CHAPTER V

SRI AUROBINDO AS A CRITIC OF ART AND POETRY

It is impossible for a great poet not to be a good critic as well. A creator of beauty is most apt to discover and enjoy the beauty in others' works. Lisperg in numbers right from his early teens and blossoming later into almost the greatest mystic poet in English, Sri Aurobindo has given us a body of literary criticism in his 'Future Poetry' unrivalled for its originality in certain aspects. He traces the progressive revelation of the Spirit in English poetry right from its early days upto the modern times, making in a prophetic vein predictions as to what course poetry would take in future. The inevitability of his conclusions regarding the nature of future poetry throws light on his unshakable faith in the total evolution of humanity toward Godhead and divinisation of all life on earth.

Baudelaire writes in his "L'art romantique" regarding the poet-critic: "It would be quite a new departure in the history of the arts for a critic to turn poet, a reversal of every psychic law, a monstrosity: on the other hand, every great poet becomes naturally, fatally, a critic. I am..."
sorry for poets who are guided by instinct alone; I consider them incomplete. A crisis inevitably arises in the spiritual life of all great poets, when they try to discover the reason of their art, to ascertain the obscure laws by virtue of which they have produced, and to derive from such a scrutiny a set of rules whose divine object is infallibility in poetic production. It would be a prodigy for a critic to turn poet and it is an impossibility for a poet not to have in him at the same time the stuff of a critic.¹

Such a poet critic is Sri Aurobindo, a perfect one of that kind at that. A born poet of uncommon ability, Sri Aurobindo believed in the Upaniṣadic assertion: 'Raso vai sah' ² where there is beauty there is divinity. Everything incomplete is potentially capable of becoming perfect which is an indisputable fact of evolution; as such beauty is hidden in everything which it is the business of the poet to bring out and which again is the main avocation of a true critic. 'In all we feel his presence and his power', he says in


² Taittiriya Upaniṣad, II-7.6
in 'Sāvitrī': 'This world is God fulfilled in outwardness'. His metaphysics, his theory of evolution, his poetic theory and his critical credo are all of a piece; all are perfection-oriented, the highest watermark in their respective fields and the farthest points upto which human mind could travel. They are also the highest synthesis of the greatest thoughts of the spiritual East and the vibrant West. As he adumbrates in 'Sāvitrī', "The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's Face", and it is the business of the true poet to prepare man's consciousness for such a realization.

All life, according to Sri Aurobindo, is an adventure of consciousness. Man can only evolve by expanding, greatening and heightening his consciousness. Man lives mainly by exciting and extending his consciousness of the 'mechanical universe'. The permeating Spirit could be realized increasingly only by a greatened consciousness. This growth of consciousness in man is a

3 'Sāvitrī', Vol. 29, X.3
4 'Sāvitrī', XI. 1. p. 709 (Vol.29)
deliberate process. The initiative must come from man on account of his deep desire to evolve and evolution is the inevitable result of expanding consciousness. All higher activities of man like Yoga, poetic creation and criticism are aids in this process of expansion of consciousness.

Art, according to Sri Aurobindo, helps in the widening of the individual consciousness of man into the cosmic consciousness step by step. The individual consciousness turns into national and then global consciousness which in turn develops into cosmic consciousness which again gets heightened into supramental consciousness ultimately. This spiritual utility of art is, according to him, the highest use of art. "Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression. Spirituality is a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the highest and most perfect Art, which while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality, as the best European Art:}
satisfies these requirements, reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things, the joy of God in the world and its beauty and desirableness and the manifestation of divine force and energy in phenomenal creation". 5

Sri Aurobindo's aesthetic theory is influenced and inspired by the ancient Indian aesthetic theory of rasa-bhāva-ānanda of Bharata enunciated in the Natya Sastra. Referring to the Kathartic activity of Art, the direct purifying of the emotions, he writes: "Out life is largely made up of the eight rasas. The movements of the heart in its enjoyment of action, its own and that of others, may either be directed downwards, as in the case with the animals and animals men, to the mere satisfaction of the ten sense-organs and the vital desires, which make instruments of the senses in the average sensual man, or they may work for the satisfaction of the heart itself in a predominantly emotional enjoyment of life, or they may be directed upwards through the medium of the intellect, rational and intuitional, to attainment of delight through the seizing on the source of all delight, the Spirit, the

5 'The Hour of God and Other Essays', Vol. 17, p. 248
Satyam, Sundaram, Anandam who is beyond and around, the source and the basis of all this world-wide activity, evolution and progress. 

The above statement describes the nature of the European as well as the Indian approach to Art. The best of European Art is emotional and intellectual in character while the best Indian Art is mainly spiritual and intuitional. It is Sri Aurobindo's firm conviction that "if Art is to reach towards the highest, the Indian tendency must dominate .......... Man becomes God, and all human activity reaches its highest and noblest when it succeeds in bringing body, heart and mind into touch with spirit. Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance." 

Thus, art, according to Sri Aurobindo, has not only emotional and intellectual values, it has spiritual values and soul values as well. The main task of art, viz. the discovery and expression of Beauty, is a spiritual activity and its intensity is related to the growth of consciousness.

6 Ibid., Vol. 17, p. 242
7 Ibid., p. 249
which again is most fundamental to his theory of evolution. Thus we find that his philosophy of the Life Divine and his theory of evolution are essentially related to his aesthetic theory.

Turning to his critical theory especially with regard to poetry, we find that Sri Aurobindo lays emphasis on the technique of poetic expression taking care to add that it is not the be-all and end-all of poetic activity as such. "In all art good technique is the first step towards perfection," he asserts but, however indispensable, it "occupies a smaller field perhaps in poetry than in any other art." This is so because the rhythmic word which is the instrument of great poetry "has a subtly sensible element, its sound value, a quite immaterial element, its significance or thought value, and both of these again, its sound and its sense, have separately and together a soul value, a direct spiritual power, which is infinitely the most important thing about them." These three indispensable values of poetry are 'beyond the province of any laws of mechanical construction' and can never be subjected to any

8 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 10
9 Ibid., p. 10
10 Ibid., p. 11
intellectual analysis either. A gifted soul creating
great poetry soars high unfettered by the rules or laws
of poetic construction or technique. In one of his letters
he criticizes the slogan of 'Art for Arts Sake': it is
unacceptable to him if the slogan simply meant that
artistry, technique and some perfect expression are all
that are needed and not the contents. These are the
indispensable first elements of artistic creation, no doubt,
but art comprises more: it comprises the three elements,
the perfect expressive form, the discovery of beauty and
revelation of the soul. The first two elements are vehicles
of Ñananda born out of creative consciousness which is the
consummation of artistic experience.

All great poetic utterance is discovery, according
to Sri Aurobindo, and must embody 'a deep, high or wide
spiritual vision' if it should deserve being called poetry.
Even poetry of the highest intensities of style and rhythm
must satisfy these two conditions, says Sri Aurobindo.
"Vision is the characteristic power of the poet ......
Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see,
and since it is to the inner senses that it has to address
itself — for the ear is only its physical gate of entry
and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing, — and since its object is to make us live within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is to an inner-sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.**

Aesthetics means to Sri Aurobindo a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, that can awaken the soul to something deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, the spirit’s delight, Ananda. Universal Ananda is the parent of aesthetics. The intensity of the delight experienced depends upon the evolution of the consciousness. Here Sri Aurobindo posits eight levels of poetry proceeding from the mystic mental levels namely the subtle-physical, the vital, the creative mind, psychic, higher, illumined, intuitive and the overmind. The overhead poetry, which is Sri Aurobindo’s exclusive and significant contribution to poetics and critical jargon, in its highest form, comes from overmind but not all of it. It could as well come from lower levels of consciousness but it has an essential aesthetic of its own and is not bound by rules and canons and other yardsticks, nor could

11 Ibid., p. 29-30
mere intellectual interpretation get anything out of it. This is where he enters the mystic region which it requires special initiation and orientation, spiritual in character, to traverse. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and outlook are fundamentally mystical; his aesthetics and poetics are part and parcel of the mystic system he has built up in his philosophy of the Life Divine.

Sri Aurobindo traces the course of English poetry in his 'Future Poetry' and the manner in which it has evolved from Chaucer to the modern times. He assesses the individual poets and their poetry critically according to the manner in which and the extent to which these principles of poetics he has enunciated have been operative in their poetry. He examines the width, the depth and the intensity of the poetic experience and vision expressed in their poetry and how far they have been able to 'make the thing presented living to the imaginative vision'.

The poetry of England is truly reflective of the national characteristics of the people. The British are known for their dynamism, daring life and practical-mindedness. In Sri Aurobindo's words, the British national mind is "remarkably dynamic and practical, with all the Teutonic
strength, patience, industry"¹² and this is on account of the 'dominant Anglo-Saxon strain' in their character. At the same time there is another element of the national mind— the submerged, half-insistent Celtic, gifted with precisely the opposite qualities, inherent spirituality, the gift of the word, the rapid and brilliant imagination, the quick and luminous intelligence, the strong emotional force and sympathy, the natural love of the things of the mind and still more of those beyond the mind, left to it from an old forgotten culture in its blood which contained an ancient mystical tradition",¹³ and this is the Scandinavian and Celtic elements in their character. The greatness as well as the limitations of English poetry arise from 'the fervent of these two elements.'

Secondly, English poetry is highly materialistic and has a 'strong hold upon this life, the earth-life.'¹⁴ It 'loves to dwell with all its weight upon the preservation of life and action, of feeling and passion.'¹⁵ The English love life in all its externalities and for its own sake;

¹² Ibid., p. 47
¹³ Ibid., p. 48
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 54
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 54
hence their poetry attempts 'to be or at least to appear true to the actual lives of life, to hold up a mirror to Nature.'

Sri Aurobindo's deep study, intimate knowledge and sympathetic understanding of the English national temperament made possible by his long stay in England during the most impressionable years of his early career have helped him in assessing the essential greatness as well as the inevitable limitations and weaknesses of the English poetic genius. The evolution of English poetry from the earliest times up to the modern period makes it clear, according to Sri Aurobindo, that it holds a great promise for the future. The trend of modern English poetry and its 'inwardness' reinforce this great faith and prediction of his in the future possibilities of poetry. All that he has said about the evolution and the future of English poetry holds good for the poetic consciousness of future humanity itself.

To critically analyse and assess the richly diverse and complex English poetical heritage is a bewildering task. Sri Aurobindo with his unity of vision and spiritual

16 Ibid., p. 55
discipline is able to look behind the apparent and get at the truth and the power which have directed the course of English poetry. 'Poetry is a highly-charged power of aesthetic expression,' says Sri Aurobindo; as such 'it must follow in its course of evolution the development of that soul'. An analysis of the trends and directions of English poetry over the centuries shows that it has evolved from the simple to the more complex, from the superficial to the more and more profound forms as a result of the blossoming of the 'new powers which lay concealed in the seed or the first form'.

Summing up the basic character of English poetry, Sri Aurobindo observes that the individual subjective element is predominant in it which also tends to make the most of the poet's personality: 'the transformation of life and Nature in the individuality becomes almost the whole secret of this poetry'. It also sets much store by the forms of external life 'as if the enriching of the life were its principal artistic aim'. 'The illusion of external reality' has been the first canon of Western artistic conceptions and according to Sri Aurobindo, the English mind carries this tendency to an extreme and loves
to build upon the safe foundation of the external and the real. There is a constant search for new intensities of word and rhythm which can translate deeper insights and soul-visions into speech. There is also evident in English poetry a certain kind of direct vision which is capable of developing into a spiritual vision once the chief disability of the English mind—its lack of disinterestedness and neglect of high spiritual motives and creative results—is removed as a result of the refining and ennobling influences of countries like India, China and Japan and their cultures on it. The Anglo-Celtic Spirit will find its highest self-expression, says Sri Aurobindo, when it turns to a impersonal and universal experience and assumes the character of a higher intuitive utterance, 'not through the toning down of personality and individuality but by their heightening to a point where they are liberated into the impersonal and universal expression'.

Discussing the place of English poetry in European literature, Sri Aurobindo remarks that in spite of its most rich and powerful poetry, English Literature has had only

17 Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 56
a very limited influence on European poetry and literature and has been a far less effective force in the shaping of European Culture than that of other tongues quite inferior in natural poetic and creative energy. This paucity of influence must be attributed to an inherent defect in the literature, says Sri Aurobindo. Its imaginative force exceeds its thought-power; so, even though it aims high, its success is not as great as its effort.\textsuperscript{18} The history of its literature is a record of individual poetic achievements and successes and no national tradition has evolved in this regard. The poetical revolutions in England have had no inner continuity. This is due to the fact that the nation lacks a self-recognising spiritual attitude. Sri Aurobindo\textquoteright s general observation in this context is applicable not only to literature but to every other department of life:

\textquote{That which recognises its self, will most readily be recognised by others; that which attains the perfect form of its own innate character, will most effectively leave its stamp in the formation of the mind of humanity}.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol.9, p. 45
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol.9, p. 45
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

Man creates art, understands and appreciates art and is also influenced by it. A study of man in the processes of creation and appreciation of art and an analysis of how art helps man evolve further and heightens his consciousness is what aesthetics is mainly about. Sri Aurobindo has created fine works of literary art and has given us brilliant pieces of literary criticism. That he has been profoundly influenced by art, especially by the highest poetry of India contained in the Vedas and Upanisads, is attested by his great Yogic achievement (sadhana).

Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics is a fine synthesis of the Western and the Eastern theories of aesthetics. His view of aesthetics accommodates both the materialistic and intellectual as well as the predominantly spiritual aspects of the Western and Eastern outlook and goes beyond the mere aggregate of these two points of view to a higher and diviner view of beauty and bliss. Matter and Spirit are the two ends of the same reality. Neither the ascetic to whom matter does not exist nor the rationalist who denies the reality of the Spirit knows the whole Truth. Sri Aurobindo asserts in his 'The Life Divine': 'Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as matter'; Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as Spirit.

1 The Life Divine, Vol. 18, p. 222.
Sri Aurobindo’s approach to beauty is in accordance with the approach of Vedanta - the Philosophy derived from the Upanishads. He looks upon beauty, whether in nature or in art, as a manifestation of Brahman. The beauty attributed to the objects of the phenomenal world perceived through the senses is very much real and is an expression of the bliss of Brahman. The ananda aspect of the Absolute is the source of creative art. Beauty is the special divine manifestation in the physical. He says in 'Sāvitrī':

"His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,  
His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;  
The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice  
Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.  
This world is God fulfilled in Outwardness." ²

Sri Aurobindo rejects the view of Advaita that with reference to Brahman as such all beauty is appearance; he agrees with the standpoint of Viśisṭādvaita and believes that Brahman manifests himself on earth as Bhuvana-sundara.

All are capable of intuiting the beautiful, contends Sri Aurobindo, just as all human beings are potentially capable of reaching the highest stage of evolution and

². 'Sāvitrī', Vol.29, xii, p. 624.
the life divine on earth.

Being a poet as well as a philosopher, Sri Aurobindo is primarily a visionary, in the realm of thought. His philosophy surveys the entire field of matter, life, mind and spirit and discovers the truth behind them, finally establishing their essential identity. The theory of evolution of Sri Aurobindo is the cornerstone of his philosophy of the Life Divine. Human aspiration is at the root of all human seeking, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, vital or aesthetic. All human endeavours which manifest themselves as science and philosophy, religion and mysticism, ethics and politics and art are the eternal aspiration of man to fulfil himself integrally. The impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed bliss, the sense of a secret immortality which Sri Aurobindo calls the earliest preoccupation of man in his 'The Life Divine' are at the root of all his endeavour and this is true of his quest for Beauty as well. Says he in 'Sāvitrī':

'A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
Await discovery in our summit selves'.

3 Šāvitrī, vol. 28, I. iv, p. 46.
This quest for beauty, the aesthetical necessity in man, can take him nearer to God. The attraction that beauty has for man is the call of divinity upon man. It is hence that beauty has been regarded as a cardinal value in life. Sri Aurobindo assurveys with authority what he has experienced in a supreme spiritual vision in 'Sāvitrī':

'This world was not built with random bricks,
of chance,
A blind God is not destiny's architect;
A conscious power has drawn the plan
of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line'.

A quest for beauty which confines itself with the unfolding of this divine plan is, no doubt, itself a divine occupation of man.

As a mystic also, Sri Aurobindo has been interested in aesthetics as a part of his insistence on unitive identification. Through his Integral Yoga he has arrived at the Truth of the most intuitive realisation of the Vedic seers, 'That Thou Art'. (Tat tvam asi), and this is possible only at the highest level of aesthetic activity which he calls 'the fourth dimension of aesthetic sense'.

---

4 Ibid., Vol. 29, VI, ii, p. 460
Where all is ourselves, ourselves in all,

To the cosmic whence as realizing our souls

A kindling rapture joins the seer and the seen.

To highlight these points in the process of assessing the contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the philosophy of beauty and to poetics was the purpose of this part of the thesis. We may now recapitulate the central arguments of the chapters in sequence.

Sri Aurobindo establishes firmly that beauty is a living experience, not an abstract principle. It inheres in the object and is real and appeals to a multitudinous variation of human consciousness in a multitudinous variation of forms and names. Beauty being an expression of ananda, to experience beauty is to experience God.

Aesthetic experience, according to Sri Aurobindo, proceeds from man's heightened consciousness. It entails the metamorphosis of the aesthete's entire personality. The highest aesthetic experience borders on the mystic and establishes a close identity between the experiencer and the experienced.

---

5 Sāvitrī, Vol. 28, II ii, p. 112
The aim of all high art, says Sri Aurobindo, is to experience the Infinite in the finite and to express it in a suitable medium. Art at its highest is a handmaid to spirituality. It is not mere workmanship. Born out of intuition and divine enthusiasm it is supranational and exceeds and excels Nature.

All true poetry, opines Sri Aurobindo, is inspired and is a communication from above. It is incantatory in its nature and is inescapably mystic in the ultimate analysis. Technique is no doubt important but without vision, no poetry could lay claim to greatness. The greatest poetry is inevitably the mantla of the Real.

A great poet-critic that he was, Sri Aurobindo's poetic theory and his critical credo are of a piece: both are perfection-oriented; both contribute to the expansion of man's consciousness. He proves beyond doubt that in the higher regions of aesthetic criticism, creative imagination, even intuition, is as important as critical intelligence.

To sum up, it is impossible for man not to have or to develop a sense of beauty in life. It is equally impossible for man not to strive for perfection and for the Life Divine on the earth. A staunch believer in the aesthetical necessity
of man and his progress towards perfection, Sri Aurobindo
has made many significant observations on art and beauty
which form part of his whole idea of the fullness, integra-
lity and perfectibility of human life.
PART TWO
INTRODUCTION

Primarily a poet as he wished to call himself, Sri Aurobindo has had a poetic career spread over a period of 60 long years, right from his late teens as a student at Cambridge, England, up to a few days before his passing at the age of 78. His literary output, apart from his philosophical, religious and cultural writings, has been a colossal one. His poetry includes lyrics, sonnets, translations, narrative poems, dramas and epics, making a grand total of about 100,000 lines. 'Savitrī', his magnum opus, running to nearly 24,000 lines is an epic achievement by any standard.

Reared in an exclusively English environment from his childhood, Sri Aurobindo could think and write in English as fluently and effortlessly as a native speaker. He brought a totally Westernised outlook to bear on the spiritual consciousness of India and the result is, his poetry as well as other writings in English is totally different from those of other Indo-Anglian writers and refreshingly original too. Hailed as the greatest synthesis of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe, Sri Aurobindo has been referred to as the last of the great Russies who held in his hand, "in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of
creative energy."¹ His brilliant treatise on 'Quantitative Metre' shows that he was a great master and technologist of prosody.

In this part, we propose to study some of his poems and plays from the aesthetical angle and see how far his critical theory has been operative in his own creations of beauty.

Sri Aurobindo is first and foremost a poet of 'Yoga'. His poetry is a true reflection of the life he lived and the ideals he cherished. Mysticism was a way of life with him and his poetry, a true record of his intense spiritual experiences, is inescapably mystic. A true enjoyer of the hues and harmonies of life, all life was an ecstasy to him and an adventure of consciousness too. His spiritual awareness made him not to spurn the amours and glamour of common life but to apprehend the promptings of the spirit behind them and accord them their rightful place in life.

Most of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a call to spiritual adventure. It is the poetry of vision, intensely spiritual at that. Written as it is from a higher consciousness and mostly from a silent mind, its uniqueness is likely to make the critic miss the true impact of his poetry: cut loose from the familiar aspects and environs of the work-a-day world, the critic is not sure of his foot in the world of this poetry.

According to Sri Aurobindo the poet 'may start from the colour of a rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the splendour of an action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its most hidden movements'.  
This is the course Sri Aurobindo's poetry has followed, from its earliest to the most mature stage. His earliest poetry written in his teens has a predominantly romantic strain mixed with a melancholy note; he attempted next dramatic and heroic poetry which he wrote after his arrival in India back from London. In his plays we come across an imaginative presentation of the philosophy of evolution which was taking shape in his mind. His intense spirituality and mysticism are made abundantly

2 'The Future Poetry', Vol. 9, p. 35
evident in many of his sonnets and later poetry. The epic 'Sāvitrī' is the consummation of Sri Aurobindo's mystic-spiritual philosophy; in other words it is the mystic realisation of the living philosophy of 'the Life Divine', much as the 'Synthesis of Yoga' is a practical guide to it in terms of 'Yoga'. Thus, the poetical compositions of Sri Aurobindo are truly reflective of the various stages of evolution through which he passed in his spiritual career, from the mere vital-mental to the mystic-spiritual levels.

As in poetry, so in drama, the essential thing, according to Sri Aurobindo, is still the "interpretative vision ... an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being". ³ Action arising out of the plot is certainly important in a drama to make it come alive but it needn't necessarily be mere outer or outward action:

"This interpretative vision and idea have in the presentation to seem to arise out of the inner life of vital types of the human soul or individual representatives

³ Ibid., p. 67
of it through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action... In all very great drama the true movement and result is really psychological and the outward action, even when it is considerably, and the consummating event, even though loud and violent, are only either its symbol or else its condition of culmination... Drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word...[4] The purpose of the dramatist must be to record the reflections of the stirrings, the agitation, in the very heart of the cosmos and of the happenings in the occult kingdoms of the Spirit, in the world of phenomena, in the very lives, the day-to-day lives of human beings. The drama must lay bare the inner stirrings and transformations brought about by them in the human soul by subtle strokes, by inner as well as outer action. The progress of the spirit made explicit through the inner as well as the outer responses of the human spirit to worldly phenomena leading to spiritual evolution towards perfection must be the main theme of the drama, not a mere crowding

Ibid., p. 67-68
of incidents and physical action to entertain the vital; that must be the primary purpose of the drama, whatever it's other merits or virtues.

The stage is the soul of man; the inner reactions of man to the world of phenomena around him motivating his own outward responses to it which again result in a set of phenomena demanding his newer spiritual responses to them - this is the drama which is staged there: all these conflicting as well as corresponding actions or phenomena result in the evolution of man from one level to the next higher level and so forth leading ultimately to spiritual perfection and supramental evolution: this is the spiritual basis for all human action and hence for all drama. All the plays of Sri Aurobindo, especially his completed plays, reflect his philosophy of evolution, the dynamic of man's transformation as well as earth-transformation, the passage from the imperfect life we live on this earth to the Life Divine as contemplated by Sri Aurobindo for humanity at large in his Integral Yoga. As regards the plots for his plays, Sri Aurobindo did not believe in inventing them. He readily turned to history, myth, earlier literature, epic as well as dramatic, and legend for his dramatic material. While he defended such borrowing of
plots, he insisted on transmitting the borrowed material into significant dramatic form with the aid of the creative labour of the artist. The plot being known, the mind of the artist is spared the pain of inventing the basic plot and expend all its power in thinking up finer touches and delicate strokes which go to make the drama perfect in execution. "There art comes in To justify genius". Real art or creative genius lies in making the old new, impressive and perfect.

'He's creator

Who greatly handles great material,

Calls order out of the abundant deep,

Not who invents sweet shadows out of air'.

He emphasizes the need for absolute freedom with which to handle the material one has borrowed in poetry as well as in drama; true development will be impossible otherwise in those fields. He is not a stickler for historical accuracy nor does he advocate close fidelity to the original for


6 Ibid., p. 826
Sri Aurobindo's plays are successful experiments at reviving the poetic drama of the Elizabethan times. Poetry adds a certain weight and serenity to the themes handled and the poetic medium is the best-suited for handling certain basic philosophical truths and values of life and making them acceptable. Yeats is of the opinion that whatever of philosophy is turned into poetry is alone permanent. Being an audio-visual medium, the drama is more effective than other branches of literature in setting forth the poet's philosophy effectively and impersonally and Sri Aurobindo as a poet as well as a dramatist, has taken advantage of this fact in his plays and has successfully presented his philosophy and theory of evolution in their poetry.
CHAPTER I

SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

From his earliest poetry written during his student days at England to the Overhead poetry dealing with the 'gloried fields of trance', Sri Aurobindo's has been an impressive poetic career. 'The child is father of the man' is very much true of Sri Aurobindo the poet: the makings of the great mystic poet of the later years could be gleaned from his earliest poetry.

The Early Poetry of Sri Aurobindo

Most of Sri Aurobindo's earliest verse was written in his late teens during his student days at Cambridge, England. These early poems reveal Greek influence as well as the influence of the decadent English poets of the Georgian era. These are more an exercise in rhyme written from a derived inspiration rather from a spontaneous inspiration or a powerful overflow of feelings. These poems abound in classical echoes and pretty poetic conceits. The diction as well as the evolution of thought in these poems is highly poetic. The rhyme-patterns are impressive and their music indisectable. The fine blend of a romantic strain reminiscent of the lake poets and a classical
restraint in these poems makes for their unique poetic appeals. This is undoubtedly poetry of the conventional kind comprising all those characteristics which we usually look for in poetry in general. Quite aware of his limitations as a poet in his early years, Sri Aurobindo asserts in an early poem:

'Mine is not Byron's lightning spear,
Nor Wordsworth's lucid strain,
Nor Shelley's lyric pain.
Nor Keats', the poet without peer',

and likens his song to mere 'idle wind' in spite of its 'woven wealth of rhyme'. He dubs his early poetry 'warped echoes of an earlier day'.

The juvenilia indicate beyond a doubt that it is an exceptionally gifted mind which created them from its ecstasy of insight, that the poet had a strong individual poetical personality and voice. Highly proficient in many continental languages, he has chosen themes for his poetry from the Hellenic world. Living as he did away from

---

1 'To a Hero-Worshipper', *Collected Poems*, Vol. 5, p. 8
the land of his birth and being ignorant of her culture
and myths, Sri Aurobindo could not but take up alien
themes in which to invest his poetic talents. His
mastery over the English language and its verse technique
together with the fascination which the aesthetic-romantic
themes of the classical European Literature had for him
has given us some of the best poems in the language which
give us an early hint of the shape of things to come. In
their purity of line, felicitous phrasing, rich fancy and
apt images, not to mention their arresting music, these
poems could stand comparison with the creation of English
romantic poetry.

'Songs to Myrtilla' is the earliest poem of Sri
Aurobindo. A detailed analysis of this poem will enable
us to identify the master craftsman behind it and afford
abundant proof that he was a born poet. It is an interest-
ing dialogue between Glaucus and Aethon who extol the feli-
cities of night and day respectively. The beautiful pictures
of the night and the day and their comparative merits and
joys surprise the reader by the details of the scenery and
the pretty conceits and images the poet has employed.
Nothing could be more welcome and satisfying to parched lips
than a running pool and its cool and clear water, so sweet
and cool is the night. The moonlit rivulets creeping silently 'like glow-worms in the dim and whispering wood' commune with the quiet heart and solitude. This description enhances the intensity of the quiet of the night when 'earth is full of whispers'.

This is the time when higher audience brings

The footsteps of invisible things.

These lines are highly suggestive as well as impressive on account of their supernatural note. 'Higher audience' suggests some higher or highly evolved human faculty which alone could hear the footfall of things which cannot be seen with the naked eye. This extra dimension - the supernatural element - added to the quiet of the night, the 'sweet' night, enhances the beauty and grandeur of the night which overawes the heart by its melodious breeze which in turn, 'sings secret in the weird and charmed trees; 'leaning on a luminous cloud'.

In the description of the day that follows, the poet observes that the brightness and the busy activity of all creatures feeling fresh after a night's rest make the
hours sweeter still. The rustle of winds and trees, the
birds' voices in the eaves and leaves accompanied with
the music of the herdsman's flute increase the pleasure
of the heart which was overawed by the quiet of the moon-
lit night. The delicious life renewed by the morning
makes him feel that 'the year is but a masque of flowers,
of light and song and honied showers', when summer and
spring bring us divinest greetings from the trees in
their blossoms.

Man is heir to the pleasures of the day as well as
the night and everything else in Nature and the dialogue
is endless and inconclusive. Nature is the manifestation
of God and her joys are the expression of His ecstasy or
'ānanda'. The poet when he turns a mystic in his later
life is going to expati ate on this. But neither the theme
nor its treatment is typical of Sri Aurobindo in this poem,
and it is evident the poet, in his teens at the moment, is
yet to find his voice. Yet the choice of diction and the
arresting rhythm of the verses give them a finish, a fresh-
ness and a perfection which are unparalleled in the teen-
age poetry of most English poets themselves.
The juvenilia are remarkable for their form and content and lyrical quality. Their music is impressive and the images employed are highly poetic. Everything in life had a fascination for him; flowers, love, birds and similar familiar romantic themes formed the subject-matter of much of his early verse; but they were not certainly the true meters, yet even in his treatment of these Sri Aurobindo has added an extra dimension which marks him out from the common run of poets. The poet aspired to write poetry as well as to live it and this made him turn from the vital and sensuous poetry to the spiritual and occult. The hopes and loves of ordinary life offered him nothing final to rest upon and hence he turned naturally to the most modern of subjects, the discovery of the Spirit. The cosmic realms and heights called him and the Spirit claimed him for her own. His fine aesthetic sensibility combined with his spiritual vision and felicitous inlook helped him to make Art and Life glorious and resplendent 'with the unflickering fire of beauty'.
The short poem entitled 'Life' is characteristic of Sri Aurobindo, the man, the poet and the Yogi. A lyric of extraordinary charm coloured by the spirit of romanticism, it is illustrative of his ideas of poetry and its aim besides throwing light on his attitude to life in general, its problems and battles. The poem lays bare the spiritual hunger of the poet who remains undaunted by the tyranny of life; it is also an epitome of the poet's philosophy of life. The poet is not averse to the many joys and splendours of life; nor does he shrink from its bitternesses and privations. He loves life in its entirety, loves it for all its bliss, with all its tyrannies. He accepts all the challenges of life, tackles them gallantly. He will enjoy to the full his share of life's experiences but never demand of life more than what is destined for him. The outcome of the battles of life do not concern, or upset him. He will take the thick with the thin and never complain. 'King or conquered', he will remain unmoved. This is the ideal of a 'Yogin' according to Sri Aurobindo.
A man of such equanimity is a 'sthithaprajna', one who is perfectly aware that the true enjoyer and experiencer is the soul of man which is not influenced, affected or stained by any experience, bliss or tyranny. 'In rags and fallen', the soul still reigns supreme. The outward appurtenances or the superficialities of life are of no avail to the soul. Its glory and divinity remain undiminished and undiminished whatever the experiences it undergoes.

This high philosophy of life, the very essence of the 'Bhagawat Gītā', takes the shape of a superb poem at the hands of Sri Aurobindo. The beauty of the vision of life, its totality and wholesomeness, the integration of the manifold experiences of life culminating in a pure joy of the Spirit, the eager and enthusiastic acceptance of the challenges of life by the poet and his intense participation in life without being affected either way by the outcome of the struggle of existence have all been so aesthetically expressed that the philosophy contained in the poem, as well as the weight of the ideas in it, sits very lightly on the poem and does not obtrude.

The gay abandon with which the romantic poets give expression to their personalised emotions in their lyrics is evidently absent in this poem. The poet does not write from
an overflow of powerful personal emotions or deal with the tumult of the soul. He writes from a silent mind which looks at life and its variegated experiences without being affected by their nature. This stilling and silencing of the mind is the outcome of a heightened consciousness from which the poet has composed his poem. There is an inevitability about this pouring forth of spiritual effusions which again are not the result of any conscious effort at expression, nor conscious cerebrations.

A mere reading aloud of the poem makes the mind cease thinking and be still. It is because the poet is not merely looking at the external physical features and appearances but goes beyond them to their very quintessence, their manifest and unmanifest consciousness as well as their evolutionary potentialities and thus evokes our spiritual sympathies rather than our physical, sensual or even mental reactions which most poetry does. This intensely spiritual approach to life, to its every aspect and detail, makes him take sheer delight in life in its wholeness and wholesomeness and thus apostrophise life as the 'daughter of delight'. The mysteries of life, its potentialities for mental, intellectual and spiritual evolution make him address it as 'mystic Miracle' - and inexplicable saga of the Spirit which offers more than what meets the eye to the true seeker of Truth. This is
spiritual poetry of the highest kind couched in words at once simple and serene.

The poet is aware of all the harsh and naked realities of life, its joys and sorrows, its trials and triumphs. All the pains of opposites in all life's experiences can afford to the spiritual aspirant, the seeker of Truth, an opportunity to turn disdain into love, pain into ecstasy and eventually mortality into Godhead. It is this equality of outlook, this equanimity of temper which makes life an insatiable experience of light and delight, a mystic miracle, an endless ecstasy. Such a poet could never tire of life; he wishes that life, this ecstasy be extended into eternity, a boundless beatitude. In a beautiful poetic metaphor, he conceives of life as a winged divinity the radius of whose flight should be eternity.

Life was an infliction and a long suffering to most of the English romantic poets; Shelley complains of having fallen on the thorns of life, and bleeding; the bitternesses and privations of his troubled life weigh heavily on his spirit. Keats is sick of this weary world and he wishes to cease and be no more at the moment of extreme ecstasy for fear it would soon end because 'nothing lasts' in this world of woes, where 'love and fame to nothingness do sink'. It
is because they lived their lives on the surface; not in the depth of their soul. Sri Aurobindo unlike these, calls upon life to take him in her wild embrace - he is aware it is none-too-soft an embrace and exhorts her in the same breath not to faint, nor swerve; he wants life to take up 'Without weak resolve'; 'his body dire and unveiled face'. He wants no half-hearted or weak-willed treatment from life. His body, the vital, is 'dire', is too difficult to subdue, too difficult to exhaust, and the face 'unveiled' will faithfully record and register the various reactions of the poet to the rigours and raptures of the challenges of life and the poet warns life not to shrink from dealing with him firmly; he desires her to help him heighten his consciousness and prepare himself for the dawn of the Spirit and the descent of the Supermind.

The poet is firmly resolved to drink 'life to the lees', explore all its lanes and thoroughfares, by-lanes and boulevards, all its experiences, all its possibilities, without conscious choice or personal preferences, in its totality and fullness, - be they cruel like the roar of the lion, or sweet like springtide.

This attitude to life is the culmination of the all-embracing integral 'yoga' of Sri Aurobindo: it is a spiritual realisation of the essence of the Vedantic formula
of the Self in all things, all things in the Self and all things as becomings of the Self: all experiences of life are experiences of the Self in man and hence are to be regarded equally.

The poem 'Life' thus impresses us as an instance of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual attitude to poetry as well as his poetic attitude to Spirituality: it bears out the truth of his conviction that art is essentially a handmaid to spirituality. Without attempting to philosophize deliberately, the poet sums up his supreme philosophy of life, the summum bonum of all existence, in this poem. Philosophical poetry and poetic philosophy meet and merge in Sri Aurobindo to produce a new genre of poetic expression thus paving the way to the Future Poetry that he envisages in his grand book of literary criticism, 'The Future Poetry'.

Another short poem 'Is this the end' sets forth Sri Aurobindo's attitude to death as well as the Immortality and the indestructibility of the Spirit as enunciated in the Bhagvat-Gītā. The involution of the Spirit in Matter which ultimately evolves into Spirit, the cornerstone of Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, can also be gleaned from this poem. The profundity of this philosophical idea, rather than
making the poem heavy and tiresome by its weight, is itself heightened by the charm of the poetry in which it is couched and proves yet again more convincingly what poetry can make of philosophy.

'Is this the end' is a powerfully emotional refusal to accept death, the physical extinction, as the end of all that one lived and strove for, all that one did or dreamed about. It is the idealist's 'Leath, be not proud'.

'Although this body, when the spirit tires of its cramped residence, shall feed the fires,

My house consumes, Not I'.

So says Sri Aurobindo and firmly believes that death is but a pause in the long and continuous process of evolution. An unceremonious end to one's unfulfilled destiny is unthinkable. "Life only is, or death is life disguised", he declares. Life is an unending mystic miracle leading to the Eternal Delight, ananda. 'Death', according to him, 'is but changing of our roles to wait in wedding garments at the Eternal's gate'. In a beautiful image that forcefully brings out his belief in rebirth and evolution, he asks:
"Because the tree is felled where the bird sang,
Must the song too hush?"

A strong advocate of and believer in 'Vedanta' he calls the Divine an artist beyond compare who ever 'remoulds himself in diviner shapes'. Besides asserting his faith in the monistic principle behind the manifold manifestation of the Universal Spirit, this line further emphasizes the fact that life evolves continuously and marches towards total divinisation, by the Divine recasting itself into diviner shapes. The abiding faith of the poet in the ultimate destiny of mankind and its total perfection and divinisation through its total evolution is made manifest here by the use of the comparative 'diviner'. Everything evolves because evolve we must and the shapes and forms in which the divine recasts itself are always an improvement over the previous ones as a result of the evolution they have undergone. The process of divine manifestation is also an endless one. This great philosophical spiritual truth of the endless evolution leading to the emergence of Truth and to the Ultimate Reality is suggested by the poet in the assertion that the divine will continue to appear in diviner shapes till all is done 'for which the stars were made'. This is a surprisingly simple poetic suggestion juxtaposed to what according to the yogin is the be-all and end-all of all human existence: 'Till the
heart discovers God and the soul knows itself'. Self-realisation leading to the Life Divine is on the cards for all humanity and death merely punctuates the process in its progress. The poet ends on the cryptic note: 'And even then there is no end'. The bulk of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is philosophical in theme and content but only when it has a spiritual slant and a mystical import beyond the level of mere intellection does it impress us as characteristically his and form a different genre altogether. He is at his best and most typical only in his mystic poetry. It is a challenge to the poet to communicate his mystic experience in words but there is a compulsive need to do it as well. "The poetic vision", according to Sri Aurobindo, "is not a critical or intellectual or philosophic view of it but a soul-view, a seizing by the inner sense" and is "a rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul’s sight of God and Nature and the world and the inner truth".²

Metaphysician of no mean order, Sri Aurobindo wished to be considered a poet first and foremost, and never, never a philosopher: What he really must have meant is that he was essentially a visionary, and not a doctrinaire. All his writings, literary and non-literary, are based totally on his own experiences and not on intellectual theorising. His inspiration for his poetry and philosophy came from another
plane and source and they serve a different purpose from that of similar writings of other poets and philosophers. Poetry is not mere emotions, sensations or effusions of an inspired fancy or imagination touching the periphery of life, of their surface life of ours. It is rather a record of the essential life, a vision of the totality of life, a life of Truth, a life in Truth. It is looking at life 'steadily and whole', not merely in a social or historical sense but in an inner and spiritualistic sense as well. Matter and outer life are too much with us and the Spirit alone can uplift man and take him nearer to Reality.

An element of mysticism is inevitable for poetry, according to Sri Aurobindo. Poetry must express truths which are fundamental and the most basic truth of all existence at all levels is the oneness and unity of all things, living and non-living, which is the quintessence of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Behind the manifold experiences of the multitudes of individuals must also lie the basic truth of their oneness: they emanate from the same life-force or sakti, which is embodied in the concept of energy. An intuitive realisation of this essential unity of all existence is basic to all types of mysticism and basic to all great poetry as well. Only such poetry which is predominantly mystic in its approach and has for its substance the most unalterable and perennial
values of life and its philosophy lurking behind the semblances
is for all times and climes, is the most enduring and cuts
across the boundaries of countries, cultures and faiths.

'Āhana' is the most typical of Sri Aurobindo's philo-
sophical poems. It is a poem in rhymed quantitative hexameters,
a rhythm Sri Aurobindo perfected in English after the Greek
model. The poem is a great sequence of great thoughts in
a grand style. The spiritual, mystic as well as romantics
elements are combined here in a classical metre and the poem
has a mantric quality and power. It is an invocation and a
application by humanity to 'Āhana, the Dawn of God.' The
mortals in pursuit of joy, knowledge and power are waiting
her descent from heaven and the Goddess is addressed the
moment she appears in the first light of the dawn. The poet
at once plunges into a most effective description of the
charms of Nature. A poetic outlining of the theory of evolu-
tion of Sri Aurobindo can be gleaned from the lines:

"Earth-souls needing the touch of the heavens
peace to recapture,
Heaven needing earth's passion to quiver its
peace into rapture."  

3 'Āhana', 'Collected Poems', Vol. 5, p. 523
4 Ibid., p. 523
An account of the joys and pleasures of Nature follows. The most romantic cataloguing of all the joys that life can afford makes us understand the attitude of the poet to life and Nature, that he regarded these joys not as mere illusions and unwholesome diversions — not as mere "vision and passing appearance/Magic or Māyā with falsehood and pain for its only inherence" as the Māyā theory of Śaṅkara's Advaita enunciates. These joys were to him droplets from the ocean of ecstasy that is God, reflections of the rapture of God in its infinite variations. All things live by this ecstasy: "ānandena jātāni jīvanti,"\(^5\) as the Taittirīya Upaniṣad proclaims. Sri Aurobindo launches into a strong condemnation of the Māyā theory at this point. "Brahma Satyam Jagan Mityā" — "one eternal, Time an illusion, life a brief error"\(^6\) — is a stout denial of the manifestation and immanence of God, he says.

Then follows an elaboration of his theories of the beginning of creation and the origin of Man which leads him on to an assessment of Science and its achievements and its false claims. The exaggerated claims of science that it has discovered the basis for every phenomenon are quite hollow.

5 Taittirīya Upaniṣad, III. 6. 3

and lack conviction. The magnificent account that follows of the manifestation of the Spirit in and as the universe and its countless forms and acts is without a parallel in all English Literature. The most spontaneous, powerful and unimpeded flow of the details of creation — from the solar systems in the cosmos upto the minutest details of life in this planet of ours — is so stupendous and breathtaking that it is impossible for the reader, on going through the poem, not to believe that it is the truest and most faithful transcription of an intense vision that the poet must have had, the words in the description falling into their due places without an effort on the part of the poet. The description has come through pure without any interference from the intellect. This account is very much similar to the description of the origin of the world and man set out in the Upaniṣads.

The beauty and ecstasy of God manifesting themselves in the infinite forms of the cosmos make this world of ours a glory and a wonder — 'Hid in our hearts is his glory; the Spirit works in our members'. The mystic element is not far behind. As expressions of His beauty and His joy, all are God.
"He is the witness and doer, he is the loved and the lover.
He the eternal Truth that we look in ourselves to discover". 7

Man is "the miniature second creator of good and of evil" and he is born again, recreates himself, in his son: "ātmā vai putra nāmā'sī" says the Upanişad. God, the Creator of this universe, manifests himself in and as everything: "Powers of his god-head we live; the Creator dwells in the creature". 8 A realisation of this mystic reality is hard to come by: one has to go through tangles of failure and suffer martyrdoms and put up with pain in order to attain to it. "Pain is the ransom we pay for the smallest foretaste of heaven." 9 Man thus marches on from stage to stage of Perfection and when he arrives at the last stage of 'perfect perfection' he is qualified for the life immortal, the life Divine, and finds himself in Brindavan, the place of eternal joy. *Sailing in Time through the straits of today to the sea of

7 Ibid., p. 525
8 Ibid., p. 528
9 Ibid., p. 530
tomorrow," man takes "his place in the Ras and his share of the ecstasy after". Āhana descends and assures him of his ascent to the heights of ecstasy and his ascension as well.

In his brief prefatory note, Sri Aurobindo has written:

"Āhana, the Dawn of God, descends on the world where amid the strife and trouble of mortality, the Hunters of Joy, the Seekers after knowledge, the Climbers in the quest of Power are toiling up the slopes or waiting in the valleys. As she stands on the mountains of the East, voices of the Hunters of Joy are the first to greet her".11  Mankind has always been after Power, Knowledge and Joy from time immemorial and the entire history of civilization and culture of man is a record of man's pursuit of these primary objectives, classical ends, in life and his attainment of them. Power generating action, knowledge inducing his intellectual curiosity and Joy leading to love, man has struggled for more and more of these felicities and has evolved mentally and spiritually but fulfilment has eluded him in spite of

10 Ibid., p. 526
11 Ibid., p. 523
his endless evolution and progress. His action, thought and love have taken him only to the outskirts of heaven beyond which he could not proceed. Thought goes farther than action and love farther than thought but they have alike failed to pierce the gates of the Invisible: 'But thought nor word can seize Eternal Truth'. 12 This is as far as mental evolution, the ascent of man, could go. Now the Divine must descend, and guide him towards his final fulfilment, his self-realisation, his Supramental Perfection. From the outskirts of heaven, the periphery of perfect perfection, they pray to Āhāna, the Dawn of God, to descend and beatify human existence: 'Vision of bliss, stopp down to mortality, lean to thy lover', 13 'out of thy greatness draw close to the breast of our mortal desire!'. 14 The Hunter of Joy symbolises the bhakti-yogin, the Seeker after Knowledge stands for the ānāna-yogin and the Climber in the quest for Power is the karma-yogin. All yoga is purposeful only with the active aid of the Divine for their final fruition. Sri Aurobindo's Pūrṇa Yoga which combines and

12 'Sāvītrī', II. xi, Vol. 28, p. 276
13 'Āhāna', 'Collected Poems', Vol. 5, p. 535
14 Ibid., p. 523
transcends all yogas helps man make a total surrender to
the Divine and be fulfilled in God. All sufferings of man
lead him finally to beatitude; only he has to prepare
himself for the descent of the Divine:

All things have bliss for their secret; only
our consciousness falters
Fearing to offer itself as a victim on
ecstasy's altars.
Is not the world his disguise? When that
cloak is tossed back from his shoulders,
Beauty looks out like a sun on the hearts of the
ravished beholders.
Mortals, your end is beatitude, rapture
eternal his meaning:
Joys, which he most now denies, is his purpose:
the hedges, the screening
Were but the rules of his play; his denials
came to lure further."

"Rose of God" is the most beautiful expression of
an inexpressible mystical experience. The mystical
experience can never be described in terms of the material

15 Ibid., p. 531
or sensuous reality of our ordinary experiences. The Rose Of God, the miracle of the Almighty One, is at once a flame and a flower, fire-sweet: this is the mystic's realm, the Spirit's demesne, where the opposites meet in absolute oneness: it is hence a great and golden Mystery. The Rose of God is a lyre of colours, very different from the riot of colours we experience here. The colour scheme presented in the poem is highly significant as a circarama of the mystic's manifold experiences in the rarefied realms of the Spirit. The mystic ascends the Sapphires of heaven and from there beholds the Rose of God in a beatific vision. It is the Bliss of God which turns into a Rose of Light, the Supreme essence of Divinity. Light begets Power which is transferred to the Earth to produce Life in terms of the countless manifestations of being in Nature, and Life gets transformed into Love, the sine qua non of Life, its raison d'etre. It is all the grand scheme of the Eternity, the Rose of God: Bliss-Light-Power-Life-Love. The Rose of God is a vermillion stain on the Sapphires of heaven, red on blue, an impressive combination of dark-bright colours. The poet describes it as a 'damask force of Infinity', 'a red icon of might' 'with a diamond halo', smitten purple with divine Desire' to manifest itself in forms of earthly life. It is a blush of rapture on Eternity's face turning it ruby-
red; it is the depth of all being which is Love, the last manifestation of the Divine in the scheme of the poem.

The first lines of the five stanzas set forth the mystic's delightful experience of Divinity totally free from the intellectual stuff born out of our linguistic emotional logic. It is a poem of praise, a eulogy of the immense glory of the Eternal. This mystic on the Mount of beatitude comes down to the mortal's level, this earthhood, in the third lines of the stanzas when he calls upon the Divine, the Rose of God, to flood the human with its Grace to help him ascend to the Divine. The poet calls upon the Rose of God to leap up in our heart of humanhood, to flood the human heart with its power with force. It is then to live in the mind of our earthhood; heart can easily be assailed but mind can only be converted gradually. Heart responds quickly; hence 'leap up' he says; but 'live in' the mind and transform it and turn it Divine-ward. Once the mind gets transformed, then the will can easily be taken hold of and charged with the Divine and made ablaze. This gradual descent of the Divine then transforms the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical rhyme thus divinising the vital. The Divine thus deeply entrenched in the mortal, vital, psychic and mental arises from 'The heart of the yearning' that sobs in 'Nature's abyss',.
The culmination of this process of descent is the total
divinisation of Life, the making of earth the home of the
wonderful. Life will then be kissed by beatitude.

'Rose of God' is thus a pure mystic cry of the soul,
a mantric prayer where rhythm and form and phrase and meaning
coalesce perfectly into an utter and absolute harmony. "As
in Dante's 'The Divine Comedy', in Sri Aurobindo's poetry too
the 'Rose' is a supreme symbol of the essence and efflorescence
of God. Bliss, Light, Power, Life, Love are the five essences
that fuse as the integral perfection of God".16 The prayer
is made to God to permit his mystic Rose to blossom on earth
so that the five petals of the Rose of God when it blooms on
earth, could establish here the reign of bliss, light, power,
life and love:

'Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O Miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name,
Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and
magical rhyme;

Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless
the children of Time.' 17

16 K.R. Srinivasa Iengar, 'Indian Writing in English',
(Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 156

17 'Rose of God', 'Collected Poems', Vol. 5, p. 584
CHAPTER II

SRI AUROBINDO'S PLAYS

'A dramatist and poet of great power and versatility'.

Sri Aurobindo has left us many plays of which only five are complete: 'Perseus the Deliverer', 'Vāsavadāta', 'Rodogune', 'The Viziers of Bāvora' and 'Eric'. Besides these, he has rendered Kālidāsa's Viśvavasiyam into English blank verse. These plays are mainly Elizabethan in cast and they breathe the spirit of classical Sanskrit drama; but as vehicles of his spiritual philosophy and theory of evolution they carry forward his unshaken faith in the perfectibility of man and the divinisation of human life.

Sri Aurobindo's plays portray the triumph of love. Love is irresistible; it leaps 'across the abyss of hate', it transcends wisdom and power. Love is presented as the panacea for all ills, a solution to all problems and conflicts. Love is the ultimate secret, the Supreme Reality; it is impossible not to succumb to its power. It may be expressed in different forms on different occasions such as

---


2 'Eric', II. 1, 'Collected Plays and Short Stories', Part One, Vol. 6, p. 506
compassion, adoration, love of the woman, love of the mother, but it is always love that sets the pace of the action, and love is redeeming power, and poetry is the native language of love. 3 As lakṣāṇa sings the glory of love in 'Eric':

'Love is divine
Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine'. 4

**Perseus, The Deliverer**

'Perseus The Deliverer', the only play to be published in its present form during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime is based on a popular Greek heroic myth. This play was written by him at a time when his great philosophy of evolution and his ideas of Life Divine were taking shape in his mind, i.e., the fruitful Baroda period and naturally there is an inevitable artistic transmutation of these philosophical themes in the play. This Greek myth has been divested of its original character and turned into a romantic story of human


4 'Eric', I. 1, Vol. 6, pp. 477-78
temperament. The dramatist has handled the myth with absolute freedom and a free play of his fertile imagination as he himself has asserted in his preface. The most successful of his experiments in poetic drama, 'Perseus the Deliverer' brings in thoughts and ideas of all great ages and nations and has thus acquired a universal character and a cosmic significance. 'For here', says Sri Aurobindo, 'the stage is the human mind of all times'.

A detailed analysis of this play will help us understand how artistically Sri Aurobindo has handled some great philosophical themes of his into this play without letting its interest flag. The central incident in the play which triggers off all action is the act of compassion of Andromeda, the heroine of the play. Andromeda, the beautiful daughter of the King of Syria, Cepheus, and his Queen, Cassiopea, releases from captivity the two Babylonian merchants who have been saved from a ship-wreck on the Syrian coast. The two had been taken prisoner and intended for sacrifice to the sea-god Poseidon by Polydemon, the priest of the cruel sea-god. Polydemon, who had an eye on the throne of Syria, is enraged at this and makes use of this occasion to achieve his ends by creating confusion and causing terror in the Kingdom of

---

5 'Perseus the Deliverer', 'Collected Plays and Short Stories', Part One, Vol. 6, p. 2
Syria in the name of the angry and offended sea-god Poseidon. With the help of the people now won over to his side, he forcibly arrests Andromeda, chains her to a rock and exposes her to the sea-monster. Perseus appears on the scene at this moment and with the aid of the powers and favours granted to him by Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, slays the formidable sea-monster and sets Andromeda free, and continuing his noble act of liberation, he saves the King, the Queen, the Prince and the merchants as well. The people, amazed at the superhuman and benevolent acts of Perseus, are as easily won over again and they become obedient to the Syrian throne. The wicked priest meets his ignominious end, unable to bear the shock and frustration. Overcoming further opposition from Phineus, the King of Tyre who is another personification of evil in the play, Perseus marries Andromeda.

Poseidon the angry sea-god, in this play, stands for the evil and hostile forces of Nature, 'Nature red in tooth and claw', subjugating the indomitable spirit of man and obstructing his upward growth. Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, designed by God to guide and chasten man's immortal spirit and help him up the path of spiritual evolution is presented as Poseidon's rival. Will man continue to be controlled by the dark satanic forces of Nature or will he
allow himself to be guided by his wisdom to evolve — this is the philosophical problem involved here. Athene challenges Poseidon and predicts that man is bound to conquer by his spiritual might the hostile powers of Nature and ascend to Godhead: "through the shocks of difficulty and death/Man shall attain his Godhead". This assertion throws light on Sri Aurobindo's concepts of spiritual evolution of man. Martyrdom is the price man may have to pay in his efforts to attain the life-divine.

Perseus is the son of Zeus, the King of gods. He is the deputy of Zeus on the earth and the champion of Athene. His descent into the world symbolises the descent of the spirit into the world. Perseus's spiritual role in this human drama sets forth the process of evolution according to Sri Aurobindo's conception. Spirit is deeply involved in Matter. Evolution is impossible without direct divine intervention at its every critical stage. There cannot be any ascent of the world into the spirit without its prior descent into the world.

It is not only man who evolves but his religion as well. The primitive religion of the people of Syria who

---

6 Ibid., P. 8

7 Kalika Ranjan Chatterjee, 'Philosophical themes in Sri Aurobindo's Perseus the Deliverer', 'Indian Writing', ed. Krishna Nandan Sinha, Ch. 15, p. 149
propitiate the angry and vengeful sea-god Poseidon, yields place to a religion of humanity, human love and compassion. So does the angry vindictive God, Poseidon, yield place to Athene who extends her empire over that of Poseidon. Thus the idea of god also has also evolved from that of a malignant one to a benevolent and humane, one. Love and compassion ultimately get the better of terror and hatred. Perseus orders that the shrine

"Be cleansed of its red memory of blood,
And the dread From that lived within its precincts,
Transfigure into a bright compassionate god". 8

It is imperative for man to evolve and all his thoughts and ideas too evolve in the process, says Perseus:

"Man must change who is the soul of Time;
His gods too change and live in larger light". 9

The evolutionary message of the play is contained in the concluding speech of Perseus:

8 "Perseus the Deliverer", V. 3, Vol. 6, p. 200
9 Ibid., p. 201
"the ascent is slow and long is Time. Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase: The day shall come when men feel close and one. Meanwhile one step forward is something gained. Since little by little earth must open to heaven. Till her dim soul awakes into the Light."¹⁰

The marriage of Perseus and Andromeda symbolises the union of Power and Grace. The play affirms the sanctity of human life and glorifies human love and compassion; it puts down corruption practised in the name of religion which Polydemon stands for. Man evolves and becomes Superman with divine assistance.¹¹

Vāsavadutta

'Vāsavadutta' is a romantic play based on a fable taken from Somadeva's 'Kathāsaritsaṅgara'. King Mahasen of Avunthie's grand designs of bringing the entire continent under his control were thwarted by the luxurious youth, King Vuthaa Udayan of Cowsambie whom he takes prisoner by means 'not noble like the sounding paths of war,' and makes his daughter

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 201

Vāsavadutta his jailor. Nature has her way, the jailor loses her heart to the prisoner. Having promised to be an engine of his great fortunes and that her head would rule her heart, she deserts him according to the unchallengable dictates of her heart and is carried away heroically to Cowsambie by Vuthsa Udayan. She chooses to obey her sovereign heart, refuses to bend to the sovereign will of her father and Mahasegn's cold calculations are foiled by her rash act.

The character of Vuthsa is most beautifully delineated in the play. Sri Aurobindo projects his own philosophy of life in Vuthsa. He is a hero of the first order; a soldier who revels in war so much that King Mahasegn and his army are no match to him. All life is a game to him; he takes everything in his stride. The mechanics of politics has no fascination for him; his view of men and matters is born of his innate heroism. Her responses and reactions are dictated by the intuitions of his heart and not by the necessities of political intrigues. When Yougandarayan warns him not 'to see a son of heaven in every worm', and Gopalaca himself insists that he is his foeman's son, Vuthsa hesitates not to grapple him to his heart with hoops of steel:
"And therefore welcome more to Vuthsa's heart
Foemen! they are our playmates in the fight
And should be dear as friends who share our hours
Of closeness and desire."\textsuperscript{12}

Gopālaca comes out plainly with the confession that
'he was aimed against Vuthsa, a secret arrow', Vuthsa
declares unhesitatingly:

'I will welcome thee into my throbbing breast'.\textsuperscript{13}

No wonder, Gopālaca tells him with a ring of sincerity:

'Thine is the noblest soul on all the earth'.\textsuperscript{14}

His 'was a soul which would not entertain evil thoughts
of malice even when the reason for it was plain as the nose
on the face. Cynicism and pessimism could never cast their
shadows on him.

'O', earth is honey; let me taste her all.
Our rapture here is short before we go

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Vasavadutta}, I. 2, Vol. 6, p. 221
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 221
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 224
To other sweetness on some rarer height
Of the up-ascending tiers that are the world.\textsuperscript{15}

"My will is for delight", he declares openly. He
abhors the political machinations which he leaves to the
wiser and warrier minds. He goes into raptures over war,
and waxes poetically over its delights. Vasuntha, his
friend, understands him better than the others:

O, Vuthsa's wise!
Because he seeks each thing in its own way,
He enjoys.\textsuperscript{16}

But he is not to be taken for granted: King Mahasegn calls
him a tender boy

'As soft as summer dews or as the lily
That yields to every gentle pushing wave'.\textsuperscript{17}

but he will soon learn that Vuthsa cannot be pushed around.
It is not sheer bravado when he protests to King Mahasegn,

\textsuperscript{15} 'Vāsavadutta', II. 1. Vol.6, p. 233
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 227
\textsuperscript{17} 'Vāsavadutta', III. 1, Vol.6, p.250
‘Tis not by bars or gates I can be bound’¹⁸

and no bars or gates bind him nor any jailor restrain him
when he jumps the guards and makes away with Vāsavadutta
to Cowsambie, not through sneaky ways as Mahasegn stopps
himself to adopt but in the most heroic fashion. It is
Vuthsa who has the last laugh and Vāsavadutta to look!

Vuthsa continues to drive Mahasegn’s fortunes back. True
mettle and true heroism triumph and all true heroes flock
together.

It is not only Vuthsa who heartens to the intuitions
of his heart but Vāsavadutta as well. She meets her father
Mahasegn more than halfway by volunteering to ‘use for
statecraft’s ends her dearest thoughts’ and by asserting,

‘My nation’s greatness is my dearest good’¹⁹

and by protesting that she will not yield to the heart’s desire
as common natures do. But Ungārita, the Queen, asserts
emphatically that before long she will change her mind and
attitude and succumb to her heart’s desire. She predicts
clearly that when her heart awakes,

¹⁸ ‘Vāsavadutta’, III. 2, Vol.6, p. 258
¹⁹ ‘Vāsavadutta’, III. 1, Vol.5, p. 253
"Thou wilt house fire, thou wilt see living gods; And all thou hast thought and known will melt away Into a flame and be reborn." 20

Before long indeed, she 'grows a rebel to her father's house'. Rather than making her husband vassal to her sire, she observes:

"Have I a father or house? O none,
O none, O none exists but only he". 21

The outward crust of her political indoctrination breaks revealing a woman's heart underneath. She is essentially feminine and that is her strength. She cannot but agree with Vuthsa:

"The deepest things are those thought seizes not;
Our spirits live their hidden meaning out." 22

Vasuntha speaks for the author:

20  Ibid., p. 254
21 'Vāsavadutta', IV. 1, Vol. 6, p. 280
22 'Vāsavadutta', III. 3, Vol. 6, p. 261
"This world is other than our standards are
And it obeys a

Our narrow thoughts! The fathomless desire
Of some huge spirit is its secret law". 23

'By our own spirits are we deified', 24 wrote William

Our intuitions come from the region of the Spirit
and it is far more safe to obey the intuitions of one's
heart rather than the cold calculations of the practical
mind or intellect. Vuthsa never comes to grief by trusting
his intuitions. The heart has its own reasons which Reason
cannot comprehend, and it is the heart which scores in the
end and not the head. Love and power fight for supremacy and
love triumphs. Vuthsa and Vasavadutta vindicate, by their
spontaneous and supreme example of the triumph of Love, the
ways of Love to men and show how everything else is subordi-
nated to it at the end.

The Viziers of Bassora

'The Viziers of Bassora', another play in five acts,
is a 'dramatic romance', as the playwright himself calls it.
It has a well-constructed plot and is full of finely contra-
sted characters. The theme is the triumph of love in this

23 'Vasavadutta', II. 1, Vol. 6, P. 227
24 William Wordsworth. 'Resolution and Independence'
play too and goodness is rewarded at the end after it is subjected to a series of trials and tribulations.

Alzayni, a cousin of the Caliph of Baghdad, is the King of Bassora. He has two viziers: Ibon Sawy, the good one, his chief Vizier and Almugene, the wicked one, his junior Vizier. Nureddene is the son of the former and Fareed, of the latter. Like father, like son: Fareed is lusty and wicked to the core while Nureddene, the hero of the play, is, though full of youth and given to easy ways of life at the beginning, large-hearted, capable of true and enduring love and is essentially good.

Ibon Sawy, the good Vizier, buys Anice-aljalice, a strikingly beautiful Persian slave-girl at the slave-market, for the sake of his king, but Nureddene falls in love with her and his love is reciprocated by Anice. Fareed, who was madly after the same slave-girl, is frustrated and urges his father to get hold of her for him by some hook or by crook.

The chief Vizier is away from Bassora on official business for some time: in the mean while his son squanders all his property, becomes insolvent and is advised to sell his slave-girl, Anice, to tide over the situation. But Nureddene could only insult and attack Almugene, the bad...
with her.

The enraged Almūnēnē poisons the mind of the king in the absence of Iʿbn Sawy, and gets him to pass orders to pull down Iʿbn Sawy's mansion and to arrest his son and the slave-girl. Nureddene gets wind of it through Ajebe, the good nephew of Almūnēnē, in advance and flees Bassora secretly with his active help and reaches Baghdad.

In Baghdad, Nureddene and Anice come across the Caliph, Haroun al Rasheed, in disguise who offers to help them out of their present predicament. The Caliph sends Nureddene to Bassora with a letter to his cousin, alone, offering to take care of Anice himself. Further difficulties are in wait for Nureddene. Alzayni, the Sultan of Bassora, charges him with having forged the letter from the Caliph and orders him to be executed, on the advice of his bad Vizier, Almūnēnē. The good Vizier returns in time to Bassora, but his appeal to the king to save his son is in vain. Finally the vizier of the Caliph, Jaffar, himself appears on the scene with the Caliph's troops. He puts Nureddene on the throne and returns Anice safely to him according to the Caliph's instructions. Alzayni and Almūnēnē are arrested.
Attempts have been made to analyse this play from the psychological angle and to interpret it spiritually. Far-fetched though it may seem, this interpretation certainly fits in with Sri Aurobindo's theory of human evolution from the vital to the spiritual and the aims of his Integral Yoga.

Bassora, an Arabian province, stands for the terrestrial manifestation of man where King Alzayni, man's ego, is enthroned. Ibn Sawy, the good chief vizier represents the higher mind whereas the bad vizier, Almuene, symbolises the beast, the 'Asura' in man. While Ibn Sawy attempts to uphold justice, order and happiness in Bassora, Almuene, is out to wreck it all. The conflict between the higher mind and the brutish 'asuric' tendencies in man is thus presented at the beginning, the Asura trying to get the upper hand and dominate human personality.

Nureddene, the hero of the play, represents a man who is already highly evolved spiritually but waiting for a spark to lift him to higher planes of spiritual existence; he is also predestined to realize his soul. He is, however, in the grip of Māyā and quite unaware of his high destiny. He is bogged down by his intense attachment to the vital pleasures and joys of an ordinary worldly life which are symbolised by the female beauties of Bassora. His love of, and aspiration
for, a higher life and spiritual evolution are revealed in a number of passages in the play spoken by himself. He intends to go forth, 'as a daring errant-knight, over romantic regions quite unknown and wander on through undiscovered islands, seas / And oceans yet unnamed', towards his true country out in 'Fairy-land'. He intends to explore the unknown regions of his consciousness and come into contact with the psyche. He meets his psyche in Anice aljalice who hails from Persia which symbolises the higher hemisphere of consciousness. Doonya, his cousin, is the one who brings them together; she represents intuition. Thus through the faculty of his intuition does Nureddene arrives at his psychic power which helps reform human nature. Nureddene's readiness to sacrifice his worldly pleasure to a large extent after he set his eyes on Anice shows how man's spiritual aspiration comes to predominate and quell his attachment to worldly pleasures. He comes to realise that the 'gadding pleasures' of worldly existence are only 'baubles' and 'random berries without savour'.

Nureddene, however, succumbs to worldly pleasures, his lower vital, and finds himself in dire financial straits. Anice, his slave-girl, offers to sell everything she has, including herself, so as to save his honour. This means that the psyche is prepared for total self-sacrifice for the
sake of the growth of spiritual consciousness. At the slave-
market, however, Nureddene refuses to part with her and
insults Almuene, and attacks him openly. He will not allow
any interference from the 'Asura' in him with the process
of spiritual advancement.

Alzayni, the ego, enraged at the insult of Almuene,
orders the arrest of Nureddene and Anice and their death.
The human ego threatened with extinction by the expansion of
spiritual consciousness tries to scotch the spiritual being.
Nureddene escapes to Baghdad with Anice with the help of
Ajebe, who represents the purified vital. Baghdad is the
residence of Haroun, the Caliph, who represents the highest
divine principle of existence. One in Baghdad, Nureddene
comes in contact with the Caliph who after a series of tests
of Nureddene's sincerity, decides to help him. He demands
the highest, though temporary, sacrifice from Nureddene
before the final realisation comes: he wants him to surrender
Anice to him, i.e. to give up his psychic consciousness,
when he left for Bassora with his letter. Nureddene, back
in Bassora, comes into great trouble. Alzayni arrests him
and orders him to be executed. The ego will not give in so
easily and is advised by the 'Asura'. But the tragedy is
averted by the timely intervention of the Divine and the ego
is thwarted and crushed, the 'Asura' liquidated. Anice is
returned to Nureddene. Delivered from the immobilised ego and the ‘asuric’ impact, Nureddene surrenders and consecrates himself to the Divine Will and accepts its gift with humility.

The very fact that the play lends itself to such a systematic spiritual interpretation in such minute detail where every little character and every little event has a part to play in the process of man’s spiritual evolution proves that all human life falls into a pattern and a pre-destined plan and a true spiritual aspirant is capable of overcoming every obstacle and every impediment thrown on his path; as a matter of fact all such obstacles are only meant to egg him on to further evolution.

The play as such is an entertaining one with conflicts and crises and a natural sequence of incidents and the characters are lively and are portrayed each with his or her own individuality. There is no attempt on the part of the author to squeeze any philosophy of his into the play or to make any character his mouthpiece. But Sri Aurobindo’s unshaken belief that all human life is a movement and an evolution towards a spiritual existence in the ultimate analysis and that all human life is incapable of being divinised in spite of all obstacles internal and external, shines through the play. Such an aesthetic presentation of the higher truths of existence
is what constitutes high and true Art according to Sri Aurobindo; such art, says he, is a handmaid to spirituality. Every event in human life is but a reflection of a corresponding movement in the occult kingdoms of the universe or in the cosmos. As all things, animate as well as inanimate, are manifestations of the Spirit, every little happening in man's earthly existence is a reflection of the drama of the Spirit, the 'līlā' of the Divine in manifestation. Drama, in order to serve its primary purpose, must attempt to present and project the mystery of life, portraying the inner striving and change leading to the ultimate spiritual evolution; in short, it must be charged with revelatory intention.  