Mysticism A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's spiritual Consciousness*, (pub-1911),pp.86,91,92,97,101.
6. Nolini Kanta Gupta *Ibid*, p.9.