CHAPTER IV

SRI AUROBINDO'S THEORY OF POETRY

A seer-poet of great power and extraordinary skill, Sri Aurobindo has formulated his theory of poetry in his work, 'The Future Poetry', which is highly original and most profound. Like his most outstanding work in the field of poetry, 'Sāvitrī', 'The Future Poetry' is another epic effort of his in the field of criticism. Most great poets have been great critics as well. None is more qualified to comment on the nature of poetry than the great poets themselves who have been witness to the greatness of poetry taking shape in their own works. Albeit they are not aware of the force and the power of their own poetry in the heat of creation; but their heightened consciousness from which it springs will certainly help them sort out the processes of their poetic creation when their emotions are recollected in tranquillity, however mystic the poetic expression. An unrivalled mystic poet that he is, Sri Aurobindo maps out for us the spiritual regions beyond the mind as the subtle-physical, the vital, the creative Intelligence, the psychic, the higher mind, the Illumined mind, the Intuitive mind and the Overmind which are yet to find their psychological equivalents.
The most original contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the theory of poetry in general and to Indian Aesthetics in particular, is his grand concept of 'Overhead poetry', poetry of the highest kind which is a 'communication from above', the mantra of the Real, a flow from the Supermind through the purest intuition, "that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the truth" ("Sadanādṛtasya"), which more or less echoes Shelley's phrase "the visitations of Divinity in man" used by him with reference to poetic inspiration in 'The Defence of Poetry'.

Born of 'the impulse of the divinity within', poetry is an unconscious activity, according to Sri Aurobindo, in the sense that it is a product of a heightened and greatened consciousness. Quite mysterious in nature, it is inherently irrational, as Plato asserts. It is irrational not in the sense that it is born out of a fine frenzy when the poet is not in control of his mind

1 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 8
2 Ibid., p. 279
or self which is what Plato means, but it is beyond the confines of the Intellectual reason which governs all human activities, it has a reason and wisdom behind it which our Intellect cannot comprehend. Being a soul-vision and the direct 'seeing' of the totality, unity and oneness of All — the divine unity of all creation — poetry goes beyond a description of the Sensuous, Imaginative and Intellectual Beauty of things and reveals even Psychic Beauty, Spiritual and Supramental Beauty, the essence and source of all beauty at all levels. The creation of beauty being his first and foremost aim, "the artist imitates God, Who created the world by communicating to it a likeness of His Beauty". Proceeding from the finite to the Infinite, he expresses the joy of the Infinite through human terms. Poetry is the offspring of his soul and mind, a dynamic form of his mental, vital and spiritual self-expression. It is born of transcendental vision, krāntādarsāna. It is a quest for spiritual fruition as well. It can give man of glimpse of 'Eternal Beauty wandering on its way' which guides the evolution of the universe from one organization of Beauty to higher and

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3 Jacques Maritain, 'Art and Scholasticism', (Sheed & Ward, 1946), p. 96
According to Plato, the poet is an inspired rhapsodist; he is 'possessed by the Muses' and speaks to us in a divinely inspired frenzy. His poetic gift is not an art or skill, consciously cultivated, but an inspiration. "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 is unable to utter his oracles, ... not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine....the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed...."

Sri Aurobindo agrees with Plato in this description of a poet as an inspired man but not entirely. The poet is in the grip of divine inspiration no doubt and his poetry can be said to cast a spell upon his hearers as well by its incantatory nature. He does not dispute


5 David Daiches, Critical approaches to Literature, 1959, p. 6
the truth of the Platonic view that the inspiration of
the poet is of divine origin and that the poet is merely
an instrument of the Gods. But he disagrees with him
totally when Plato asserts that the poet is out of his
senses when he is in the grip of a divine emotion and is
not conscious of himself or his powers; nor does he agree
with him in regard to his assertion that there is no
invention in him until he is inspired. Nor is it correct
to say that the poet need have no art in order to create
poetry, no volition either. According to Sri Aurobindo
the poet is very much conscious of himself in his moments
of poetic creation; as a matter of fact his consciousness
is very much chastened and heightened in those moments.
The higher the consciousness, the greater and more sublime
is the quality of his poetry. It is wrong to claim that
the poet in ordinary moments is an ordinary man lacking
in art and volition, being merely a passive vehicle of
divine inspiration when it grips him. The poet must be a
master of his technique and develop in himself the skills
of rhythmic and musical composition so as to be a fit
recipient of the divine inspiration when it descends on
him. Man must make a conscious and sustained effort in
order to evolve and to prepare himself for the argous
task of self-realisation. The poet, as a man speaking to
men, under a divine inspiration must no doubt be a man of
heightened consciousness and of greater capacity to com-pre-
hend the truths and values of life. He is hence much
higher in the order of evolution than an ordinary man.
Again it is not correct to say that the mind is not in him
in his inspired moments, but that the mind in him is tran-
scended, it is something higher than the mind which gets
activated and perceives the Truth direct without the medium
of the mind and senses. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the
ture creator, the true hearer is the soul." 6

Lascelles Abercrombie in his "The Idea of Great
Poetry" also stresses the incantatory nature of poetry
as being the hallmark of all true and great poetry. He
describes incantation as "the power of using words so as
to produce in us a sort of enchantment; and by that I mean
a power not merely to charm and delight, but to kindle
our minds into unusual vitality, exquisitely aware both
of things and of the connections of things." 7 The magical

6 "The Future Poetry", Vol. 9, p. 10

7 Lascelles Abercrombie, 'The Idea of Great Poetry',
(Martin Seeker, 1926), p. 18.
phrase helps the poet not merely to describe but to recreate the state of mind in which he found himself at the moment of the experience under reference in the reader as well. All poetic experiences are unique and the incantatory words of the poet immortalise them. "Out of subtly adjusted sound and sense of words," the poet must "contrive such a texture of intensities and complexities of meaning, of unsuspected filaments of fine allusion and suggestion, as will enable those gossamers to capture and convey into our minds just those fleeting, gleaming qualities of experience which elude the hold of everyday straightforward language. For these are the very qualities which give to each moment of experience its unique distinction; and the words that can securely convey them are magical words for they are truly creative." The primary power of a true poet is the power of discovering 'the magical phrase' in which even the common words come to acquire uncommon power and energy of meaning. This magical phrase when it comes invigorates the mind and electrifies the entire texture of language surrounding

8 Ibid., p. 23-24
it in the text of the poem and makes it vibrate with a vitality of its own. The incantatory power of these magical words and phrases in poetry helps create a unique state of mind in the reader in which the poet can directly transmit to him his peculiar individual aesthetic experience. Poetry, thus, aims at conveying experience itself, undiminished in any vital character, out of the poet's mind into ours. This incantatory effect, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the chief element in all great poetry which moves us by its rhythm and music. The Vedic and Upaniṣadic poetry of India which has touched the peak of poetic excellence is supreme example for incantatory poetry; this, Sri Aurobindo calls 'Mantric' poetry. Poetry, according to the ancient Indian tradition, is all mantric. It sets up a direct communication between the gods and the poetic soul and through him the reader's soul as well, thus paving the way for the ultimate vibrant fusion of the human and divine souls which is the human be-all and end-all of all existence. The mantric poetry is the poet's highest achievement. All true poetry is

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intelligence, the imagination and the ear. Intelligence imagination and ear are only channels and instruments of the soul, who is the true hearer of poetry. Technique is also the first step towards perfection and occupies a smaller field in poetry.

Rhythmic word is the instrument of poetic creation. Its thought-value and sound-value have separately or together a soul-value. This rhythmic word is the most complex and flexible of all other instruments of art and infinitely more suggestive. Its sensible element gives it its sound-value, its immaterial element its thought value or significance and these two together have a direct spiritual power or soul-value. Poetic technique or laws of mechanical construction no doubt contributes to poetic perfection but in the highest flights of poetry it is of no great significance.

Poetry, according to Sri Aurobindo, determines itself its own form. In the heat of poetic creation, the poet does not keep his attention fixed on the technique of his art. The rhythm and the style flow from his soul.

11 Ibid., pp. 10-11
uninterruptedly out of sheer delight, divine in its origin. This supreme poetic utterance is the highest form of speech born out of man's self-vision." A divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal soul has felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into its original creative vision — such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. And this delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power."

Poetry, as the highest form of speech is different from the ordinary everyday use of language as well as the use of language in prose. Ordinary speech which uses language mostly for a limited practical utility of
communication, treats words as mere conventional signs for ideas as if they are useful for life but themselves are without life. Such a use of words makes them use their natural force and vividness and charm. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, words, in the primitive use of languages had a real and vivid life of their own and stood not for mere precise ideas and meanings but for a whole gamut of feelings and sensations and broad mental impressions with minute shades of quality in them. A panorama of vivid experiences flashed before the mind's eye on account of the suggestive power of the words' sound, their life and their power. The Intellectual import and the definitive thought value of the words were only its secondary elements which grew more dominant as language evolved. Poetry, in its use of words, in the heat of inspiration, brings back to life the original element in words, their very spirit, their soul-suggestion; it thus "arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning, the word carries." By throwing open the doors of the Spirit, poetry gives utterance to the experience, the vision, the ideas of the higher and

13 Ibid., p. 13
wider soul in man. Prose style is different from the ordinary speech in that it uses rhythms which ordinary speech neglects and aims at a greater fluidity and harmony. Words are associated in such an agreeable way that they please and clarify the intelligence. Prose aims at an accurate, subtle and flexible expression in order to heighten the force of its intellectual appeal. It may use emphatic rhythms and images as well but only with a view to enhancing the effect of the intellectual vision of the thought it describes, and thus comes to possess an aesthetic appeal. Reason and taste are its most fundamental guiding factors; effectiveness and forcefulness its most important aspects.

Poetry goes beyond these limits and aims at a more striking rhythmic balance. It uses images for sheer vision and opens itself to a mightier breath of speech. The privilege of the poet is to go beyond mere intellectual illuminativeness and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of

14 Ibid., pp. 13-14
infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountainheads of the spirit within us. The lower kind of poetry does not answer to this description. It emanates from an excitement of the intellect, the imagination, the emotions and the vital activities and satisfies only the eye, sense, heart and thought-mind, which are passive instruments of the soul. The real, the high poetry is born out of spiritual excitement and attempts to embody the truth of life or truth of Nature in it. "It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities." 15

All creation is a mystery; it does not admit of any intellectual analysis. It is at best the most outward and mechanical part of it which can be analysed. The creative faculty of the poetic mind, says Sri Aurobindo, is no exception.

According to him, the poet is a magician who hardly knows the secret of his own spell. The poetic mind which constructs, even when it is consciously critical, is more

15 Ibid., pp. 15-16
intuitive than intellectual. It becomes the channel and instrument of the divine afflatus. It is by a spiritual feeling or identification that one can bring oneself to appreciate the greatness or glory of the poetry created by the inspiration of the spiritual power and not by an intellectual judgment. It is the same spiritual feeling or power which tells him whether the word that comes is suitable, adequate, effective, as well as expressive of the vision that is to be embodied in the poetic creation or whether he has to wait for another that shall be more inspired or expressive. Thus the poem becomes the inevitable utterance every word of which is an irreplacable element in it. The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit. The message of the Spirit, the intuition, is couched in the poetic word whose meaning and significance get greatened and heightened according to the gravity of the message that is conveyed. It is the chosen medium of the soul's self-expression and the intensity of the word depends upon the progress of the soul which expresses itself in poetry. Hence, it is that Sri Aurobindo calls poetry 'the Mantra of the Real' which rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth.
According to Sri Aurobindo, the quality of poetry one writes depends upon the level of one's consciousness. The outer consciousness of the poet is the transmitting agent and even the highest inspiration may get sullied and altered if the outer consciousness of the poet is lethargic, inert, overactive or undeveloped. It is only through the growth, development and heightening of the consciousness that one can heighten, chasten and energise one's inspiration.

The poet is a man with a capacity for exceptionally vivid experience. He retains the pristine freshness of experience. Through this rare capacity of his for realising and then imparting to others the 'sensuous and affective qualities of experience,' he succeeds in "heightening this capacity in his readers and broadening or deepening the more meagre and jejune content of their sensuous life." Being endowed with an exceptional sensitivity to the significance of words, their rhythm and movement, the poet is capable of highly valuable experiences which he chooses to express and immortalise in his works of art and commu-

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nicate to others; therefore in the appreciation of such works of art "the standard of men's experiences is raised and we achieve such valuable experiences as by our own unaided efforts we could not obtain." Thus we find that "a poem may induce in the reader an attitude of mind encouraging him to pay more attention than was habitual with him in his day-to-day practical life to the sensed core and feel of experience, dwelling in awareness upon its subtle and changing qualities, and to set a higher value than before upon this kind of 'heightening and enrichment' of consciousness."

A yogic consciousness helps one chasten and drawn one's ego and develop 'equality' - an outlook which helps him look at everything, men and things, with an equal eye, in an unimpeccablyed and detached manner. This equality of outlook is what is referred to in the Gītā as 'Ekatva' in 'Ekatvam anupasāyataḥ'. This essential oneness, this unity in the great diversity of Nature makes for the greatest poetry. Hence the poet who is a Yogi writes best when he is in the grip of the purest emotion,

17 Ibid., p. 171
18 Ibid., p. 181
when he is totally cut off from all the limiting or restricting considerations of life imposed upon him by the society and his environment.

According to Sri Aurobindo, an element of mysticism is inevitable for all true poetry. The poet being a seer of Truth can never escape seeing and realizing the basic truth of the essential oneness and integrality of all forms of existence, human and non-human as well as all forms of matter. Consciousness is inherent in all forms of Matter as well as Spirit, in manifest or unmanifest condition. This consciousness is the spark of the Spirit or the Divine and hence in the ultimate stage of evolution nothing is left behind unevolved. "Involved we are and evolve we must" is true not only of humans but the non-humans and non-living matter as well. The truth of this "one in the Many and the many in the one", embodied in the Upanishadic dictum "Tat Tvam Asi" is the most fundamental of all truths about existence. The poet, being the discoverer of Beauty, the divine element in things, has necessarily to come to grips with this fundamental truth of Divine immanence and that is the beginning of mysticism in his artistic creations.
"The power which constitutes our life, and makes us conscious of the world we live in, is the same power as that which makes, or rather is the world; and we, who are parts of the world, are parts of IT. Thus all the diversity of things we see and know, ourselves the seers and knowers among the rest, constitute one life together; every part is part of the living whole; in each the spirit of the living whole resides; and the condition which makes knowledge possible to us is our kinship, our identity with this all pervasive spirit." This was in a nutshell the mystic philosophy of Blake, a great mystic poet, whose poetry Sri Aurobindo admires. Like the prophet of the life divine, Blake believed in the possibility of an identification of the divine nature with the human. Like Sri Aurobindo again, he believed that "the complete and perfect development in man of the seed of life that is in him would lift his life to a level with the Divine," which comes nearest to the Supramental transformation as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.


20 Ibid., p. 286
It is impossible for the mind and the human intellect to comprehend the essential unity of things. It can be realised, it can be felt, only "when mind and heart set their questionings and despondencies aside, and repose upon the assurance that comes to them from within. And the action that proceeds from such assurance is the spontaneous outflowing which in art is the creative impulse; in conduct, is love".

Spenser, in his "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" says that the world we see around us with all its charm and beauty is a manifestation of God through which we are to appreciate the divine beauty.

The means therefore which unto us is lent Him to behold, is on his works to looke,
Which he hath made in beauty excellent..."

To Coleridge, this world of ours is the mighty manifestation of God through which we are led to the bright reality of which it is but a shadow. In his poem "The Destiny of Nations", he writes:

21 Ibid., p. 286
"All that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolic, one mighty alphabet
To infant minds; and we in this low world
Placed with our backs to bright reality,
That we might learn with young unwounded ken
The substance from the shadow."

Thus English poetry has been "deeply coloured by the belief that the natural world is but a shadow and reflection of a higher reality beyond and that the things which we know through the senses are symbols by whose means we can penetrate to an imitation of the divine nature behind."

Such excerpts from all great poetry point to the presence of the mystic element in poetry. All that is worth experiencing, sensory as well as non-sensory, partakes of the divine and hence the mystical core in its content. The mystics begin by turning away from the many attractions or distractions of the sensory world, and turning in upon their own soul. The Christian mystics describe their experience "as a state of passivity because it is a free operation in which the soul does not act on its own

22 Harold Osborne, 'Aesthetics and Criticism', pp. 191-192
initiative, but is raised to a higher direction, reoriented by the work of the Holy Spirit."\textsuperscript{23} The mystical experience is immediate. The mind does not intercede, nor does it interpret it. It goes beyond the method of logic, concepts and analogies. The normal processes of mind in the act of knowing, the normal function of apprehending through the senses are not obliterated but remain silent, but the distinct use of conceptual formulas is obliterated. Mind is not killed but transcended.

Sri Aurobindo stresses the need to still the mind and to drown the ego in order to prepare oneself for the mystic vision. But it is possible for man to attain to the highest experience of the divine or the Saccidānanda only with the descent of the Supermind. "All can be done if the God-touch is there."\textsuperscript{24} This mystical state is not mere passivity on account of the silence of the mind. The attainment of passivity is itself activity, an active process. A wheel appears motionless when it spins at a very high speed. The Spirit comes into activity when mind goes still and man ascends to a higher plane of consciousness.

\textsuperscript{23} Geddes MacGregor, \textit{Aesthetic experience in religion}, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Sāvitrī}, I, I. Vol. 28, p. 3.
and is highly and essentially active.

The mystic experience, being above logic and beyond mental processes, is radically incommunicable in human language. It is not analogous to aesthetics. If they are asked to make their experience intelligible to us, "they may sometimes answer enigmatically that it is like 'seeing a sound' or 'hearing a vision'."²⁵ If, however, they express themselves through the medium of aesthetic symbols, use analogous ideas from the world of senses in their contemplation or press vivid imagery into service, we must know that they are not mere intellectual concepts or abstractions but aesthetic intuitions. Writing about mystic poetry in one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo says: "The mystic feels real and present, even ever present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed

in intellectually devised images. He uses words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract, has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To him, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and he can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to him an image but a fact. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.\footnote{Sri Aurobindo, \textit{Sri Aurobindo Mandir Manual}, No. 5, 15 August 1946 (Sri Aurobindo Pata Mandir, Calcutta), p. 13.}
According to Thomas Carlyle who considered poetry the workings of genius itself, and who equated it with Inspiration, itself held to be mysterious and inscrutable; "the true Poet is ever, as of old, the Seer; whose eye has been gifted to discern the godlike mystery of God's Universe, and decipher some new lines of its celestial writing; we can still call him a Vates and Seer; for he sees into this greatest of secrets, 'the open secret'; hidden things become clear; how the Future (both resting on Eternity) is out another phasis of the Present; thereby are his words in very truth prophetic; what he has spoken shall be done."

Sri Aurobindo asserts that sight or vision is the essential poetic gift and the poet's characteristic power. Thought-power, lavish imagery and a penetrating force of passion and emotion are no doubt essential to great poetry, necessary aids to poetic expression, but do not form the essence or the source of poetry as such. The poet is referred to as Kavi in Sanskrit which in the

Vedic times meant the poet-seer who saw and found the inspired word of his vision. He saw the Vedas and the Upanisads, the breath of God, manifesting themselves as the purest Light and gave them a configuration in the form of poetry. This was the very acme of intuitive vision in which the highest Truth of the Divine becomes manifested to the sense of sight direct. Hence the sages are called, not the authors of the Mantra, but its seers, 'Mantra Draśṭā'. Says Sri Aurobindo: "The archetypal poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a soul that sees in itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive body of the vision; and the great poets are those who repeat in some measure this ideal creation, 'kavyāḥ satyasaśrutāḥ', seers and hearers of the poetic truth and the poetic word."

While Carlyle had great faith in the heroic destiny of man it was not absolute and unalloyed. He more or less acquiesced in the philosophy of decline; to him the

28  *The Future Poetry*, Vol. 9, p. 30
advancement of civilization denoted to a certain extent the decay of genius and greatness. But to Sri Aurobindo the ultimate divinization of human beings as a race was an inevitable fact; his 'Life Divine' is a blue-print for man's ultimate destiny. The gift of vision and intuition was the lot of every man to possess provided he strove for it consciously and prepared himself for the descent of the Supramental power on him. Carlyle in his lectures "On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History", assigns only the third place to the Poet in the hierarchy of heroes. The Hero is Divinity and as Prophet — to fancy one of our fellow-men as a god in human form or as one speaking with the voice of a god — is now extinct and past on account of the triumph of science and the consequent loss of the sense of wonder. Our Hero, hence, could only be a Poet now.

"We are now to see our Hero in the less ambitious, but also less questionable, character of Poet; a character which does not pass. The Poet is a heroic figure belonging to all ages, whom all ages possess, when once he is produced, whom the newest age as the oldest may produce; — and will produce, always when Nature pleases. Let Nature send a Hero-soul; in no age is it other than possible
that he may be shaped into a Poet".

Poetry is accorded such priority over philosophy as well as the other analogous modes of knowing mainly on account of the fact that it proceeds from the highest faculty of man in the most exalted moments when it is in the grip of the creative Time-Spirit and records its vision of the essential Truth, cosmic, universal and spiritual. It claims for its province not only the whole circle of Nature but creates "new worlds of its own, shows us persons who are not to be found in being, and represents even the faculties of the soul, with her several virtues and vices, in a sensible shape and character."

Poetic words are the direct energy of the Universal Spirit. They do not merely present meaning; they create it. Thus poetry can be said to be an imitation, not of nature but of the creating, naming God-head. The poet thus is a second creator, 'poietes', maker.


30 Addison, 'Spectator No. 419', quoted in N. Fruman, 'Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel', (George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 185

What characterizes a true poet who deserves the exalted title of a second creator or seer is detailed by Sri Aurobindo in the concluding paragraph of his 'The Future Poetry': "It is in effect a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the Godhead in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well as the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised up-lifting of his thought and feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and more clearly disclosed self of the universe."

The future of poetry is immense, as Matthew Arnold has declared and the poetry of the Future will be, according to Sri Aurobindo, the poetry of the Spirit, embodying the aforesaid vision and speaking with the inspiration of its utterance. This poetic vision of life is the 'soul-view', according to Sri Aurobindo, because the true creator and the true hearer is the soul. Thus all genuine

32 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 288
poetic activity is the activity of the Spirit within us. This view of poetry is a higher concept than that of Arnold's who calls poetry a criticism of life. The basic material or substance of poetry will continue to be the same but the events, emotions and the transiences of life expressed in it will be presented as steps and stages in the evolution of man and matter and the eternal manifestation of the Spirit in all. Its supreme consummation will be in the expression of the spiritual vision of Truth, Life, Beauty and Delight which constitute the Supreme poetic truth and culminate in supreme Ananda.

The mantra, by which Sri Aurobindo connotes poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible "when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of Truth." All great poetry springs

33 The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram calls poetry the sensuality of the Spirit.

34 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 17
from a fusion of these three elements, the poetic words becoming luminous and acquiring a revelatory character in the process.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution and his theory of poetry are of a piece. He asserts in his theory of evolution that man cannot by his own effort make himself more than man. Evolution at every stage is possible only by the descent of Supramental knowledge coming to the aid of man's conscious efforts to evolve himself. The final fruition of man is possible only when the spirit descends into him to transform him completely. In the same manner, poetry at its best turns mystic. It is an incantation and is akin to prayer. Sri Aurobindo calls this, mantra. The best example for mantric poetry is the Vedic and Upanišadic poetry. This poetry strikes us 'half as a prayer from below, half as a whisper from above,' it is a communication from above and has a divine origin and a divine afflatus. It is quintessentially soul speaking to soul, not merely man speaking to man. It establishes instantaneous communication at the intuitive level overriding the meddlesome intervention of the intellect and

the senses. A poet needs an intensity of vision and sustained inspiration at the highest possible level in order to be able to write such mantric poetry with an elemental power and force.

The poetic word in such mantric poetry leaps into its place and assumes the meaning, power and force of its own accord. No amount of mere human effort, fancy and imagination can produce a mantra. It is the visitation of divinity in man which makes this possible. Sri Aurobindo has explained at length the effect that mantra exerts on man in his epic, 'Sāvitrī':

"Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And, musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
The word repeated itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
Are seized unalterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change;
He feels a Wideness and becomes a power,
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea;
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech."

The mind labouring hard to comprehend the message of the mantra gives up the attempt and falls silent thus making way for the higher faculties to make the attempt. Intellectual comprehension being ruled out, intuitive comprehension takes over, establishes communication with the soul; the message now flashes on it and man experiences ecstasy as a result. Creation of such works of art is possible only for the gnostic being according to Sri Aurobindo. Referring to such creation, he says: 'Creation aesthetic or dynamic, mental creation, life-creation, material creation will have for him the same sense. It will be the creation of significant forms of the Eternal Force, Light, Beauty, Reality, - the beauty and truth of its forms and bodies, the beauty and truth of its powers and qualities, the beauty and truth of its spirit, its formless beauty of self and essence.' It is always indeed the

36 *Sāuktā*, Vol 24, p. 375
spirit in man which shapes his poetic utterance, says Sri Aurobindo.

Discussing the modus operandi of the production of poetry in a letter Sri Aurobindo says that a 'truly poetic poetry' comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and the outer mind; consciousness and other external instruments are used in the process of its transmission only. He lists the three elements involved in poetic production in this context: the original source of inspiration, the vital force of creative beauty and the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet.

The originating source of inspiration may be the subtle physical plane, the higher or lower vital itself, the plane of dynamic or creative intelligence, the plane of dynamic vision, the psychic, the illumined mind, Intuition or the Overmind widenesses. This inspiration will be deemed to be perfect, pure and unsullied if it flows down from the source, the Idea, rhythm, form, words all together, without any need for the interference of the brain-mind or the Intellect. The poet in this case is a mere channel or receptacle, an agent for transmitting the inspiration and no more, "although he feels the joy of the creation and the joy of the āvēsa, enthousiasmos,
elation of the inrush and the passage." Such inspiration arises mostly from the vital or the psychic, 'the two most powerfully impelling and compelling parts of the nature' and its flow is spontaneous and unobstructed. Poets in the grip of such an undoctored and untailored inspiration are the mouthpiece of the Gods Themselves.

If the original inspiration does not come ready made from the source and the rhythm, language etc. are to be found somewhere in the instrument, then it is the vital force of creative beauty which takes up the idea, fits it into an appropriate and adequate form and contributes its own substance and impetus to it. Such unformed inspiration, usually other than vital or psychic, arising from the creative poetic intelligence or the higher or even the Illumined mind, allows itself to be arrested by the busy-body intellect and through its conscious 'labour of creation gets transformed into a mere weakened shadow of the original idea which gets obliterated in the process of intellectual cerebration. Here the poetic idea is expressed through

38 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 293
39 Ibid., p. 292
emotions recollected in tranquillity which is totally different from a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

Sometimes the inspiration gets blocked by a lethargic outer consciousness or gets totally rehashed and recast by a too active outer consciousness. The resulting poetry in either case is a mere mental manufacture born out of toilsome labour; it could be powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. If, however, the outer consciousness remains entirely passive and transmits the inspiration without alteration what it receives from the god-heads, great poetry comes to birth.

In another letter he lists the three essentials for writing poetry: viz. emotional sincerity and poetical feeling, a mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm which entails a knowledge of the technique of poetic and rhythmic expression and the power of inspiration, the creative energy. According to Wordsworth, the poet is a man speaking to men; a man 'endowed with more lively

40 Ibid., p. 293
41 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 295
sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a
greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive
soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man
pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in
him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions
as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually
impelled to create them where he does not find them."

... The Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater
promptness to think and feel without immediate external exci-
tement, and a greater power of expressing such thoughts and
feelings are produced in him in that manner."42 Such poetry
is necessarily the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings
and takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.
This is what Sri Aurobindo has termed emotional sincerity and
poetical feeling which are an essential constituent of poetry.

A mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm is the
second requisite. The poet must be master of the technique
of poetic and rhythmic expressions. To learn the

42 William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads',
quoted in Carritt, 'Philosophies of Beauty'. (Clarendon
language of art, to acquire the requisite technical
dexterity, must be an artist's first duty, according to
Blake. The technique as such - the metre, the variation
of movement without spoiling the fundamental structure
of the metre, the proper use of stress, quantity, asso-
nances, dissonances etc. - can be learnt by turning in
one's ear 'in a tapasya of vigilant attention to these
constitutents' in great poetry. But the more important
factor, the secret soul of rhythm which uses but exceeds
the technique is a subtle element in poetry lying hidden
behind the music of words and sounds and things and this
must either grow or suddenly open in the poet and does
so when the Power within wishes to express itself in that
way. The term technique refers to the whole collection
of the artistic devices employed by the poet; but it is
chiefly a question "of the ways and means of proceeding
in the intellectual sphere which the artist uses to attain
the end of his art .... But they have to be discovered.
And the most elevated of them, those most closely approxi-
mating to the individuality of the work spiritually conceived
by the artist, are strictly personal to him and discoverable
by one individual only." This is what contributes to

43 Jacques Maritain, 'Art and Scholasticism',
(Sheid and Ward, London, 1946), p. 135
the originality of the work of art. Explaining the 
importance of this consciously cultivated technique of 
art, Baudelaire writes in 'L'Art romantique': "It is 
clear that systems of rhetoric and prosodies are not forms 
of tyranny arbitrarily devised, but a collection of rules 
required by the very organization of the spiritual being: 
prosodies and systems of rhetoric have never prevented 
originality from manifesting itself distinctly. The 
opposite would be far more true, that they have assisted 
the development of originality."

A poet, says Sri Aurobindo, neglects technique at 
his own peril. It is a serious error to regard metre or 
rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous 
equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic 
form. Metre is the most natural mould of expression for 
certain states of creative emotion and vision. The metrical 
is more natural and spontaneous than the non-metrical 
form. The emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless 
rhythm.

44 Baudelaire, 'L'Art romantique', quoted in 
Jacques Maritain, 'Art and Scholasticism', p. 135

45 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 392
Last but the most important essential for poetic creation is Inspiration, the creative energy. It is this inspiration which makes all the difference between the poet and the good verse-writer. All art is inspiration, asserts Blake, and true artistic work could only be done in the Spirit. Once the poet or the artist is, by long search, in possession of the best and most appropriate form for expressing what has to be said, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it. Inspiration spontaneously dictates to him the method of execution appropriate to his designs.

A work of art has necessarily to be inspired; if it is not, it cannot be called art. When it is inspired, it is the gift of God, the Ultimate Truth and Beauty get expressed in it. 'Where there is no inspiration there can be no poetry.'

All true inspiration proceeds from within, according to Coleridge, whereas according to Sri Aurobindo the

46 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 392-93
47 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 355
Sri Aurobindo, in whose opinion Beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one at the highest level, agrees with Hegel's view of art: "it (art) cannot fulfil its highest function till it has established itself in the same sphere with religion and philosophy and has become simply one of the ways of expressing, or presenting to consciousness, the divine, the deepest interests of man, the most comprehensive spiritual truths."
