Chapter 2

“Vision” in Sri Aurobindo’s Poetry and Poetics

“Vision is the characteristic power of the poet” (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 26: 31).

Vision is usually equated with the characteristic faculty of seeing with the eyes. Then what is it that makes Sri Aurobindo mark it as a characteristic of the poet? Is there any distinct feature associated with the poet as regards vision? What is vision for an ordinary individual and how does it differ from the vision of the poet? Vision is the power to see through eyes, to see the objects those are present in the given space and time. This faculty related to the sensory activity is common to all human beings who have the visual faculty endowed through eyes. This definition is a narrow one, for there are people who do not have the faculty of vision through eyes, yet they are known to have vision, for example the poet Surdas. Politicians, Economists, Sociologists and others have narrated their vision for India and humanity in great detail. This proves that eyes are only one of the modes of vision, rather a restricted one. There are other modes of vision too; Mind is one of them: it has the capacity to imagine. Imagination, which stems from image, pertains to seeing. However, it is not eye, but mind that sees and envisions. India 2020 is the vision of the former President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, in which he envisions the future of India as a developed nation by the year 2020. This is a futuristic vision. Dr. Kalam has imagined a developed India. This vision however, is time bound and not restricted by space as is the case with the vision with eyes. There are still more faculties in...
human beings to envision, they are the intuitive and the revelatory faculties. They are special visions which only few people have, where the future happenings are revealed to the person. Saints, mystics and spiritualists also have visions and they have their own nature and use. Joan of Arc, who was declared a saint centuries after her death, was guided by the angels whom she saw; she called them her visions. Saint Teresa had the visions of the Christ and distinguishes them from the images of the pictures she had seen before. Her visions were concrete and she admitted that her soul saw them. Evelyn Underhill, who studied the mystical visions and experiences of many saints, quotes one such experience of Saint Teresa,

The vision passes as quickly as a flash of lightning, yet this is most glorious picture makes an impression on the imagination and I believe can never be effaced until the soul at last sees Christ to enjoy Him forever. Although I call it a picture “picture”, you must not imagine that it looks like a painting; Christ appears are a living person, who sometimes speaks and reveals deep mysteries. (Mysticism 289)

The intuitive and the revelatory capacities may be inculcated through conscious practice and by following certain methods. These levels of vision differ in quality and intensity. Human eyesight has the potential to work only in the presence of light and cannot alter the events just by seeing them. Imagination takes flight away from time and space, it shapes the course of events by giving an impetus to reach the imagined goal, but it is not certain that the goal will be attained. The faculty of intuition and revelation can help to change the course of events and even channelize the events for its fulfillment because they are intense, carrying a dynamic force. It is the intensity of the vision which has the capacity to create an impact and manifest.
The nature, expanse and the intensity of the vision are the criteria which distinguish one visionary from the other.

Visions occur on different subjects – God, man, nature, angles, demons, goblins, past, present, future, and so forth. Vision is sometimes confused with hallucination or dream. “Vision” that vaguest of words has been used by the friends and enemies of the mystics to describe or obscure a wide range of experience: from formless intuition, through crude optical hallucination, to the voluntary visualizations common to the artistic mind” (Underhill 279)

Like Hallucinations and Dreams, visions may not always relate to the ordinary life. Therefore, a vision is more likely to be dismissed as a hallucination by one who does not believe in the phenomenon and experience of vision. Hallucination is a mental state when the non-existent objects are visible or audible to the person. They are self-generated without the presence of any external stimuli or perception by the sensory organs. When the spell of hallucination gets over, the person may realize that his/her vision was his/her own construction. Hallucination is a mental state where the patient needs assistance, care and medical consultation to cure a particular malady. Images, thoughts, pictures and visions are also associated with dreams. Dreams occur in sleep and are not conscious visions. Images occurring in the dream are often disconnected reflections of the things that happen during the day or they may be some distorted memory of the past events. They are often disorganized, disoriented and inconsequential. Modern psychology has revealed that many suppressed desires that a person may not be able to fulfill during the day, in the waking state may find their fulfillment in the dream, for the instincts are more active when the conscious mind is asleep.
Visions that appear to the mystics, poets and saints are concrete. They occur in a state when the person can describe it vision in words. Also, it does not necessarily occur in the altered state of consciousness as with hallucination and dreams too. Their visions are as concrete to them as the sight of material objects by the physical eye. Joan of Arc’s visions were concrete to her, although no one else believed them and dismissed and charged her with heresy and treason. The visions of Saint Teresa too were concrete to her and were not images of Christ but the soul vision of the Lord.

Vision is a powerful mode of conveying things. In The Future Poetry Sri Aurobindo says,

Poetry, like the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is mental and verbal and not material. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of the sight or be included in it, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. (CWSA 26:26)

He contended that a poet should not only be able to see but also should be able to make the reader see. Sri Aurobindo upholds the idea of Kavi which was prevalent in ancient India, where the poet was not only the creator of verse, he/she was a rishi, a sage, who could see with his/her heightened consciousness.

The name given to these sages was Kavi, which afterwards came to mean any poet, but at the time had the sense of a seer of truth, the Veda itself describes them as kavyayah satyayatratah, seers who are hearers of the Truth and
the Veda itself was called, śruti, a word which came to mean revealed Scripture.

(*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*: 1)

The word *Kavi* is translated as seer-poet, one who can see and compose. The poets to whom Sri Aurobindo’s refers in his writings are those who are sages and have the faculty of vision (*driśti*) and audition (*śruti*). They are not simple sensory activities, which all human beings possess, but special faculties which have to be inculcated to grasp the vision and audition of higher powers and inspirations coming from higher realms of consciousness. They require an inner perception, an inner eye, and an inner ear. It is the capacity of *driśti* and *śruti* that differentiates ordinary vision from the poetic vision. The poet is not only concerned with images, he/she is expected to have an inner ear for rhythm too. The aural part comes into play there and it is at a certain level of consciousness that the visionary and aural faculties meet and form what Sri Aurobindo calls the *mantra*. The formation of mantra and the merging of these two faculties require large explanations which shall be taken up in a separate chapter. However, the capacity to envision and draw the vision is the primary quality of the poet. These visions have different levels and may be graded from the most tangible form of vision to the most intangible one.

The term imitation has been debated over centuries since it was first discussed in Plato’s *Republic*. The term imitation “the Latin *imitatio*, is a translation of Greek *mimesis*” (*Princeton*: 370). Plato used the term imitation “in two senses, a good and a bad...The only kind of poetry which Plato excludes from his ideal state is that which is imitative in the bad sense.” (Tate 161) Imitation which mimes only the physical appearance or only the outer details is bad. Good imitation is one that “imitates the ideal world” (Tate 161) and “the genuine poet is not merely a
wand-bearer but genuinely inspired (by knowledge of the ideas) and has the root of the matter in him” (Tate 162). Imitation then becomes the imitation of the inner substance of the object. Imitation therefore requires complete understanding of the object. The “divine power” referred above has to be experienced and delivered in the work of art. Therefore, the genius of the poet plays an important role in creation.

Considering Plato’s view of poets being twice removed from reality, his disciple Aristotle deferred from the former and defined imitation. “Poetry, according to Aristotle, is a mode of imitation. By imitation, however, he does not mean an exact copy of objective reality or literal transcript of life. For him imitation means, “the objective representation of life in literature” or “the imaginative reconstruction of life”. The poet imitates not only the objective reality, but also an idea in his head.” It is creative imitation, or the dimension (good sense) of imitation in art that Plato advocated. Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics traces the history of imitation from Plato to Renaissance,

The Renaissance inherited at least three major concepts of imitation from antiquity: (1) the Platonic: a copying of sensuous reality, (2) the Aristotelian: a representation of the universal patterns of human behavior, and of an action embodying these, and (3) the Hellenic and rhetorical: imitation of canonized literary models...But each of these was further complicated by a deviation or a variant interpretation: (1) the Platonic by Neoplatonic suggestion that the artist can create according to a true Idea, (2) the Aristotelian vulgarization of Aristotle’s “universals” into particular social types belonging to a particular place
or time, and (3) the rhetorical by its rather adventitious association with “enthusiasm” and the *furor poeticus* (379).

Plato and Aristotle even to this day are credited for their authoritative verdicts on imitation. These observations on imitation may lead to the process of poetic creation or composition. Imitation is one of the processes of poetic creation; one of the modes of composition; an essential element of creation; an aspect of vision. The poet has to observe and imitate the essence of things around him and transfer the same essence into his poetry. Aristotle explained the nuances of tragedy, comedy, epic and history and mentioned what and how to imitate. He marked that the poet imitates men in action, but that action is the action of the character’s mind and not mere imitation of the physical activities and that imitation requires a creative interpretation of the object, person or event.

Sri Aurobindo writes that the aim of poetry “is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature” (CWSA 26: 27). It presents something deeper and profound than the mere appearance. He describes the nature of imitation – “art is not an imitation or reproduction of outward Nature, but rather missioned to give by the aid of a transmuting faculty something more inwardly true than the external life and appearance.”(CWSA 26: 227) There is an echo of Aristotle’s concept of mimesis and the good sense of Plato’s imitation in Sri Aurobindo’s definition. However, he adds that art has to represent “something more inwardly true” than what the outward appearance. Art is not divorced from truth, rather it aims at penetrating deep into the real essence of the object and express the inner beauty and truth in a harmonious way in order to delight.
One of Sri Aurobindo’s poems, “A Tree” may be cited as an example of imitation fitting into his own definition –

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.
This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain. (CWSA 2: 207)

In this poem the tree represents the soul’s longing for the heavens. For example, boughs represent fingers and the tree represents a human being. The poem conveys a profounder meaning through the imagery of the tree. It is an exemplification of Sri Aurobindo’s idea of imitation.

He did not use imitation only in imagery, adapted the form of writing sonnets, plays and epic too. He wrote sonnets in both, the Shakespearean and the Miltonic style; for example the poem “Evolution”. The first sonnet is written in the Shakespearean and the second in the Miltonic scheme.

Both the poems bear the same title “Evolution” yet they have different texture and tone. The sonnet beginning with the lines “All is not finished in the unseen decree;” (CWSA 2: 595) has an impersonal tone and concludes philosophically. It voices Sri Aurobindo’s concept of the evolution of consciousness from the inanimate objects to the higher realms of consciousness. The structure of the poem in itself and by itself conveys in three systematic
stanzas, the past, present and future of evolution. In the conclusive couplet he addresses the evolving consciousness that has to manifest further to the “miracled summits”.

The next sonnet is abundant with imagery. It seems a direct record of the vision and does not discuss the philosophy of evolution. The thought is similar to the previous sonnet but the expression is figurative. The poet goes into a state of consciousness where he realizes a dormant energy in the form of a sleeping coiled snake at the beginning of the world. In the course of evolution the dormant energy manifested as Matter, Life and Mind. In his vision he saw “Earth was a cradle for the arriving god”, (CWSA 22: 594) and human being as transitional. In the last six lines he explains what the evolution would bring forth. It will liberate the Mind; remove pain, suffering and death; eradicate darkness; and the soul would come forth and govern the being.

The collected works of Sri Aurobindo has a few poems with editor’s note in the parenthesis – “Imitated from the Bengali of Chundidas”, two of poems are “Radha’s Complaint in Absence” and “Radha’s Appeal”. Chundidas in his poetry wrote on the *srngara* (love and the joy of union) and *virah* (pain of separation) rasas in connection to Radha and her lover. While translating some of Chundidas’ poems, Sri Aurobindo imitated him. Here are a few lines from “Radha’s Complaint in Absence”:

O heart, my heart, a heavy pain is thine!

What land is that where none doth know

Love’s cruel name nor any word of sin?

My heart, there let us go. (CWSA 2: 32)
Sri Aurobindo’s plays are modeled on Elizabethan drama and are “Elizabethan too in [their] blank verse” (Sethna, Sri Aurobindo the Poet: 71). They explore various themes from various cultures. The manner of presentation of these plays is essentially Elizabethan but they show the Aurobindonian curve of the theme of evolution. Unlike Elizabethan plays, these plays have less action. The drama takes place in the minds of the characters and the thoughts are realized in action. Like, “Eric” is a play about emotions and the changes in the characters are primarily psychological. Similarly, his epic Savitri is written in the traditional form of an English epic. It has twelve books, further divided into cantos.

If imitation is to be extended to themes, he has borrowed much for his poems, “Urvasie”, “Love and Death”, “Ulopie”, “Chitrangada”, and his epic Savitri from the Indian epic the Mahabharata. Similarly, his poem in hexameter “Illion” is based on the Homer’s Iliad; his “Ahana” and “The Decent of Ahana” have Vedic imageries. Though a few elements are borrowed they cannot be entirely called imitation. Sri Aurobindo borrows either the theme, the form or the imagery; the poetry is his own as he transforms the original. Significantly, the imitation dissolves in poetry so much so that it becomes difficult to discriminate the original from the imitated. According to his definition, there has to be a transmutation of the external nature into that which is something more internal and profound. All these examples of imitation show that the imitation is transmuted by the profundity of thought and the eloquence of ideas.

Imagination, like imitation is a mode of poetic creation and is predominantly associated with the Romantic poets. “Imagination is derived from the Latin imaginatio, which was a late substitute for phantasia (a simple transliteration of the Greek from which fancy is derived. The
two derivatives, long appeared as synonymous designating the image-receiving or image-forming faculty or process.” (*Princeton*: 370). *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms* defines imagination as “the faculty of producing ideal creations consistent with reality, as distinct from the power of creating decorative imagery” (140) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* defines it thus, “the mental faculty sometimes thought to encompass all acts of thinking about something novel, contrary to fact, or not currently perceived” (361) Imagination essentially consists of thoughts in images. Imagination in poetry involves the blending of the real and the ideal. Wordsworth’s poem “Daffodils” may be taken as an example of creative imagination. He saw Daffodils and was delighted. In reclusion he thought about them and wrote the poem. When one reads this poem, he/she is led to imagine Wordsworth’s ecstasy on seeing the Daffodils. Therefore, it may be said that the poet has a strong imagination. Yeats’ in his poem “Byzantium” imagines the objects of his ideal world. Browning’s imagination is delivered in some of his monologues “Andrea del Sarto” and “Rabi ben Ezra”.

Unlike the classicists Dr. Johnson and David Humes the Romantic poets gave importance to imagination over reason. In his *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge defines two types of imaginations — primary and secondary. The former is a faculty present in all, while the secondary imagination belongs to artists and poets. To quote Coleridge,

> The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the
kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.

(Biographia Literaria: 153)

Shelley in his essay “A Defense of Poetry” begins by distinguishing two “mental action[s]” viz. reason and imagination. He establishes the difference between them and relates the two. “Reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.” (Ramaswami 1: 337) He defines poetry as the “expression of imagination” and says that it is intimately related to the origin of man.

Imagination thus is a powerful means of poetic creation. The stronger the imagination and contemplative capacity of the poet, more vivid is his expression. Imagination presents to the mind what is absent in the given space and time. The reader might not have seen the mountains, but a powerful description can bring forth the picture of the mountain. The subject of imagination like that of imitation can be anything from man to nature, from God to devil. Milton for example explores in his imagination the given concepts of creation of the world and the fall of man as described in the Bible. The Romantics attend to the nature and perceive and project the natural as supernatural or supernatural as natural. The modern poets surrounded by the chaotic world of decay and disintegration either imagine massive destruction or a new creation. They may talk about the lovely charms of their beloved or the hollowness of humanity or the dark side of human behavior. Through the poet imagination helps explore the virtues and vices of human nature and the nature around and his success depends upon the effectiveness
of recreating his experiences and images in the mind of the reader. New Criticism, Deconstruction and Reader Response theories however, do not accept the emphasis given to the intention and the impact of the poem/text and the reader respectively. The phrases “intentional fallacy”, “affective fallacy”, “open ended text”, “the death of the author” do not advocate the intention of the poet to be studied very particularly. Nevertheless, imagination has its role in poetic creation if not in poetic appreciation (as is the case with the above mentioned literary theories).

Sri Aurobindo recognizes different types of imagination. In *The Future Poetry* he writes,

> ...there are many kinds of imagination; the objective imagination which visualizes strongly the outward aspects of life and things; the subjective imagination which visualizes strongly the mental and emotional impressions they have the power to start in the mind; the imagination which deals in the play of mental fictions and to which we give the name poetic fancy; the aesthetic imagination which delights in beauty of words and images for their own sake and sees no farther (27) ...[and a] spiritual imagination (28).

In this context, Chaucer can be exemplified for objective imagination. In *Canterbury Tales* men and women are described as types with distinct manners and appearances. Chaucer does not focus on the minds of the characters and the mental workings of his creations. He drew inspiration from the appearances of men around him and weaved poetry out of his objective observation. The description of a physician may be cited for this purpose,

> Ther was also a Doctour of Phisik,
The poetry of all the Romantic poets may be seen as subjective imagination. These poets voiced their emotions and feelings about the nature of human beings. They gave primacy to feeling over thought, and always had a personal touch in them – a personal opinion, personal experience or observation. Poetic fancy may be attributed to Browning’s poetry. His imaginations and expressions of the dramatization of the characters taken from history lead to the formation of “mental fiction”.

The poetry of Blake and Yeats and Shakespeare’s plays are examples of aesthetic imagination as the words and images in their works are employed to delight. Blake marvels at the creation of Lamb, the symbol of innocence;

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Does thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o’er the mead; (53)

Similarly, characters in Shakespeare’s plays like Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Portia, Shylock surprise the reader by their aesthetic appeal and even the beauty of the plot. Similarly, spiritual imagination figure in the poetry of Whitman, Tagore and the Bhakti poets. These types of imaginations are not like water-tight compartments. The poet may use a combination of them to create the desired effect and convey the idea and emotion.
It is difficult to find the objective, subjective imagination and poetic fancy in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. There is an abundance of aesthetic and spiritual imagination in his early poetry because he describes the natural world as reflecting the human nature. Nature reflects the human emotions. The starting lines of the long poem – “Love and Death” portray this aesthetic beauty by comparing the attributes of nature and human beings.

In woodlands of the bright and early world,
When love was to himself yet new and warm
And stainless, played like morning with a flower
Ruru with his young bride Priyumvada. (CWSA 2: 113)

The lover Ruru and his beloved Priyumvada are as young and fresh as the ambience in the morning. They are compared with the blossoming flowers in a lonely forest and their love is untouched by sorrow or pain. The world for the lovers is perfect and beautiful, so is Nature – calm, serene and fragrant. However, when the lovers are separated by Priyumvada’s death, Ruru becomes silent. He challenges death and curses trees and plants which try to console him or identify with his emotions. The youth of love is shown in the freshness of dawn; the sadness, agony and pain accompany the fierce noon and dark night. Sri Aurobindo describes the individual and nature almost simultaneously. Similes and metaphors describe the incidents and the moods of the lovers. Ruru is described as a “happy flood of passion”, and Priyamvada as “Fresh-cheeked and dew-eyed”. Not only in “Love and Death”, even in “Urvasie” the individual characters appear simultaneously. The aesthetic imagination is abundant. The finer elements of love, joy, beauty and the like, are present in all the stanzas; but even in the passages where
sorrow, death and pain are described, beauty remains intact as the description brings out the essential mood, the *rasa* behind the feelings.

The poem “Who” expresses some of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual experiences. It is an example of spiritual expression from the reader’s point of view. For the researcher, it is a spiritual imagination but for the poet, it is a spiritual experience. This poem draws the different aspects of the Supreme and the ways people perceive him as the One or the Dualities (*dwaita* and *adwaita*) in the form and the formless, as the laughter and the smile, as the microcosm and the macrocosm of the Universe and also as the unknown and one beyond definition.

*In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,*

*Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?*

*When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,*

*Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?* (CWSA 2: 203)

This poem evokes imaginations of the metaphysical. The question that the poet asks is “Who” is that Supreme whom we know in different forms and subtleties. Taking it as a spiritual imagination, the reader is made to imagine the ways in which God manifests in this world and the powers He has. While He can force the planets to revolve, He can give elegance and beauty to the curl of a girl; He is beautiful being dark, She is beautiful in Her wrath. There is no answer to the question posed by the poet, whether God is man or woman for they show their splendor in both the forms. God is present in every small thing around but human beings lack the vision to realize Him. The poet also says God is always sought for in temples and other places but this mighty “ageless and deathless” power is seated within each individual; only inward vision and the poise are required to realize Him. This poem is an example of spiritual imagination for the
poet provokes the reader to think and imagine the existence of God in each movement, stillness, sound and silence of the world.

Imitation and imagination give vividness to poetry. However, an object of imitation or a strong imaginative power is not enough to make poetry effective unless it is expressed powerfully. This powerful expression comes by the force which the poet feels when he writes poetry, rather scribes the lines. Inspiration qualifies poetry and makes it effective. The spontaneous overflow perhaps occurs due to this descending inspiration; a poet becomes a catalyst when he is a passive recipient and a scribe for this inspiration. The poetry becomes impersonal when it is only the inspiration which controls the poet while he writes it. The personal records of the poets, writers and artists document their shifting over from the creators to scribes under the force of inspiration. Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics defines inspiration as “the urge that sets a poet to work and the devotion that keeps him at it” (396). Timothy Clark’s The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing is an important work, which throws light on the nature of inspiration. “The key concept here is that of dictation by an other: the sense of the individual moved by a force than her-or himself.” (qtd. in Clark 18). Inspiration is said to come to the poet from outside. Poets invoke the muses to be inspired.

Another source of inspiration as pointed out by the encyclopedia is, the source within. Of this there are two varieties: one is the inspiration coming from the genius or the native talent; the other is the one attributed to the welling up of the suppressed desires and emotions. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes them as the inspiration coming from outside and coming
from inside. One such record of Boris Pasternak as cited by Clark may serve as an appropriate example of inspiration descending on the poets,

After two or three stanzas and several images by which he himself was astonished, his work took possession of him and he experienced the approach of what is usually called inspiration. At such moments the correlation of forces controlling the artist is, as it were stood on its head. The ascendency is no longer with the artist or the state of mind he is struggling to express, but with the language, his instrument of expression. Language, the home and dwelling of beauty and meaning, itself begins to think and speak for man, and turns wholly into music, not in the sense of outward, audible sounds but by virtue of the power and momentum of the inward flow. Then, like the current of a mighty river polishing stones turning wheels by its very movement, the flow of speech creates in passing, by the force of its laws, rhyme and rhythm and countless other forms and formations, still more importance and until now undiscovered, unconsidered and unnamed. (qtd. in Clark 24)

Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” came to him as an inspiration and a vision in his dream when he was under the spell of opium. The whole poem of about 300-400 lines came to him, and when he woke up he started writing them, but he was interrupted and when he again got back to writing the poem, he could not recall what he saw. He had the idea but not the exact lines which he wanted to scribe. Thus it may be inferred that inspiration is difficult to command. Sri Aurobindo says that inspiration comes when it wills and takes leave at its own will. A writer’s block is
nothing but the lack of inspiration which hampers his/ her creative activity. It is the level of inspiration which determines the quality of the poem which will be discussed in detail later when Sri Aurobindo’s poetics would be taken up.

Inspiration has great significance in Sri Aurobindo’s aesthetics. The level of inspiration decides the quality of vision in poetry in his view. He defines inspiration and says that it comes from various levels, “What we mean by inspiration is that the impetus to poetic creation and utterance comes to us from a superconscient source above the ordinary mentality, so that what is written seems not to be the fabrication of the brain-mind, but something more sovereign breathed or poured in from above.” (CWSA 26: 183). The Superconscient sources of inspiration are in his own terms – Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition and the Overmind. A poet receives inspiration from these planes, not in a divisive manner but a word here a word or a line there. Sri Aurobindo has analyzed in detail many lines of the ancient and modern poets and marked the levels of inspiration from where they came. To cite examples of Overmind inspiration selected by Sri Aurobindo are Wordsworth’s “a mind…/Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone” (CWSA 27: 26) and “The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep” and Milton’s line “Those thoughts that wander through eternity.” (CWSA 27: 33).

To receive inspiration the poet has to prepare through study. Timothy Clark refers to Keats’ astonishment as his own creation, because he was not aware that he was under the spell of inspiration. “He has often not been aware of the beauty of some thought or expression until after he has composed and written it down. It then struck him with astonishment – and seemed rather the production of another person than his own.” (Clark 26)
Sri Aurobindo describes the poetry coming from the Superconscient planes of consciousness to be the Overhead poetry. In Savitri, Sri Aurobindo writes about the source of inspiration, “And inspiration comes from the Unknown; / But only reason and sense he feels as sure, / They only are his trusted witnesses.” (517) The source is unknown for the one who cannot discern the levels, which Sri Aurobindo could identify and experience. If the source is not identified, by the poet and the reader, they may confuse it with the mental and sensual imaginings.

Sri Aurobindo did not see the poets as mere manufacturers of poetry. He upholds the ancient Indian concept of calling poet – a Kavi, who is a seer. The poet is equally a yogi involved in intense tapasya and ascension of consciousness. The poet documents his visions and enables the reader “to see”. Vyasa and Valmiki had this faculty and their works are the result of their poetic vision. Therefore, poetry and yoga or ascension of consciousness are real works of the poet. The Vedic poets were of the order of the Kavi, who prepared themselves by doing tapasya to invoke the highest inspiration and receive the Word from above. The Word that comes from the highest realms of consciousness becomes Mantra as it descends in its perfect form, structure, word and force. It comes in perfected form and force, and its power is highest, therefore poetry thus created will have the greatest influence. Sri Aurobindo, himself a yogi, a poet and a seer wrote Savitri from those heights. He said that he received lines from above which he merely scribed. Many lines in the epic are mantric because of their origin from the Overmind plane, the rest has a “general Overmind influence”, he said.

Similarly, there is inspiration coming from within. Not from the genius or the suppressed desires but from what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic. The meaning of psychic in Sri Aurobindo’s
terminology is similar to the Greek word psyche which denotes soul. Psychic is the divine spark in each individual which takes part in evolution from birth to birth. The poetry inspired by the psychic has distinct qualities. The presence of psychic being gives birth to poetry that is soft and emotive. He distinguishes between the poetry coming from the overhead planes and that coming from the psychic—

For the tone of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes,—it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception, an intimate language. The expression “sweetness and light” can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful authority, strength and space. (CWSA 27: 84)

Sri Aurobindo cites Shelley’s lines from his poem “To-” as an example of “perfect psychic inspiration”,

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
In this poem worshipper’s longing for the Lord is compared to the longing of the moth for the fire. The moth destroys itself by entering the flame, likewise the union of the worshipper and the Lord results in the abolition of the worshipper’s ego; but for the joy of ultimate union the two sacrifice their own lives.

It is indeed possible to write poetry stimulated by suppressed desires, but this source is subconscient. It is also possible to draw a word picture of dark and obscure forces in the poet or in the world. Many war poets have written of sadness, distress and their poetry which moves and plagues the reader’s heart and mind. The subconscient is the seat of all that is suppressed, dark and obscure in one’s being and the poetry written from those levels would certainly be dark and dull. However, poetry inspired from the overhead planes or psychic is beautiful and sweet and elevates the reader. Therefore, the source of inspiration is very important.

In The Future Poetry Sri Aurobindo explains the meaning of poetic inspiration. The “impetus” to create poetry comes from the superconsciente planes of consciousness and thus diminishes the use of mind in creating poetry. He says that knowledge through inspiration exceeds knowledge through reason as the latter explores knowledge through senses. Inspiration is just a glimpse of truth from the higher planes of consciousness. It is momentary. However, intuition and revelation are higher than inspiration.

Intuition and Revelation are the terms that are importantly associated with poetry. The poets intuitively capture the universal truths which are revealed as mantric poetry. Artists have recorded the working of a force that creates effortlessly, the work of art without the mind’s intervention. Evelyn Underhill cites the example of what the famous painter Raphael said to
another famous painter, Leonardo da Vinci – “I have noticed that when one paints one should think of nothing: everything then comes better”. (64) When the poet is ready and inspired by the higher realms of consciousness, poetry ensues. If the poetry descends from the level of the Overmind, the Word is revealed to the poet and then he/she becomes a mere scribe. Intuition as defined in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* is “a non-inferential knowledge or grasp, as of a proposition, concept or entity that is not based on perception, memory or introspection; also, the capacity in virtue of which such cognition is possible.” (382). There are two types of knowledge that are distinguished, logical and intuitive. As described in the definition above it is non-referential. S. Murali explains the meaning of intuition with Sri Aurobindo’s reference –

> The poetry of Intuition may have the play of colour and brightness but it does not depend on them – it may be quite bare. It tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. Sri Aurobindo’s “Intuition”, is different from the Crocean or Tagorian variety. It pertains to the Supramental order of poetic consciousness. By intuition he means a profound penetration into the essence of things by a spontaneous inner – intimacy on a superhuman level. (*The Mantra of Vision*: 75).

Intuition in general refers to the ability to sense that which is not present to the senses. However, to realize the presence of intuition in poetry the reader has to get in touch with intuition. Intuition according to Sri Aurobindo is knowledge by direct sight. A poet may look at an object and know the truth or the truth simply leaps out as a flash thereby enlightening the person and enhancing his/her Knowledge. Intuition engenders vision,
The intuition is usually a lightning flash showing up a single spot or plot of ground or scene with an entire and miraculous completeness of vision to the surprised ecstasy of the inner eye; its rhythm has a decisive inevitable sound which leaves nothing essential unheard, but very commonly is embodied in a single stroke. (CWSA 27:37)

Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri is an example of the consummation of intuition and revelation. It is difficult to define poetic intuition without experiencing it. Sri Aurobindo who had experienced it could write the poetry of that order and could identify those levels in the poetry of other poets and define it with clarity and lucidity.

“Revelation” says Sri Aurobindo “is the direct sight, the direct hearing or the inspired memory of Truth, drṣṭi, śruti, smṛti; it is the highest experience and always accessible to renewed experience. Not because God spoke it, because the soul saw it, is the word of the Scriptures our supreme authority” (CWSA 12: 434). Intuition and revelation thus form an integral part of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic vision. It is associated with scriptures. The words of the Veda, Upanishad and the Bible are revealed words and not intellectual statements. S. Murali explains revelation in relation to vision. He says, “Revelation is the revealing power or the transparency of the poetic vision that inducts the influx of the supramental” (“Relocating Sri Aurobindo”: 153). Revelatory poetry can mould the reader’s consciousness as it has the capacity to influence the reader even if he/she does not know the words. The words are packed with power and require some preparation on the part of the reader before they can be read. Therefore, knowledge about the Vedas in the olden days were passed on only to initiates, those who could hold the force of the words, because the force is likely to shatter the person, if
he/she lacked the required preparation. This preparation is that of the consciousness, which must evolve to be a proper channel of the spiritual knowledge. It might be easy to grasp the word-meaning through the intellect, but the profundity of such texts is only realized when the individual becomes a worthy recipient. This revelation is a complex process, which has been described by Sri Aurobindo in his exegesis on the Vedas. He had the spiritual experiences as recorded in the Vedas and later all his experiences were confirmed when he read them and declared them as the revealed Word.

It is also important that one who becomes the recipient should be equipped with technical capacity. Spiritual experience does not necessarily lead to its perfect expression unless the poet is technically sound. Therefore, some amount of technical and a large amount of spiritual preparation are indispensable for the poet to receive the revealed poetry. There are many passages in *Savitri* which are revelatory and intuitive. Many are those which descended from the mantric planes of consciousness where poetry is composed through the medium of revelation and intuition alone. R. Y. Deshpande a scientist and scholar of Sri Aurobindo’s writings and Indian aesthetics, has noted those lines in some of his lectures. Few lines may be exemplified here –

Plains lay that seemed the expanse of God’s wide sleep,

Thought’s wings climbed up towards heaven’s vast repose

Lost in blue deeps of immortality.

A changed earth-nature felt the breath of peace. (672)

It is not possible for the researcher to explain the mantric purport of the lines as it does not fall under the domain of mental experience. It is only Sri Aurobindo who can explain them.
This survey of the processes of poetic creation has been made to get a complete picture of these terms with reference to Sri Aurobindo’s writings. Sri Aurobindo’s definitions and descriptions bring greater clarity to these terms and concepts and give a larger picture of the act of creation. It is not a random explanation of the terms. It follows an evolution from the tangible to the intangible; from the outer to the inner. From imitation to revelation the process becomes complex and requires greater amount of effort towards the preparation of consciousness.

There are different levels of visions based on the process of poetic creation. Sri Aurobindo described and expressed the visions of different planes of consciousness in some of his sonnets and Savitri. Each vision has its own place and can be graded. In one of his letters to a disciple he writes – “Visions come from all planes and are of all kinds and different values” (Letters on Yoga: 935). The planes he describes at various places may be roughly divided into two broad categories – one coming from above or below or from the mind, and the other from within. Therefore, a poem can take birth from the various ranges between the subconscient to the superconscient and from the inner to the outer. Sri Aurobindo saw and experienced on all these planes. He expressed them in the prose form in The Life Divine, and in poetic form in sonnets and in epic Savitri. The different planes of consciousness from which Sri Aurobindo envisioned and experienced may be described sequentially.

Consciousness ranges from the Inconscient level to the Superconscient levels. Sri Aurobindo travelled through these realms of nescience as well as the bright worlds. He expressed his visions in the form of poetry. His poems and epic Savitri have images of that
world of which the humanity is unaware. From his poetic renderings it becomes clear that a poet’s fancy or imagination cannot describe those unknown, unseen worlds. It is only a poet, a risi, a kavi who has had concrete experience of those realms, can relate and describe them with such clarity and authority. The levels of consciousness are many and there is a considerable overlapping. These levels form their own worlds and have specific characteristics. The broader levels of the Inconscient, Subconscient, Physical, Vital, Mental, Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition, Overmind and Supermind have been chosen to simplify the understanding of the levels of consciousness. The levels like, physical vital, or vital mental have been deliberately eschewed.

Sri Aurobindo explains the meaning of the Inconscient plane of consciousness as a plane where the consciousness is asleep, is dormant. There is no light or movement in this region. It is full of darkness, obscurity and inertia. Sri Aurobindo experiences this consciousness as jaḍa, as having no consciousness. He reached this level of consciousness and saw its darkness, but with his yogic powers he says he established light there. He observes that matter was born out of this region. In two of his sonnets – “The Pilgrim of the Night” and “The Inconscient” he explains what he saw – “I made an assignation with the Night; / In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous” (CWSA 2: 603) and “The darkness was the Omnipotent’s abode, / Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God” (CWSA 2: 604).

In the first poem, Sri Aurobindo describes his journey in the dark and obscure realm of night. He describes this as “dark and dangerous”. He travels to this realm with “God’s deathless light” in his heart and says that this plane of consciousness was not explored by anyone before,
as he found no such signs, no footprints. Although he finds the place dark, dim and blinding, he emerges forth from this dungeon with the strength and power of God. He feels assured that once the light is established there, it will grow. In the sonnet “The Inconscient” he sees the God involved and established there. Although there is darkness all over, God sits veiled there. His epic Savitri describes the Inconscient and the creation from the Inconscient in great detail. In the opening canto of Savitri, the poet describes the beginning of evolution from the first stirring in this dark region where he says that something “Teased the Inconscient to wake ignorance”. This something he later describes as the involved consciousness which was dormant, but slowly unfolded itself into creation. This in no way may be taken as an exhaustive account of the Inconscient. It is not possible for the researcher to describe it as she did not experience it. The above description is only a summary of what has been gathered from the reading and comprehension of a few poems and Savitri.

The Inconscient is vast. It is the last plane in which the involved divine consciousness lays dormant. Above this plane of consciousness lies the Subconscient. The Subconscient is the seat of impressions, instincts and habits. It stores all that which the waking mental consciousness forgets or fails to notice. All the experiences taking place during the day and over a period of time slowly recede from the daily workings, but they get stored in this region and surface whenever they find opportunity through dreams and speech. Many of the daily activities and conversations too are governed by the subconscient though the individual may not be aware of the source. This region is disorganized and disharmonious. Dreams are often incomprehensible and confusing; they do not have any logical meaning and coherence. Subconscient is the plane of human existence. It holds impressions not only of the present life
but of the previous lives too. Some people have reported of having seen their past lives because this plane of consciousness yields those memories in this life which are otherwise hidden and dormant. Sri Aurobindo describes this plane in one of his sonnets - “The Inconscient Foundation”,

My soul regards its veiled subconscient base;
All the dead obstinate symbols of the past,
The hereditary moulds, the stamps of race
Are upheld to sight, the old imprints effaced. (CWSA 2: 621)

Above the Subconscient level are the Physical, Vital and Mental planes. Sri Aurobindo writes in one of his letters – “When I speak of the physical consciousness, I mean the physical mind and the physical vital as well as the body consciousness proper” (Letter on Yoga III: 1443). In his vision physical is not only the visible part of existence. It is a composite of the three; the body consciousness, the physical vital and the physical mental. The body by its nature is matter, which is inert and resistant to change. The body consciousness therefore is inert and stubborn. Sri Aurobindo explains that body consciousness acts even without the influence and interference of the mind. The instant reflex action of withdrawal of hand in case of injury pertains to the body consciousness. The working of this level of consciousness is mechanical and is based on the sensory perception. Another portion of the physical consciousness is the physical vital. Sri Aurobindo describes this part to be “a vital turned entirely upon physical things, full of desires and greeds and seekings for pleasure on the physical plane” (Letters on Yoga I: 344). The last portion of the physical consciousness is the physical mind. It is the portion which entirely dwells on the objects and the sensory activity to perceive. It only grasps the
material existence of things and forms images and understanding of the same. The truth for the physical mind depends on the appearance and the signals that the sensory organs give. It is completely turned on the physical objects around.

This is Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the physical consciousness. In his yoga of integral transformation, he envisages the transformation of the physical consciousness too. His poems give a glimpse of his vision where he does not see the physical as an inert consciousness, but finds the Infinite sitting inside the finite forms. In his poems – “Form” and “The Body” Sri Aurobindo speaks of the beauty, utility and significance of the form. The body is not to be denied but respected as it is the temple in which God resides. In “Form” he describes – “Form is the wonder-house of eternity, / A cavern of the deathless Eremite” (CWSA 2: 625). His envisions body or form as the base in which the soul resides and expresses itself; though a small abode, the infinite takes shape in it and uses it as long as needed. But the physical consciousness purifies when the individual becomes more and more aware of the spirit that inhabits the form.

Above physical consciousness is the vital consciousness. A consciousness more fluid and flexible than the physical. Sri Aurobindo envisions vital consciousness as an essential part of human existence. He writes – “Vitality means life-force – wherever there is life, in plant to animal or man, there is life-force – without the vital there can be no life in matter and no living action” (Letters on Yoga I: 346). Vital consciousness is made up of this life-force, the energy, the motivation and the enthusiasm to work and live exist in this plane. It is the seat of desires, emotions, sentiments, ambitions and all those elements which drive human being to move forward. It has both negative and positive aspects. It is the vital plane of consciousness from where the artists, poet and musicians draw the motivation and drive to create. The aesthetic
expression of human beings comes from this life-plane. Owing to its desires and ambitions it may lead one to the negative path, for the life-force then is exerted in that direction. However, the finer elements in the vital can bring out the best of the emotional and artistic expressions. Sri Aurobindo says that the vital being in human being has to be kept under control, for then it is a good servant and does its best. However, once it takes command it may lead to destruction. It is helpful in yoga when it is under control. The vital consciousness is influenced by the physical and mental consciousness. It exists with the interaction of these levels in human beings. It is Sri Aurobindo’s discerning sight that has seen it and has described about it so distinctly. In Savitri he describes,

  It turns in us to finite loves and lusts,
  The will to conquer and have, to seize and keep,
  To enlarge life's room and scope and pleasure's range,
  To battle and overcome and make one's own,
  The hope to mix one's joy with others' joy,
  A yearning to possess and be possessed,
  To enjoy and be enjoyed, to feel, to live. (139)

Mental plane of consciousness is the one which governs the thought and leads to rational thinking. Mind has its physical and vital parts, but it is the rational thinking and the capacity to judge and foresee which make human mind different from that of animals. The plane of mind relates to cognition and intelligence. It is capable of rationalizing, observing, analyzing, memorizing, and discerning things in its own limited way. It is conscious but is limited in its awareness of the Truth. It tends to grasp the surface meaning always and errs in its
perception quite often. Mind by its nature understands things in division, as opposites or paradoxes. It cannot see things as a unified whole. When it has to see the whole, it fits the parts together and perceives it as a whole. But it lacks the unified perception. It also fails to grasp the largeness and profundity of the thing perceived. With its capacity to reason mind has created its own laws and studies all sciences and arts based on those laws. Sri Aurobindo describes human being as thinking beings and sees mind to be an instrument to connect to other planes of consciousness. It has its own purpose to serve for humanity. With its limited capacity, mind organizes, it makes rules and principles, it governs with the laws and forms the moral standards for a harmonious living in the society. The philosophies that are formed on reasoning and intelligence have come from those who have a strong mental mind, i.e those who reside more on the mental consciousness. Human beings predominantly act under the vital and mental consciousness most of the time, the physical has to obey to the demands of the mind and vital. Thoughts and opinions particularly belong to the mind, while the emotions belong to the vital and an individual usually is under the sway of thoughts and emotions. The vision of the mind as given by Sri Aurobindo in Savitri describes mind as a limited instrument, half enlightened but having the capacity to give judgments and pave way for the higher forces to work in the individual when it is enlightened. “In limits only it was powerful; / Acute to capture truth for outward use, / Its knowledge was the body's instrument;” (150) Mental consciousness uses knowledge and rationality for living and governing the vital and the physical. Without its control however, the vital may go astray and make lives chaotic. It is the mind that controls and bridles the senses and desires and passions, in itself it has the capacity to capture ideas and thoughts, organize and execute them.
Sri Aurobindo saw the physical, vital and mental planes of consciousness in terms of the static and the dynamic powers, the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti*. The description of the planes above are the *prakriti* aspect, the static or the *purusha* aspect lies behind and remains a witness to all that goes on. It remains a silent witness. The witness powers called the *purusha* behind the physical, vital, mental consciousness are *annamaya purusha, prānamaya purusha* and *manomaya purusha*. They are pure and unmixed and have a realization of the Divine within. Sri Aurobindo envisages that it is through yoga one can become aware of these *purusha* and take a step into realizing the Divine.

These three levels of consciousness are those on which most of the masses dwell. They are unaware of the subconscient below and the Superconscient above them. Like the regions of consciousness below human beings there are levels above too and like the subconscient plane the higher planes also influence the three planes described above. It is because of the influence of the higher planes that some finer strokes of brush or fine rhythm in poetry are formed. The higher philosophies of life come from these higher levels. Sri Aurobindo calls them the superconscient. It comprises of the Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition and Overmind. He explains his vision and experience about these levels in *Savitri*. These levels have a connection with his vision and aesthetics for he has elaborately discussed the influence of these planes in poetry and marked the lines by various poets who have received influences from them. These levels of consciousness form the basis of the Overhead aesthetic of Sri Aurobindo that will be dealt with in detail in another chapter.
Sri Aurobindo calls the Higher mind to be “a first plane of spiritual consciousness” (CWSA 27:20). This mind is just above the mental consciousness. It receives light from the spiritual planes in a better way than the mind and is therefore more luminous and less opaque. It still works on mind level with spiritually elevated consciousness. The tools used by the mind – intelligence and reason are heightened there and the knowledge is directly grasped under the spiritual light. The philosophies propounded with some inner Truth come from this level. Sri Aurobindo writes - “…but its special character, its activity of consciousness are dominated by Thought; it is a luminous thought-mind, a mind or spirit-born conceptual knowledge” (CWSA 22: 974). It is a thought which does not rest on reasoning. It has the spiritual element which enlightens the thought and its execution. It has certain sight not very clear as in the higher planes but it has a sight better than the mental plane. It is wider than the mind and exceeds the reason of the mind and intelligence. It is here that the domain of suprarational reason begins. Sri Aurobindo gives detailed description of the vision of this level of consciousness in Savitri, two lines describing the Higher mind are – “A cosmic Thought spread out its vastitude; / Its smallest parts are here philosophies” (659). It is comprehensive and vaster than the mental consciousness. Thinking belongs to the mind and the Higher mind beyond these levels there is not much thought but direct sight.

The level where the thought recedes and sight takes on is the level of the illumined mind. Sri Aurobindo writes that this is the region taken up by “spiritual light”. As the term ‘illumined’ suggests it is the zone of light but light of the spiritual nature; a light that enables to see clearly and widens the vision and perception. There is recurrence of the images rather than thoughts. It is at this level of consciousness that inspiration comes rushing down. The principle
of this level of consciousness is perception by sight and not by thought as it is for the Higher mind. It is illumined by the spiritual touch and perceives through spiritual vision. The knowledge by vision is far more concrete and true than the knowledge gained by thought. With this mind comes the widening of consciousness and the sense of objects turns into identity with them. It engulfs the heart with a constant joy:

A burning head of vision leads the mind,

Thought trails behind it its long comet tail;

The heart glows, an illuminate and seer,

And sense is kindled into identity. (CWSA 34: 659)

The next level of consciousness is that of Intuition. It is a level of consciousness where knowledge of things comes from identity with them. Sri Aurobindo writes – “Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from the concealed identity” (CWSA 22: 981). It is a luminous consciousness which is able to see the bare truth. It is a bright zone of light. Any word coming from this level is packed with the spiritual consciousness and has force behind it. By its direct vision it sees the Truth behind the thought and can see it thread-bare. Intuition here is a plane of consciousness and not merely the faculty of premonition as is commonly understood by the term. Premonition of the events happening later is a little awareness that an individual occasionally has, but this plane of consciousness receives its knowledge in the light of the higher levels. Sri Aurobindo’s vision of this plane is described in Savitri:
Thought there has revelation's sun-bright eyes;

The Word, a mighty and inspiring Voice,

Enters Truth's inmost cabin of privacy

And tears away the veil from God and life. (660)

Knowledge comes in flashes as revelation and it is from here that the poetic lines descend wrapped in form and content into the pen of the initiated poet. The lines describe the nature of intuition and the Word that descends from this level is packed with the truth force and when it is uttered it brings revelation and illumination to the readers. Intuition and above levels are responsible for the formation of incantatory poetry that has mantric powers.

Overmind level is the highest of the superconscient levels. This level of consciousness is universal consciousness. It brings in the universal joy, love and beauty. This is the plane where all the gods, goddesses and rishi reside. They see the world in its essence. In fact Sri Aurobindo says that each God creates his own world on this level. Rishi on this level is able to deliver mantras. Mantras are the words packed with creative force. There are very few who reach this level of consciousness. To reach to the Overmind level one has to go through all the lower levels of consciousness. It is quite difficult to station oneself on this consciousness. However, once stationed one can create mantras. This is the level on the edge of Supermind and the other planes of consciousness. Beyond this is the infinity whereas it is here that the sense of space and time begins. Everything exists here in the light of truth yet in their divisive state. The sense of One behind many is there, but the perception of the One as many comes only in the
next level of consciousness. The sense of individuality is lost here. An egoless cosmic being only remains. The cosmic consciousness prevails. In the lines from *Savitri* Overmind has been described thus –

The Powers that build the cosmos station take
In its house of infinite possibility;
Each god from there builds his nature's world; (660)

Sri Aurobindo describes Overmind as the delegate of the Supermind. It is the dividing line between the upper hemisphere (*parārdha*) and the lower one (*aparādha*). The former contains the mind, life and matter and the latter *Sat, Chit, Ananda* and Supermind. Overmind stands at the border of these two. He writes in *Savitri* that Overmind is “Time's buffer state bordering Eternity”. The temporal existence and perception starts only at this level of consciousness. It is a zone full of light and Sri Aurobindo envisions this plane of consciousness in “golden” colour.

Supermind is the level beyond the range of Mind, the superconscient. It is called truth-consciousness by Sri Aurobindo. It is a consciousness where perception becomes Supramental sense, Supramental Thought, truth-seeing and truth-hearing. The knowledge here is knowledge by identity. In this consciousness the sense of division ends. Although on the plane of manifestation division remains but its sense is not there. Everything becomes a part of the One supreme consciousness. This is the level where the sense of time and space ends and immortality exists.

A vast quiescence swallowing up all sound
Into a voicelessness of utter bliss;
Even Matter brought a close spiritual touch,

All thrilled with the immanence of one divine. (CWSA 34: 672)

The realm of the Supermind is all luminous. Darkness, obscurity, falsehood and ignorance have no place on this level of consciousness. The sense of time and timelessness both are present to this level of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes that it is difficult for the mental consciousness to conceive such two seemingly opposite states. However, it is the choice of this consciousness to alter its poise into any of these states. The perception of Time here is not a continuum of moments which are at once present and yet in a flux. The time perception here is that of *trikaladrishti*, of perception of past, present and future at a single moment. Sri Aurobindo writes – “It will therefore have knowledge of the three times, *trikāladrsti*, held of old to be a supreme sign of the seer and the Rishi, - not as an abnormal power, but as its normal way of time knowledge” (CWSA 23: 886). This is the Supramental Time-Vision which the poets had in the past through which they had the Vedic śruti (truth-hearing). They were capable of inner hearing and inner seeing that is a characteristic of the realms of consciousness pertaining to Overmind and Supermind. *Trikaladrishti* comes only on the Supermind not below this realm. These were the planes that Sri Aurobindo saw with his knowledge of three times. Only one who has transcended and experienced those levels can write about it so clearly. Sri Aurobindo’s basis of perception was *trikaladrishti* as he recorded in his record of yoga about the nature and the ways of this perception. *Record of Yoga* is a record of Sri Aurobindo’s yogic experiences primarily from 1909-1927.

Each plane of consciousness described above has a distinct characteristic. Sri Aurobindo specifies that there is nothing higher or lower. It is only that the manifestation of the
consciousness on each level differs. The higher consciousness here only refers to the wideness of expression. The inconscient keeps the Divine consciousness dormant and does not express it, whereas the mind expresses it in some measure, the Overmind in a fuller manner. Sri Aurobindo did not only describe these planes of consciousness in Savitri and other poems, he also said that visions come from these levels. It is not in the capacity of the researcher to find the visions that have come from these levels, therefore only the visions of the planes as described by Sri Aurobindo have been elucidated. Not only these concepts and planes of consciousness, he has also described the vision of God, Man and Nature in his poetry. In fact Sri Aurobindo experienced God with name and form and even as formless. In some of the sonnets like “Krishna” and “Shiva” he describes his realization of these gods. He describes their colour, their abode and properties they own. His realization of having their vision and the realization of becoming one with these gods are described in these sonnets. In “Krishna” he writes “I have seen the beauty of the immortal eyes, / And heard the passion of the lover’s flute” (CWSA 2: 608). He describes Sri Krishna with flute, and it is His love that draws Sri Aurobindo towards Him and he finally finds his life fulfilled by the identity with the Lord.

He describes Shiva’s abode the “white summit of eternity” and the eternal cosmic dance of Shiva which is responsible for creation. His vision of Kali in a temple near the river Narmada has been described in the sonnet “The Stone Goddess”. His vision and experience of the formless is described in the sonnet “The Self’s Infinity”. Sri Aurobindo writes that his being has become one with the infinite. His mind, body and heart all have realized its unity in the infinite. In the concluding lines he writes – “A momentless immensity pure and bare, / I stretch to an eternal everywhere”. (CWSA 2: 610). There are many such visions of the infinite, of the Spirit,
liberation and transformation. They may be grouped as his visions on the individual, universal and transcendental levels. “Krishna” and “Shiva” are the visions of the individual godheads. “The Silver Call”, “The Call of the Impossible”, “Cosmic Consciousness”, “The Indwelling Universal” are visions of the universal aspect of the Divine. He writes – “All eyes that look on me are my sole eyes; / The one heart that beats within all breasts is mine” (CWSA 2: 601). These lines express the identification of the poet with the God in every individual. He expresses the visions after complete identification with the Universal Being. Some of his poems expressing his visions of the transcendental are “The Unseen Infinite”, “Light”, “The Self’s Infinity”, “The Word of Silence”, “The Infinite Adventure”. His lines from “The Self’s Infinity” describe his oneness with the transcendental consciousness:

   I have become what before Time I was.

   A secret touch has quieted thought and sense:

   All things by the agent Mind created pass

   Into a void and mute magnificence. (CWSA 2: 610)

Sri Aurobindo has described “Man” in different sonnets. He envisions man or humanity as mediator, or a bundle of contrasts of, a transient being and as a thinking animal. The sonnets describing visions of Man are “Man the Thinking Animal”, “Man the Mediator”, “Man, the Despot of Contraries”. He has written extensively about Man (human Beings) in The Life Divine (CWSA 21-22) and The Synthesis of Yoga (CWSA 23-24). His yoga essentially focuses on the capacities and incapacies of the human beings, the need to transcend humanity and the form
and need for a new race which would come as a result of further evolution of consciousness. In the visions of the planes described above it is clear that there are many realms of consciousness above mind. Humanity represents mind and therefore it has go beyond mind and represent and embody higher levels of consciousness in future. In his sonnets he has seen Man or humanity as having contradictory qualities—“I harbour all the wisdom of the wise/ In my nature of stupendous Ignorance” (CWSA 2: 626). He further describes Man as having light within and one who is capable of going towards immortality, yet he succumbs to death. As a mediator Man’s mind serves as a link between the superconscient and the vital and physical planes. While standing on the base of Subconscient, Man is capable to rise higher in consciousness. Man as a thinking animal also gives the vision of humanity which is half human and half divine. Human beings have the basal qualities of animals yet their thinking capacity and the conscious capacity to evolve is befitting for the purpose of evolution. Sri Aurobindo writes—“Aspiring to godhead from insensible clay/ He travels slow-footed towards the eternal day” (CWSA 2: 593).

These are only the visions of God and Man. Sri Aurobindo has expressed his visions of science, and form and matter too in his sonnets. His visions were based on his experiences. It is through yoga that Sri Aurobindo ascended and discovered the planes of consciousness. He did not keep spirituality away from any activity. When he said “All life is yoga” he extended spirituality to every expression of human existence, society, poetry, art, politics, and day to day living. This principle that he firmly believed in is reflected in his poems. He wrote what he experienced and poetic expression is only one of the many dimensions of his life that is taken for study here. He wrote simultaneously for various disciplines of knowledge, psychology, philosophy, political thought and even answered the queries of many people. As yoga is not
divorced from life and, poetry is a part of the human expression, it also gets influenced by yoga. Sri Aurobindo deliberately experimented with his epic poem *Savitri* and merged life, yoga and poetry in it.

Most of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is an expression of his experiences in his spiritual journey. Some are experiments in forms and themes and even in translation. His commentaries on the Veda, Upanishad and Gita are the expressions of his intense experiences and realizations of the scriptures and they found expression as a series of essays, commenting and clarifying certain concepts for all to understand. His visions as expressed in his poetry are spiritual experiences and realizations that he has undergone. Vision is only a faculty however; it is the most essential characteristic of the poet, contends Sri Aurobindo. It is through his yoga that he developed the *trikaladrishhti*, the perception of past, present and future at once. It was not the limited vision belonging to the ordinary consciousness, but a vision attained through heightening of consciousness. These poetic visions have significance as they not only describe what Sri Aurobindo saw, but what he envisaged for the future of humanity for which he constantly labored, strived, experienced, experiment and expressed.

Sri Aurobindo says in *The Future Poetry* that “The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of the sight or be included in it, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech” (CWSA 26: 26). Vision or sight is of utmost significance for the creation of poetry. The function of the poet is to help the reader, live in the soul and the inner mind. The ordinary reader, who is mostly used to living in the outer mind and sense, must be first made to see by his soul. This will