enable him to have a deeper and clearer vision than the more limited sense and intelligence of the mind. A poet is essentially a seer and not someone who writes beautiful rhymes and rhapsody and thinks in lines and stanzas. He has the capacity to see beyond the surface mind and find the revealing word. This revealing word is not only effective but illuminating and inspiring and eventually compels “to see”. The aim of true poetry is to interpret the hidden realities that are concealed from the common sight. When the poet approaches in the right direction to bring about the truth of his vision, the revelation takes place. The intensity of the inner sight is evidently much stronger in the poet as he is able to awaken the readers to the inner sight as well. Sri Aurobindo points out that the greatest poets are those who have a “powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it” (CWSA 26: 32).

Chapter 3

Sri Aurobindo’s Spiritual “Experiences”, his “Experiments” and their Expression in Poetry and Poetics

“Visions come under the head of experience, unless they fix themselves and are accompanied by realization of which they are as it were the support.” (Sri Aurobindo, The Mother: 97)

“Yoga... proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience...” (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga 1:189)
“Vision” is a kind of experience and it may occur on different planes. As discussed in the previous chapter, visions are related to different objects and events. However, all experiences do not relate to vision necessarily. Vision is only one aspect; faculties of hearing, smelling, speech and touch may also contribute to the range of experiences one may have. Some experiences may not relate to any of the sensory organs; they may be metaphysical and meta-sensorial. Poets, saints and mystics have had varied experiences and some of these have documented them.

Nolini Kanta Gupta selected few mystics, poets and artists who had spiritual experiences and have exhibited deeper understanding of the spiritual life in their works. Goethe, Rabindranath Tagore and William Blake are known as a mystic poets, for they wrapped their spiritual experience into symbols and put them as mystic poetry. Blaise Pascal was a mathematician, a physicist and a philosopher whose life was very short yet his realization of God was very strong in him. Walter Hilton was a mystic of the fourteenth century and he wrote extensively on God and spirituality. He was highly influential in his times. Aldous Huxley, the philosopher too had certain spiritual realizations who not only expressed his experiences but, even collected sayings from various saints and mystics of the world. Nicholas Roerich was a painter with the “external make-up” of a Westerner and the spiritual temperament of the East. His paintings on Himalaya portray that he believed Himalayas to be the place of spiritual adventures and realization. The accounts of these mystics and saints facilitate to understand the range of spiritual and mystical experiences.

Sri Aurobindo was a seer-poet who wrote with his experience, realization and vision. He did not write anything that he did not experience or realize. His early poems which have some strains of the Romantic poets are not necessarily based on spiritual experiences. They may be seen as attempts to express the youthful passions in a sublime form and not as his spiritual experiences or realizations but expressions of his feelings and understanding. In common parlance this too can be taken as an expression of experience though not in the spiritual domain but in the ordinary way and are similar to
the poets who expressed their feelings in poetry. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry has many variations. His early poetry can be classified under the expressions of his feelings and passions. When he took to yoga he expressed his yogic experiences in poetry. His poetry may be grouped under his spiritual experiences of the form and the formless, the nirguna and the saguna and the transcendental aspects of the Divine.

In his formative years Sri Aurobindo read the classics in many of the European languages. There influence can be observed in his poetry although with a stamp of individuality. His lyrics have a Romantic strain and reflect the impact of Romantic poets like Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron etc. His poem – “Songs to Myrtilla” describe the shades and moods of nature; of night and day, of spring and autumn and of the youthfulness of the individual in relation to the elements of nature. K. D. Sethna, a poet-critic observes,

The ecstasy of insight which is the acme of metrical utterance and lays bare the very heart and meaning of the world in one shade or another can hardly be reached if a poet has not in his early life brooded with intent joy and devotion on rhythms and figures.... And who can deny either music or imaginative subtlety to Sri Aurobindo when in his Songs to Myrtilla, written largely in his late teens under the influence of a close contact with the Greek Muse, he gives us piece after finely-wrought piece of natural magic? (Sri Aurobindo the Poet: 2)

“Sweet is the night, sweet and cool/ As to the parched lips a running pool” (CWSA 2: 9) The nature described in this poem is akin to Wordsworth’s description of nature. The poem is written in rhyme and each stanza brings in a new shade of nature. This poem seems to be based on Sri Aurobindo’s understanding and perception of the seasons of England and yet has a universal appeal. The contrast between night and day and spring and autumn suggests the change in nature which is similar to the change in human life and the poet highlights the importance of the present moment – “Forget the
future, leave the past/ The little hour they life shall last” (CWSA 2: 11). This poem which is full of the images of the nature, is constantly compared or juxtaposed with the experiences of love, life, death, eternity and the like. ‘Sea’ and ‘river’ are recurring images in most of the poems like “Night by the Sea”, “The Lover’s Complaint” and “The Island Grave”. Few sonnets from the manuscripts published in the collected works seem to be love poetry. The sonnet – “I cannot equal” speak about the beauty of some person possibly of a woman who has mesmerized the poet – “One face in the wide world alone divine, / The only one that never can be mine” (177). Other sonnets “O face that I have loved”, “O letter dull and cold”, “My life is wasted”, “Because thy flame is spent”, “Thou didst mistake”, “Rose, I have loved” and the poem “Since I have seen your face” all speak about love, its nature, the incapability to reach out to the love and the beauty and the marvel of love. However, these poems are the effusions of a rich mind burdened by an adolescent sensibility; they are sensuous and impassioned, and there are brilliant evocations of sounds and colour” (Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History: 40)

The lines dedicated to the human beloved can be very well applied to the divine beloved. The urge for union and the sublimity of love raises the spirit of the theme to a level where there is no vulgarity and perversity. Love, though human, is seen in its pure form. The beauty in the beloved is adored not in order to seek pleasure but because she is beautiful. It is Sri Aurobindo’s own genius that he elevated the mundane love to a sublime level; and this sublimity sets his poetry aside even in the formative years of his life. Poems written at an early age reflect the urge to look beyond the appearance. The sonnets – “I have a doubt”, “To weep because a glorious sun”, and “What is this talk” have a longing to see beyond and find the divine, to see if there is divine, if He exists. It may be observed that there is a marked difference between the themes and their presentation during his stay in England and after his return to India in 1893. His poem “Envoi” (1890-92) documents this transition,

For in Sicilian olive-groves no more
Or seldom must my footprints now be seen,
Nor tread Athenian lanes, nor yet explore
Parnassus or thy voiceful shores, O Hippocrene.
Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow. (CWSA 2: 37)

In relation to this transition, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says,

No more would be [he] devote himself to Greek poetry as he had done during the past few years; no more would he exchange alexandrines and hexameters with the faded poets of ancient Greece and Rome; no more would he feel the heart-beats of European culture in their warmth and vivacity.” (Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History: 44)

When he came to India, he acquainted himself with the Indian literature in various ancient and modern Indian languages. However, still unaware of the yogic traditions he had spiritual experiences. In two of his letters he relates the experience of seeing Goddess Kali as “the living presence of Kali in a shrine on the banks of the Narmada” (CWSA 36: 110). He describes elsewhere – “Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what? – a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother” (Letters on Yoga I: 199)

Sri Aurobindo visited a temple on the bank of the river Narmada. He records his experience there as he saw and felt the living presence of Goddess Kali in the temple. When people visit temple
they admire and worship the deity and do not necessarily feel the presence behind the deity. Sri Aurobindo felt that concrete presence. He had the vision of the deity with a living aura, beyond the idol. With his penetrating power and receptive consciousness he saw the deity there. This experience of seeing a living presence in an idol was translated later into the poem — “The Stone Goddess”.

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, —
A living Presence deathless and divine,
A Form that harboured all infinity. (CWSA 2: 149)

His other poems “God” (1895-1908), “Krishna” (1939), “Shiva” (1939) are his realizations of the personal or the individual aspect of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo had the vision of Vasudeva (Sri Krishna) when he was imprisoned in Alipore jail during 1909-1910. He saw Him in every material object and human beings around. His realization was such that he did not see any criminal or murderer or judge, but only souls in everybody. He wrote a sonnet and a lyrical poem. One is called “Krishna” and the other with the same title bearing a subtitle ‘Cretics’ (1927-47). In the latter he writes “All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He; / Many limbs sate his whims, bear His sweet ecstasy” (CWSA 2: 637). His sonnet describes Sri Aurobindo’s complete identity with Sri Krishna. He also had the vision of Lord Shiva. In one of his letters he describes Krishna and Shiva which corroborates with his expression in poetry. He wrote,

Shiva is the Lord of Tapas. The power is the power of Tapas. Krishna as a godhead is the Lord of Ananda, Love and Bhakti; as an incarnation, he manifests the union of wisdom (Jnana) and works and leads the earth-evolution through this towards union with the Divine by Ananda, Love and Bhakti. (Letters on Yoga 1: 391)

His sonnet “Shiva” (1933) speaks about the abode of Shiva and his spouse Parvati and expresses the nature of austerities that the God is involved in. He sees him as a creator of the world whose dance is a
symbol of new creation. In another poem “Shiva” with the subtitle ‘The Inconscient Creator’ Sri Aurobindo describes Shiva’s abode in greater detail and describes his descent from the heavenly chambers into the snow-peaked mountains. His descent brought evolution from the inconscient; therefore he is called the Inconscient creator. These are the sonnets expressing Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual experiences, realizations and visions of the personal gods.

He also experienced the formless aspect of God, essentially as consciousness. In Baroda, the carriage in which Sri Aurobindo was travelling was about to meet with an accident. At that very instance a higher force intervened and the accident was averted. He realized that it was not a coincidence but the working of some force that saved him. “The Godhead” written on 13/09/1939 expresses this experience. It explains how the incident took place and how he saw “the vision of the Godhead surging from within” (CWSA 36: 110) saved him.

> Above my head a mighty head was seen,
> A face with the calm of immortality
> And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
> In the vast circle of its sovereignty. (CWSA 2: 607)

Other two sonnets which may be quoted for the experience of the formless are “The Indwelling Universal” and “Bliss of Identity”. The poet speaks about his experiences of the Divine within him, the formless which has descended in him and elevated his consciousness. In the latter he writes “Thy spirit’s infinite breath in me; / My life is a throb of Thy eternity” (CWSA 2: 601). In these sonnets Sri Aurobindo describes that all his being, his mind, his energies, even his body have become the channel of the Divine force and he throbs with the delight of becoming an instrument.
There are two aspects of God on the Universal plane – nirguna and saguna. Sri Aurobindo devotes a separate chapter “The Passive and the Active Brahman” in *The Synthesis of Yoga* to define, elaborate and differentiate between the two aspects. The nirguna Brahman is the Impersonal Divine whereas saguna is the personal. “Nirguna or Unqualified is not incapable of qualities, rather it is this very Nirguna or No-Quality who manifests Himself as Saguna, as Ananta-guna, infinite quality, since He contains all in His absolute capacity of boundlessly varied self-revelation.” (CWSA 23: 380) Through his yoga sadhana, Sri Aurobindo experienced both the passive as well as the active Brahman.

On his official tour to Kashmir Sri Aurobindo had “the realisation of the vacant Infinite while walking on the ridge of the Takht-i-[Suleman]” (CWSA 36: 110). This was the experience of the nirguna Brahman same as Shankaracharya experienced. The sonnet “Adwaita” written on 19/10/1939 is an expression of this experience.

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon

Where Shankaracharya’s tiny temple stands

..........................

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace

On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries. (CWSA 2: 621)

The saguna aspect of the divine is nameless but is full of qualities. “Who” and “Parambrahman” are examples of Sri Aurobindo’s expression of the qualities of the Divine who exists in different forms and names, who is the cause of all and yet beyond everything. God is one who is found in the smallest flower and in the luminous stars, “In the strength of a man, in the beauty of woman/ In the laugh of a boy, in the blush of a girl” (CWSA 2: 202). He is the light and the shadow, the love and the wrath, Krishna and Kali, in pleasure and pain, in moments and in eternity; is the time and the timeless, the lover and the beloved, darkness and light; he is present in all and yet is beyond, he is the cause of all and yet beyond all reasons, he is omnipresent and omnipotent. These are the attributes of the Divine that are
found in these two poems of Sri Aurobindo. They are presented in the Upanishadic strains and bring out various qualities through paradoxes and pairs.

On the universal plane his experiences were of that of the realization of cosmic consciousness and the experience of nirvana, of liberation and that of transformation. Sri Aurobindo grows one with the cosmic consciousness. This experience he expresses in “Cosmic Consciousness”. He explains that this consciousness is expansive and he has risen above the divisive consciousness that divides god and demon, joy and sorrow, and even separates the individual from another individual. All the nature, the wind and stars are his part. All paradoxes are resolved in him. He identifies with all the joys and sorrows of human beings. He is beyond time and space and yet identifies himself with animate and inanimate things of the universe. He writes – “I pass beyond Time and life on measureless wings, / Yet still am one with born and unborn things.” (603)

Sri Aurobindo wrote two poems under the title “Liberation”. The sonnet having lines – “I am the one Being’s sole immobile Bliss: / No one I am, I who am all that is” (604) seems to be the freedom into the cosmic consciousness. The poet describes that he has moved above the gymnastics of mind and reached into the realm where the soul does all the work. He has also risen above birth and death and from the petty ego of the being. His mind and body have become luminous with “endless light” flowing in him and he has realized his real self in the soul who is in everyone and yet beyond everything. “The Cosmic Spirit” has a similar content where Sri Aurobindo talks about his identity with every creature of the universe. His mind and life have enlarged to such a consciousness that all joys and sorrows, all the galaxies reside in him. His mind is silent and it is only the soul or the spirit that acts in him.

“Nirvana” is another poem which expresses Sri Aurobindo’s experience, which may be seen to be the experience of cosmic consciousness. He describes the meaning of Nirvana in one of his letters, “Nirvana is nothing but the peace and of the Spirit which can exist in itself, be there world or no world, world-
order or world-disorder” (Letters on Yoga 1: 53). In the poem he describes that he has lost the sense of “I” which binds human beings to ego and makes them petty. He has risen above the world of sense and thought and it is only the “Alone” or the spirit that he feels and realizes. He experiences a peace and silence in his beings and his being has attained the magnanimity of the Infinite breaking its finite bonds.

Transcendent is above universe, above manifestation. It is one of the unmanifest poises of the Divine. One of his two sonnets named “Liberation” too speaks about the transcendental experience. Sri Aurobindo experienced this and wrote about it in abundance in Savitri too. It is a domain of vast space, light and is beyond time. The poet says that he is able to experience this vastness as his consciousness has grown beyond the limitation of the body and mind. In Savitri he writes,

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)

Life in the transcendental consciousness is eternal as it is beyond the cycles of life and death, beyond joys and sorrows; it is pure existence, consciousness and bliss. It is not possible to describe this plane as it is beyond manifestation and all the mental gymnastics is inadequate to describe it.

Sri Aurobindo’s experience and vision gave way to poetry. His ceaseless experiments too lead to the creation of poetry. Savitri and his essays compiled in The Future Poetry (CWSA 26) are the result of his vision, experience and experiment in poetry and poetics. The ascension of consciousness and rewriting Savitri from those planes has been a part of Sri Aurobindo’s experience and experiment. He says in one of his letters,
I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower level, I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact, *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. (CWSA 27:272)

Sri Aurobindo did not necessarily rewrite or rework upon the sonnets and other poems as a part of experiment with consciousness but he did experiment with themes, forms and meters. In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo writes that yogic experiments are similar to that of the experiments that scientists perform in laboratory. They both are subjective in nature and proceed with an assumption, carried out in steps, proceeds with trial and error and sometimes bring out startling discoveries. While the scientist works on matter, a yogi works on the spiritual planes. The validity of the results on matter may be tested and verified by anyone and it is likely to yield the same results in the given circumstances. So is with yoga. One who pursues yoga may verify the experiences of any yogi or that of any yogic path if he/she fulfills the conditions. Sri Aurobindo did not only experiment in yoga, but also in poetry and poetics. His experiments facilitated him into a better expression of the same thing. For example the theme of love and death with which he experimented for more than forty years and culminated in *Savitri*. His sole aim behind all the experiments was perfect the expression of consciousness. It is noteworthy that experiment does not necessarily mean a series of failures leading to one success, even the first experiment and assumption could be a success. Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts show that he experimented and discarded what he did not find appropriate, but most of his thematic experiments were a chain of successive attempts, not necessarily failures. However, with every successive attempt he tried to perfect the form, theme and content along with the elevation of consciousness.
Sri Aurobindo chose themes from various cultures. Being well versed in the European and Indian cultures, he freely chose the themes and topics which suited his mode of expression. Themes in his poetry range from the love and passion of youth, love for nature, personal tributes, Vedic and Vedantic themes, science, expression of the infinite, evolution, even historical and political events and recreation of some of the Greek legends.

The theme of love and passion has already been dealt with above. They were significant as part of Sri Aurobindo’s experience as a youth. He experimented with this theme of love too. His poems written during the period of 1890-1900 show pure youthful passion of love. “The Lover’s Complaint”, “Love in Sorrow” and “Since I have seen your face” belong to this period. “The Lover’s Complaint” was written between 1890 and 1892. The theme of this poem is borrowed from the Greek myth of Nisa or Megara. K. D. Sethna remarks that this poem is “based ostensibly on Greek elegiac style, where the pan-piping lover, in the midst of his lament by the banks of the Arethuse for the cruel manner in which Nisa has forsaken him for Mopsus, longs for death” (Sri Aurobindo the Poet: 4),

O plaintive, murmuring reed, begin thy strain;

Unloose that heavenly tongue,

Interpreter divine of pain;

Utter thy voice, the sister of my song.

Thee in the silver waters growing,

Arcadian Pan, strange whispers blowing

Into thy delicate stops, did teach

A language lovelier than speech. (CWSA 2: 26)
Nisa is the wife of Heracles and is killed by him out of anger. In the poem the poet laments the death of Nisa and the loss of a beautiful and loving woman. The melancholy of the poet is reflected in the refrain “O plaintive murmuring reed, begin thy strain” (CWSA 2: 26). In the poem, the poet is a captive of the beauty of Nisa. He recollects her beauty and some events related to her, and concludes the poem with sorrow of having lost her. The description evokes the feeling of compassion and loss; the pang of separation is evident in the lines – “To Lethe let my footsteps go/ And wailing waters in the realms below/ Where happier song is none than moaning pain” (28). This poem describes the loss of love in a simple tone.

The poem “Love in Sorrow” is nostalgic in tone in which the poet recollects the time when he was alone without any companion. He addresses his friend and beloved and remembers that they came together because of their loneliness. He reminds the beloved of the time they spent together and the beauty of the nature that they admired. In the poem, the poet finds himself alone as the beloved is dead and he is alone again. The poet describes his parting moment thus – “We parted where the sacred spires arose / In silent power above the silent street” (30). This touching description of the memories of the beloved and the heart of the lover full of sorrow pervades throughout the poem and coveys the suffering and pain of the lover.

In the poem “Since I have seen your face” the poet voicing for the lover, praises the beloved and reveals that he is charmed by her beauty and love and is her willing captive. The lover finds his beloved’s presence in every beautiful flower and also in the sunlight. He addresses the beloved and reveals his motive to possess her. He also confesses that he tried to save himself from falling in love with her but he could not resist and now has completely surrendered to the charm of his beloved.

I have tried to save my soul alive from your snare,
I will strive no more; let it flutter and perish there.
I too will snare your body alive, O my dove,
And teach you all the torture and sweetness of love. (CWSA 2: 192)

The young alluring heart of the lover, their longing and remembrances of their beloved is simply expressed in these poems. The presence and description of human love is distinct. The poem is lucid and the appeal is to the joys, sorrows and beauty of love.

Sri Aurobindo’s further attempt to improvise upon the theme of love is exemplified in his poems “Immortal Love”, “O face that I have loved”, “O Letter dull and cold”, “Because thy flame is spent” and “Rose, I have loved”. Love is elevated in these poems to sublimity. It is no more the charm of the beloved’s physical beauty or the loss of the beloved that the lover laments for in the poems. The nature of love as portrayed in these poems is immortal and eternal. It is beyond the eternal appearances. “Immortal Love” describes love as immortal. The poet says that he does not love his beloved only for her external beauty but for what she is. His love will not perish as it is of an eternal nature. “O face that I have loved” address the haloed faced of the beloved and the charm which has captivated the lover. But the love is not of a mundane kind, the lover is not charmed, only to posses and fulfill his longing, but in the face of his beloved he has seen the eternal and it is his soul that rejoices to be in love. “My soul is by some magic curl surprised, / Some glances have my heart immortalized” (CWSA 2: 177). The beloved in these poems is described as having some godly features and traits. Her beauty is celestial and her charms are heavenly. The nature of love itself is sublime and makes the lover a worshiper of the beloved’s soul and not the body. These poems are a transition from the mundane love described in the earlier poems to the evolution of the love having an unearthly and celestial nature. With a close reading of the text the poem like “Immortal Love” and “Because thy flame is spent” and “I have a hundred lives” reveal that the beloved here is not necessarily woman in the human form. The beloved may be a goddess or some spirit that moves the poet and for which the poet longs and wants to unite with.
Nature in the form of birds, trees, rivers, oceans, brooks, flowers, mountains, colours and seasons, night and dawn, sun and moon all occur repeatedly in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. The poems having the imagery and description of nature has a connection with human nature and mood, or to some inspiration that the poet wants to bring out of nature. “Songs to Myrtilla”, “To the Sea”, “The Night at Sea”, “A Tree”, “Seasons”, “Nightingale”, “The Spring Child”, “Night by the Sea”, “The Island Grave”, “To the Cuckoo” and “Evening” are some of the poems in which Sri Aurobindo’s description of nature and the relation of human beings to that of nature are clearly discernable. Sri Aurobindo even addresses the nature as he addresses human being or himself in many of the poems.

Of Spring is her name for whose bud and blooming
We praise today the Giver, —
Of Spring, and its sweetness clings about her
For her face is Spring and Spring’s without her,
As loth to leave her. (CWSA 2:185)

This is the description of beauty of the spring season as well as the beauty and the vibrancy of the youth. The poet wishes that the spring may live long and the youthful and energetic days that bring happiness too should prolong. Other poems related to the image of sea, describe the vastness of the sea. The poet is fascinated by the expanse of the sea and expects life to be as magnanimous as the sea. In the poem “To the Sea”, Sri Aurobindo praises the depths of the sea and writes that the sea remains unperturbed even if a boat sinks in it. He feels that the sea is challenging him to delve deep within it and explore the depths. The poet says that he will take up the challenge as he wants to measure the depth of the sea and reach the bottom. In his letters Sri Aurobindo relates sea to consciousness. “The sea is a symbol of a plane of consciousness” (Letters on Yoga II: 975). The challenge that sea presents before Sri Aurobindo is not the act of diving into the sea with water but to explore the depth of consciousness. In
the poem, Sri Aurobindo says that he is ready to take the challenge; he will not only measure the depth of the sea but also his own capacity. He ends the poem with the line – “I come, O Sea, / To measure my enormous self with thee” (208). Nature usually has a symbolic meaning in the poems. “A Tree” presents the human aspiration to rise higher. The birds, nightingale and cuckoo sing eternally and delight the human beings with their soulful songs. Night and dawn have an alternating play of sorrows and joys experienced by the human beings. Fire too assumes the symbol of the guidance of the Divine or of that of the spiritual aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo wrote most of the above mentioned poems by 1909. When his yoga started, nature in his poetry got a denser and forceful symbol. In the poems “In the Moonlight” (1895-1980), “The Island Sun” (1939), The Blue Bird” (1935), “The Rose of God” (1934), “The Other Earths” (193-50), “Ocean Oneness” (1942), “The River” (1942) and “The Tiger and the Deer” (undated), nature becomes the vehicle of the spiritual consciousness. They are not only symbols but merge in the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo so much so that the expanse of his consciousness when expressed as the sea gives a grand picture. The juxtaposition and identification of the object and the symbol and the consciousness which it expresses are so perfect that it is difficult to separate the symbol and the object. In the poem “Ocean Oneness” Sri Aurobindo writes about the expanse of his consciousness with the imagery of the ocean –

Identified with silence and boundlessness

My spirit widens clasping the universe

Till all that seemed becomes the Real,

One in a mighty and single vastness. (CWSA 2: 573)

This oneness is with the transcendent consciousness where silence pervades and death, ignorance and sorrow are replaced by bliss, light and quietude. An evolution in the portrayal of nature is seen in Sri Aurobindo’s earlier poetry and the later ones. In the poems written at an early age nature is presented in its bare forms and the inspirations drawn from nature are imageries similar to those used by other
nature poets. However, poetry written in the later years presents various elements of nature as spiritual entities and the relation of nature with the poet’s consciousness becomes more intimate. “Thought the Paraclete” written on 31.12.1934 is one of those symbolic poems in which Sri Aurobindo has used the symbol of Paraclete to describe the nature of ‘thought’.

He depicts the mind as caught up into layer after layer of what is beyond, leaving behind in the consciousness here a superb calm unbounded by the brief and the finite, a sense of some ultimate Self without personal confines. The poetic expression is packed with symbols and visions straight from the spiritual planes. (Sethna, The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo: 92)

Sri Aurobindo wrote many sonnets on his experiences of the infinite. The poems “The Infinitesimal Infinite”, “The Infinite Adventure”, “The Self’s Infinity” and “The Unseen Infinite” all have the theme of Infinite. The experience of the infinite is that of vastness and timelessness. The Infinite as described in various poems is immeasurable. The poet repeatedly says that he has realized this Infinite, has seen it. He finds the universe around our solar system to be an infinitesimal dot in the infinite. This infinite is pure says the poet. In “The Self’s Infinity” he concludes with these lines – “A momentless immensity pure and bare, / I stretch to an eternal everywhere” (CWSA 2: 610).

The sonnets on science reveal the power and limitations of science. Sri Aurobindo believes that even an electron potentially is God. He describes electron as the vehicle of Shiva, which means that the supreme consciousness has got embedded in the small particle (electron) known to humanity today. He writes –

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.
The One devised innumerably to be;
His oneness in invisible forms he hides,
Time’s tiny temples to eternity. (CWSA 2: 600)
In the sonnet “Discoveries of Science” he describes the efforts made by humanity to discover the truth behind the physical existence of things. He observes that the discoveries of science are only fragments of the truth. Science is not able to discover the complete truth as it works with the material objects and according to Sri Aurobindo there are other planes of consciousness and the material objects are governed by other planes of consciousness too. He also contrasts science with the unknowable in the sonnet “Science and the Unknowable” in which he describes the working of science. He says that science sums up everything into a formula. It cannot see the force behind the material objects. He describes science “It is a brain and hand without a soul, / An eye that test the outward carved relief” (CWSA 2: 598) and cannot gauge at the indivisible, the unknown behind the objects. His surrealist poem “A Dream of Surreal Science” too describes the havoc that science might play. Sri Aurobindo’s epic Savitri too speaks of the limitations and uses of science with reference to God and the Infinite. The epic has used many scientific terms describing the poet’s knowledge about the scientific disciplines and his insight into it. Sri Aurobindo does not undermine the attempts of science to find the truth, but contends that an evolution in the nature of scientific inquiry is required in order to discover the truths. In one of his letters he wrote,

The facts of Science do not compel anyone to take any particular philosophical direction. They are now neutral and can even be used on one side or another though most scientists do not consider such a use as admissible. Nobody here ever said that the new discoveries of Physics supported the ideas of religion or churches; they merely contended that Science had lost its old materialistic dogmatism and moved away by a revolutionary change from its old moorings.

It is this change which I expected and prophesied in my poems in the first Ahana volume, “A Vision of Science” and “In the Moonlight”. (Letters on Yoga 1: 207)
According to him, science needs to discover the soul and not put everything into mechanical formulae. He did not find science to be an antagonist of the Spirit, but a part of it. Sri Aurobindo finds the union of the two as the future of humanity, for science is incomplete unless it reaches the knowledge of God which is the aim of religion too. He resolves this problem when he finds electron to be the chariot of Shiva. His vision of science gives science, a larger scope to explore the non-material levels of existence as he describes science to be an instrument of God and not against Him.

One of the most important themes that Sri Aurobindo experimented repeatedly in his long poems is the relation of love and death. Philosophies and poems have been written on the contrast between life and death. Death is always seen as opposed to life. No power has been able to save life from death and decay. Even the sages who took to austerities and managed to live for centuries had to give up their bodies as they would be worn out. Death and decay has been the rule of nature. Sri Aurobindo explored the theme and relation of life, love and death. He borrowed the concepts for three of his poems from three different legends of the Mahabharata. The legend of Urvasie and Pururavas; Pramadvara and Ruru; and Savitri and Satyavan. All the legends primarily deal with love, life and death. Regarding his experiments with the theme of love and death he wrote,

My conception being an ideal struggle between love and death, two things are needed to give it poetical form, an adequate picture of love and adequate image of Death. The love pictured must be on the ideal plane, and touch therefore the farthest limit of strength in each of its three directions. The sensual must be emphasised to give it firm root and basis, the emotional to impart to it life, the spiritual to prolong it into infinite permanence. And if at their limits of extension the three meet and harmonise, if they are not triple but triune, then is that love a perfect love and the picture of it a perfect picture. Such at least is the conception of the poem; (CWSA 36: 132).

This conception may be witness in his longer poems “Urvasie”, “Love and Death” (1899) and epic Savitri.
In “Urvasie” poem, the heavenly nymph (*apsara*) Urvasie marries King Pururavas and lives on earth. Urvasie could stay on earth only on one condition that is, Pururavas should never see her naked. However, he happens to see her one night accidentally when there is thundering and lightening. As the condition is overruled, Urvasie goes back to heaven. Pururavas becomes very sad and wishes to get her back. The heavenly beings tell him that it is not possible to send Urvasie to earth again, if he wishes to unite with her, should leave the earth and join her in heaven. Leaving earth is leaving earthly life. Pururavas accepts the condition and goes away from the earth to heaven. He sacrifices his kingly duties and even his life in order to fulfill his love.

Another long poem “Love and Death” has a similar theme. King Ruru and Princess Priyamvada are married and live happily. Priyumvada is bitten by a snake and dies. Ruru wants her back. Only if Ruru sacrifices half his life-span on earth can he reunite with his beloved wife. Ruru readily agrees for it. Ruru is a Brahmin, that is one who pursues knowledge. By sacrificing half his life-span he ignores his responsibilities towards the humanity. At a ripe age he would have been able to enlighten people with his knowledge. However, he ignores this and happily sacrifices half his life to regain Priyumvada.

These two legends reveal that love and life are very difficult to attain on earth. Life has to be sacrificed if love is to be fulfilled. In any case life succumbs to death. Sri Aurobindo was not satisfied with this theme. He pursued the theme in which life does not succumb to death and found only one legend in the *Mahabharata* that of Savitri and Satyavan where death succumbs. It is a story of conjugal love against death. In the legend, Satyavan dies and Death comes to take away the soul of Satyavan. Savitri, Satyavan’s wife follows Death to those unearthly realms where human beings cannot enter. Savitri is a woman with spiritual powers. She performs many austerities as she was aware of the calamity beforehand. With her strength she pursues Death and retrieves the soul of Satyavan.
Sri Aurobindo transformed this legend into a symbol where Savitri is the incarnation of Divine Love. It is Divine Love alone that can save life on earth and bring immortality. The epic Savitri describes Love’s victory over Death. Death is not killed or conquered but is transformed into Light. Death is personified in the epic and he gets dissolved and merges into the Divine. Sri Aurobindo’s search for the theme where Love conquers Death finds its culmination in Savitri. Savitri is not only Sri Aurobindo’s experimentation in theme but also in consciousness. It has been described earlier that Sri Aurobindo took the writing of this epic to see if the ascension of consciousness affects the level of poetry too. Therefore, it is an exemplification of experiments in various aspects.

In Sri Aurobindo’s long poems and plays, women have been central figures. Long poems “Chitrangada”, “Ulopie”, epic Savitri, and his plays – “Perseus the Deliverer”, “Rodogune” and “Eric”, women play important roles. In the poems they are portrayed as dynamic and powerful and have the power to rule and command not only their spouse but also death as in his epic Savitri. Sri Aurobindo believed in Shakti, the dynamic power that governs the world. In these plays and poems women assume a dynamic role. Though in the plays the women are supported or pursued by men to aid or rescue them, but they emerge as heroines, as warriors in Sri Aurobindo’s poems. They are not timid and weak but endowed with feminine as well masculine traits. Women are tender, yet the decision makers of the family. In the epic, Savitri stands firm on her decision to marry Satyavan even after she learns about the doom that would befall her. Her spiritual strength guides her; she takes up the challenge and emerges victorious. The lines describing her strength of will regarding taking a decision is described in Savitri thus–

Once my heart chose and chooses not again.

The word I have spoken can never be erased,

It is written in the record book of God. (CWSA 2: 432)
Evolution of consciousness was central to Sri Aurobindo’s experiments. He wrote two sonnets with the name “Evolution”. The poems describe the process of evolution from matter to life and to mind. He does not see human being (man/woman) to be the last stage in evolution and believes that humanity will be superseded by an evolved race. He describes the stages of evolution elaborately in *Savitri*. The epic traces the creation of this world in the form of involution. Sri Aurobindo says that it was the Spirit which descended into the world in an orderly way and finally hid itself into the Inconscient. The inconscient has hidden the Spirit in it. In the course of evolution slowly each level on which the involution took place, evolution began in the reverse order. Therefore, matter was born out of the Inconscient; further came life and mind. Each state expressed the Spirit in its multiplicity. As there are realms of consciousness above mind through which involution took place, therefore, evolution too would proceed further and unfold further realms. In the epic, evolution is shown by the efforts made by Ashwapati and Savitri. The first half of the epic describes Ashwapati’s efforts to ascend the stairs of consciousness and call for the Divine Mother to descend on earth. The second part of the epic mostly concentrates on Savitri’s act of ascent, transformation of Death and the consequent descent of higher consciousness with her. *Savitri* has been an experiment in different themes and dimensions of the elevation of consciousness and its relation to writing poetry, the process of human evolution, the theme of Love conquering Death, and the power of women.

Apart from them there are many other themes which can be systematically distilled from the epic. Evolution was not dealt only as a theme. Sri Aurobindo believed that, “Poetry like everything else in man [human being] evolves.” (CWSA 26: 205) No aspect and expression of life remains untouched when there is an evolution of consciousness. He envisions that poetry would evolve in future. It is about this vision that he has written in a number of essays, which are collected in the volume entitled *The Future Poetry*. His letters in *Savitri* and *The Future Poetry* describe the past, present and future of poetry and poetics. His writings in the political and social disciplines describe his vision of the evolved society.
Evolution of consciousness being the basic principle of Sri Aurobindo’s writings, finds its application and
description in all his writings. In all his works he traces the evolution of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo did not necessarily experiment to prove any hypothesis. His experiments are a
constant search for a perfect expression and a means to elevate the theme from the mundane level of
consciousness to a sublime one. His poems on love, nature, science, and even love and death show this
gradual progression of the ordinary feelings and emotions to an elevated feeling, leading to the
realization of Divine. Sri Aurobindo says that he constantly searched for perfection of form, content and
consciousness in poetry. Only when he found it, he would be content. Therefore, Savitri is not same as
“Love and Death”, in its handling of the theme, form and content and the embodiment of its
consciousness. Savitri has an Overmind influence as Sri Aurobindo describes in one of his letters,
whereas he did not write this about “Love and Death” or “Urvasie”. Along with the thematic
experiments Sri Aurobindo experimented with translations too. He evolved his own techniques of
translation and described those in his commentaries on Veda, Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata,
Kalidasa’s works and other translations from different languages.

With the growth of technology knowledge has become widespread. Texts across cultures are
easily available to the remote areas at least through the books, journals and internet. This opened the
scope for wider studies in various fields like – cultural studies, post-colonial studies, translation studies,
international relations, impact of globalization and commercialization and the like. Translation study is
one such field which has found its application and importance in various fields especially in literature.
Scholars debate and discuss on ways, needs, functions, purposes and elements of a good translation.
Translation is not necessarily a literal translation in literature as in the case of technical field. It is
possible to translate the technical terms and find equivalent registers in two different language systems.
It is quite difficult to translate a literary text because it carries cultural, historical and emotional
dynamics behind it. Therefore, the work of translation can be called as work in translating cultures especially when the cultures are as distinct as that of India and Europe or Africa and America. Translation study aims to address many questions such as – cultural translatability, finding word equivalents, rendering of emotions, finding the turn of language, finding the right meter in case of poetic translation, evoking the same sensibility as the original, the question of fidelity, truth and beauty of translation, the closeness of the original and the translated work, and catching the subtleties which lie in the original.

It is a common agreement among scholars that a translation is secondary and the original can never be equaled by any translation. Till the emergence of the post-colonial theory, translation was taken to be a secondary activity, a less creative one. However, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi in the *Post-Colonial Translation* refute this point and give equal importance to translation. Apart from enriching the target language, translation from Indian and African languages to English is a way to say that “the Empire can translate back” (10).

Sri Aurobindo addressed all the questions mentioned above and exemplified them through his translations of works of Kalidasa, Homer, Valmiki, Vyasa, Veda, Upanishad and *Gita* and from various Indian and non-Indian languages. However, his theory of translation can essentially be taken from his essay “On Translating Kalidasa” and from his letters on translation. For, in all other texts his focus was to interpret and comment on the essential elements of the text rather than translate them.

Sri Aurobindo did not set any rigid parameters for translation. He took into consideration the different levels on which translation could be done and made use of all of them. His spiritual experiences corroborated with that of the Vedas and Upanishads. While commenting on them he took into account the literal meaning, the implied meaning, the pragmatic meaning, the context, the utility and the spirit of what was being conveyed in the text. Similarly, while translating too, he conscientiously
used different techniques and modes. He gives various examples of his translations of Kalidasa’s texts and shows how he made use of different techniques.

Sri Aurobindo observes that translations, especially “poetical translation” was taken to be word translation. He calls this view “superstitious” and remarks that the spirit behind the word was always the governing factor which was required to be translated. “…there is a spirit behind the word & dominating the word which eludes the “faithful” translator and that it is more important to get at the spirit of a poet than his exact sense.” (CWSA 1: 239). His efforts were directed towards understanding the spirit of the poem and he made all efforts to deliver the same spirit in translation.

He highlights the importance of what and how to choose to translate. The translator is expected to have a good discerning power to choose the right elements, key concepts and ideas which may be highlighted in the translation. While translating Kalidasa’s works, Sri Aurobindo admits that he had this in view. He strongly believed that poetry and even prose comes wrapped in a wholesome unit of form, sense and spirit. The spirit of poetry descends clothed in words and sound pattern which the poet has to transcribe. Similarly even the translator has to receive the form and the spirit of the text and translate it under the heat of inspiration. It is in this process of reception that translation too becomes a creative process. Therefore, today most of the scholars emphasize that translation is a creative process and not a mere pastime. In fact more than translation, the term “trans-creation” is in vogue. However, this trans-creation takes place on different levels. Sri Aurobindo describes these levels in great detail with reference to meter which is equally applicable to all that is not always related to metrical translations. He draws a parallel between the compositions of individual being to the meter. His metaphysical view of man consists of three outer members and two inner members in an individual. These are physical, vital, mental and psychic and spiritual beings respectively. Similarly the perception of meter too follows the same curve from physical to spiritual. His scheme of metrical pattern runs on six levels- mechanical, sensational, emotional, intellectual, ecstatic and spiritual.
Riti and alamkāra as described in the introduction refer to the physical or mechanical structure, to the body of poetry. This being the outermost element appeals to the ear and the sensational element comes into play. A little higher to this is the emotional element where the sthāyi bhava is invoked and the rasa is generated. Further higher, is the intellectual appeal of the meter where it suggests meaning to the intellect; meaning is gathered by drawing inferences or finding the implied (anumiti) or the suggested meanings (dhvani) in a text. Along with the technical and subtle aspects like riti and dhvani, the higher and the sublime aspects like ecstasy and spirituality are also important in a text. Rather it is the spirit which determines the distinctiveness of the poet, which marks the difference between the works of two poets. Regarding the spirit of the poet, a scholar and translator of Sri Aurobindo’s writings, Richard Hartz remarks, “the great poet may or may not be an overtly spiritual man, but behind him, if we accept the Indian concept of the Vibhuti, is a universal power of the Divine whose instrument he is for manifesting some potentiality of the Infinite needed for the fullness of the human evolution.” (Mother India: June 2004: 489).

The six levels mentioned above move from being tangible to being more and more intangible. The more it becomes intangible the more it is required by the translator to dive into the depths of the work and find the spirit of the poet and render the essential spiritual content in the translation. Certainly, he has to go through all the levels to find the spirit and integrate the whole with the thread of the spirit found. It depends entirely on the initiation of the translator as to how far he/she is able to delve deep into the spirit of a given text and identify his/her own spiritual condition – “to create the same spiritual, emotional & aesthetic effect as the original, the first condition is obviously to identify our spiritual condition, as far as may be, with that of the poet at the time when he wrote & then to embody the emotion in verse.” (CWSA 1: 243)

One of the significant problems before the translator is to choose the meter while translating a poem. There is an instinct to use the metrical patterns of the original into translation. However, Sri
Aurobindo remarks that this attempt is not always successful because the turn of one language suited to a particular meter would not suit another language. He gives examples,

The hexameter in English, however skillfully managed, has not the same value as the Homeric, the English alexandrine does not render the French; terza rima in Latinised Saxon sounds entirely different from the noble movement of the Divina Commedia, the stiff German blank verse of Goethe & Schiller is not the golden Shakesppearian harmony. (CWSA 1: 244)

It is not only the accentual or quantitative quality of meter in the source language which makes it effective, but the clothing of the spirit of the language into the particular meter that makes for the complete impact of the poetry. He explains – “the same arrangement of quantities or of accents has very seldom the same spiritual & emotional value in two different languages.” (CWSA 1: 244). The translation of meter directly from the original to the new language which poses such a problem in translation of poetry is solved by Sri Aurobindo. He gives a possible solution to this – “The translator’s only resource is to steep himself in the original, quelling that in him which conflicts with its spirit, and remain on the watch for the proper metrical mood in himself” (CWSA 1: 245).

Keeping this in view Sri Aurobindo translated Kalidasa’s plays in blank verse. The Sanskrit plays have varied meters altering with the moods, however, he thinks that the variation in meter corresponding to the variation in the original would make an opera in English. Therefore, he chose blank verse “varying its pitch”. While translating Meghadutam however, he found terza rima to be the most suitable meter. He did not device it rather he says it came automatically as he took to translation. Reasoning his efforts, Sri Aurobindo explains that Meghadutam is written in a uniform meter which is quite natural to Sanskrit, but such a uniformity of meter would be monotonous in English and so terza rima which is more flexible comes at hand. In a similar manner while translating “poetical epigrams” of Bhartrihari, he chooses a freer rendering in English rather than “the severity and compact massiveness
of Sanskrit” (CWSA 5: 374) He took liberties to rhyme where it was not found in the Sanskrit to give an impact of the original. Sri Aurobindo thus does not set a rigid rule to translate text. In fact he emphatically says that the rules are made for the convenience of the translator and should be followed as long as they help in effective translation, however, the translator is expected to follow his/her own originality and receptivity in translating the work.

Sri Aurobindo deals with the problem of fidelity in detail and observes three purposes of translation. If the purpose of translation is to acquaint the target language readers with the idea of the text, as an idiom conveys, the infidelity may be tolerated. Paraphrasing which is not a translation in the real sense, is also permissible, as the purpose of translation then is to express the latent emotions of the text. However, if the purpose of translation is to trans-create in its wholesomeness then no such liberties are permissible. The purpose of translation according to Sri Aurobindo is –

The translator seeks first to place the mind of the reader in the same spiritual atmosphere as the original; he seeks next to produce in him the same emotions & the same kind of poetical delight and aesthetic gratification, and lastly he seeks to convey to him the thought of the poet & substance in such words as will create, as far as may be, the same or a similar train of associations, the same pictures or the same sensuous impressions. (CWSA 1:250)

Taking examples from his own translations of Kalidasa’s works Sri Aurobindo deliberates upon the extent to which words, images and ideas may be translated. It is often seen that owing to the lack of equivalent word in the target language the translator is forced to retain the original word in the translation too. This becomes a jargon for the uninitiated and poses difficulty to the target language reader. Sri Aurobindo takes liberties to transliterate the names of some trees, flowers, birds and mythological names “when they do not look hopelessly outlandish” however he cautions that “too
liberal use of it would entirely destroy the ideal of translation” (CWSA 1: 252). He quotes – śyāmabhando
baliniyamanābhhyudayatasyena visṭṣoḥ translated by him as -

“Dark like the cloudy foot of highest God
When starting from the dwarfshape world-immense
With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.”

To the Indian readers acquainted with the legend of Bali and Vishnu a direct reference of these figures in translation would pose no problem, but those unacquainted with Indian mythology or even the story would find it rather out of place to relate to such names. Therefore Sri Aurobindo translated Vishnu as “highest God” and Bali as “Titan”. Lord Vishnu taking a dwarf incarnation and measuring the Earth and Heaven with his two feet “quelling” Bali with the third measure is briefly narrated in the translation. This now makes sense to the English reader as the legend is explained. A single line in Sanskrit translated into three lines in English looks like a paraphrase. Sri Aurobindo refutes this and says that the target of translation is to convey the “exact image, associations & poetical beauty & flavor of the original” (CWSA 1: 254). By elaborating upon the legend in translation it has become comprehensible to the English readers and therefore the translation does not lose its validity.

Another freedom that he avails is adding the required image to the original. He uses the image “seen in sleep” to convey “the impression of night & dim reality” (CWSA 1: 255) this image does not figure in the original but to translate the mood which in Sanskrit is conveyed but the usage of appropriate sound expressions needs the inclusion of suggesting image in English.

There is also the scope to discard and deviate from the original image. He uses “widowed bird” to convey the loneliness of Chocrovaque, the bird separated from his comrade. “Widowed bird” conveys the sorrow, the pathos of the bird and so it saves the separate articulation of the sorrow. This slight
deviation “translates the idea & the emotion while suggesting a slightly different but related image” (CWSA 1: 257).

These were the various means by which Sri Aurobindo experimented to translate Kalidasa’s works. However, he knew always that –

In poetry it is not the verbal substance that we seek from the report or rendering of foreign masterpieces; we desire rather the spiritual substance, the soul of the poet & the soul of his poetry. We cannot hear the sounds & rhythms loved & admired by his countrymen and contemporaries; but we ask for as many as we can recover of the responses & echo which that ancient music set vibrating in the heavens of their thought. (CWSA 5: 357)

He translated the Vedic and the Upanishadic texts in the similar way. In *The Hymns to Mystic Fire* he says, “I have not always used the same phrase though always keeping the same sense, but varied the translation according to the needs of the passage.” (20)

His primary aim in translating them was to dig into the “spiritual substance” and “the soul of poetry”. Regarding the Vedas he marks that they do not only instruct the sacrificial ceremony but, has a psychological and spiritual purport behind them. Sri Aurobindo studied the symbols carefully and his discoveries of the symbols and the subsequent spiritual experience confirmed his experiences that he had before reading the Vedas. The symbols in the Vedas are taken from the common life. Everything mentioned there is present in the nature and as a common understanding; it is in the material gain which the sacrificial ceremonies help. However, with his insight Sri Aurobindo discerned that the material gains form only the outer feature of the Veda and is relevant only to those who are not initiated into the spiritual way of life. The spiritual symbols of most of the material objects are described by Sri Aurobindo in *The Secret of the Veda*. He translated a considerable number of hymns from the Rig Veda. His translations of many Upanishads are also based on the spiritual significance of each story and
symbol. His translations of the Vedas and Upanishads are in prose. They are essential poetic prose. In his own words,

This is a literary and not a strictly literal translation. But a fidelity to the meaning, the sense of the words and the structure of the thought, has been preserved: in fact the method has been to start with a bare and scrupulously exact rendering of the actual language and adhere to that as the basis of the interpretation; for it is only so that we can find out the actual thoughts of these ancient mystics. But any rendering of such great poetry as the hymns of the Rig-veda, magnificent in their colouring and images, noble and beautiful in rhythm, perfect in their diction, must, if it is not to be a merely dead scholastic work, bring at least a faint echo of their poetic force, more cannot be done in a prose translation and in so different a language. (Hymns: 19)

Sri Aurobindo used some of these translations as seed thoughts and developed the essays which are collected as *The Life Divine*. His translations are not only useful to the English readers but even to understand the seed and the essential idea of each of the essays in his philosophical treatise.

He also translated texts from Tamil, Bengali, Latin and Greek and some other Indian languages into the English language. He also wrote commentaries on the style, or content or the author whose works he translated. They do not contribute much to the understanding of his theory of translation, but show his mastery over many Indian and Western languages.

Sri Aurobindo’s experiments are not limited to the experiments in theme and translations. He also made an attempt to see how the form might be evolved in order to suit the growth of consciousness. He had studied prosody and had mastered the technicalities of form and style. A perfect poetry according to him will have the content clothed in perfect form. It will embody the consciousness perfectly. In *The Future Poetry* he writes “Poetry rather determines its own form; the form is not
imposed on it by any law mechanical or eternal to it” (13). Sri Aurobindo followed this and wrote poetry in various forms. Though he deliberately chose to write an epic poem or sonnet, but the style of the epic or the sonnet was determined by the flow of poetry itself. All the realizations have been expressed in sonnets. But he wrote in both styles of sonnets – the Shakespearean having three quatrains and a couplet and the Miltonic with one octet and one sestet. He followed what the experience and the vision commanded. Where there were more things to be compressed in few lines he wrote in the Shakespearean style, and when there had to be a sustained description of one particular experience he wrote in the Miltonic style.

The sonnet “The Body” has three quatrains each describing an idea slightly different from the previous one, yet well connected and the couplet giving the final realization. In the first quatrain the poet describes that his body was limited with its limited consciousness and he nurtured it as his universe. When he realized the cosmic consciousness the body became only a small vehicle that carries the soul and nothing more in itself. The soul, supported by this small chariot is large and moves in the large spaces of the universe. In the second quatrain he admits that the body is too small and fragile to carry out the magnanimous task of the soul, but it has its own purpose in evolution and so it has been kept alive by the soul. The third quatrain describes the vision of the infinite before the body. It can see the “endless Time and Space” and the beautiful world beyond mind. Its heart is full of joy with this realization and its mind constantly thinks about the beautiful and distant things. The couplet gives the final statement of the poet in the admiration of the body – “How grown with all the world conterminous/ Is the little dweller in this narrow house” (CWSA 2: 617). The body with its limitations has widened in its consciousness and can support the “giant” soul.

In the sonnet “Form” the poet describes the significance of form in the first eight lines. This poem has a philosophical tone. It addresses to those who reject the form or material existence in pursuit
of the Infinite and the Formless. Sri Aurobindo says that the Infinite dwells as finite in the form and that each microcosm inhabits infinite in it. The mystery of the Infinite is hidden in the form which is slowly revealed with time. In the sestet the poet describes that it is the form that manifests the mysteries and the beauty of God. The flowers, the marvels of nature are but the expression of the Infinite in finite. The form expresses the One in its multiple forms and it is the form which is the base of further evolution.

These two sonnets exemplify that to express different experiences Sri Aurobindo chose different forms of sonnets. He believes that the lyrical form of poetry is the future of poetry. It is in the lyrical strain that the poet may best express. Sonnets written before Sri Aurobindo have dense thought content in them. Shakespeare described the beauty and charm of the Black woman and the fair boy in his sonnets. They express the life plane of consciousness. Milton’s sonnets appeal to the ideas. His sonnets speak of some thought which he tries to convey through poetry. Sri Aurobindo’s sonnets always speak of his inner or spiritual experiences. “It is therefore a transition from the lyricism of life weighted by the stresses of thought to the lyricism of the inmost spirit which uses but is beyond thought” (CWSA 26: 280). Sri Aurobindo envisaged the lyrical poetry expressing the soul, as the next form that poetry may evolve into. He wrote about this in his essays between 1916 and 1920. Most of his sonnets belong to a period later than the essays. His sonnets may be seen as an exemplification of what he envisaged.

K.D. Sethna counts almost 5000 lines in the volume of collected poems of Sri Aurobindo in blank verse; to add to this count is his epic Savitri with more than 23,000 lines. Many of Sri Aurobindo’s translations too are in blank verse. Blank verse is qualified by its musical quality. K. D. Sethna refers to this with reference to Sri Aurobindo’s blank verse. He writes –

In poetry, music does not stand just for one particular arrangement and movement of speech – a simple dance or a rich swirl, a slow gravity or a swift puissance. It can be anything and it is born fundamentally of kindled emotion and vision setting language
astir and aglow so that words and phrases become intense and harmonious in a vital suggestive way and fall into suitable metrical patterns that ring significant changes on a recurrent base. In short, it is inspiration adequately expressing itself. (The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo: 7)

These lines describe that it is not the rhyme, assonance and alliteration that gives music to poetry. Music lies in the arrangement of words and the flow and the lucidity of thought, vision and consciousness. The reader has to read the inner music of the sounds and the consciousness. Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively in blank verse. He did write much poetry in rhymes and couplets too, but it is the blank verse which forms the bulk of his attempts. “Urvasie”, “Love and Death” “Baji Prabhou”, “Illion”, “Chitrangada”, “Ulopie”, all the plays and Savitri all are in blank verse unlike “Ahana” which is written in couplets. “Illion” is also his experiment in hexameter, but it is written in blank verse. Savitri, the epic is written in blank verse unlike the previous attempts of writing epics in English by Spencer, Milton and Keats which have been in rhyme. The inner music in these poems saves it from becoming prosaic. Even his plays are poetic and it gains the force and the flow from the music of the blank verse. The lines from Savitri with which the epic begins amply exemplifies what follows in the rest of the epic form.

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

Across the path of the divine Event

The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone

In her unlit temple of eternity,

Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge. (1)

A smooth reading of these lines would reveal the musical quality inherent in it. The continuity of the idea and the flow of words give it resonance and impact of music. It certainly needs a trained ear to
listen to the symphonies of the blank verse. The bulk of blank verse is Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to the literature in English as he not only added to the literary wealth but also exemplified how to write in this form. Blank verse was becoming obsolete when he wrote in it. He renewed it and elevated it by expressing not only the mundane but also that sublime in this form.

The above mentioned poems in blank verse are written in the epic style. “Urvasie”, “Illion” and Savitri have been developed in books and cantos. “Urvasie” has four cantos; “Illion” is written in eleven books and Savitri is a complete epic of twelve books. Epic was not the fashion of the day. When Sri Aurobindo wrote poetry, prose was preferred. Even in poetry epic was not the form preferred by the poets. He marks that there was a declining tendency amongst poets about epic poetry.

It is sometimes asserted that the epic is solely proper to primitive ages when the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity, the literary epic an artificial prolongation by an intellectual age and a genuine epic poetry no longer possible now or in the future. This is to mistake form and circumstance for the central reality. (CWSA 26: 286)

Therefore, it was becoming extinct. Sri Aurobindo renewed the interest in epics and wrote the journey of soul in Savitri on the epic scale. Savitri is the longest epic poetry in English language with over 23,000 lines. He notes that epics in the past mostly expressed the outer human action. Homer’s epics have men in war and voyaging. They are chivalrous and indulge into warfare. Milton’s epics have the play of intellectual forces in the form of Satan and God. Sri Aurobindo says that epics also have to evolve to delineate the inner life of the characters, with the outer description only used to enhance or support the inner. In Sri Aurobindo’s words,

The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action: the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggle of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great Indian poems, the
pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us are as fit themes as primitive war and adventure for the imagination of the epic creator.

(CWSA 26: 286)

It was mostly the external action with which the epics have remained concerned. The struggle of good and evil is shown by the outward actions of the characters in the epic. It is in the defeat and destruction of Ravana, Kauravas and Troy that the victory of good lies. Sri Aurobindo observes that the world has changed since the time these epics were written; the wars are more on the mental level and the fight between good and evil is more psychological than physical. The struggle between good and evil has not changed, but epics have to change the mode of expression in order to make it a psychological and spiritual battle.

The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe. (CWSA 26: 286)

*Savitri* is an example of the epic with very little action and more of a spiritual combat between the godly and the evil forces. There are no wars in *Savitri*. The journey undertaken by Ashwapati and Savitri are on the planes of consciousness; they do not show any external action. Apart from Savitri’s journey into the forest to find a match for her and her return to Satyavan’s hermitage after receiving the consent from her father are a few major external events described in the epic. Ashwapati’s journey into the Subconscient and the Superconscient planes of consciousness is his inner journey, the journey taken by his soul. Savitri too follows death which is also a journey of the soul. Her body remains stationed in all
these events. *Savitri* fulfills the conditions laid by the poet in his critical treatise. It is the journey and the flight to the highest realms of consciousness and visions of the humanity.

Sri Aurobindo has to his credit the introduction of hexameter into English Poetry. Before him the poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Philip Sidney, Gabriel Harvey have attempted it. But Sri Aurobindo observes that the previous attempts at introducing quantitative meter in English have been a failure because it was a forced attempt to stretch the meter into six feet. English language does not have the turn like the European classical languages to allow such a length. Sri Aurobindo labored for the same. His “Illion” and “Ahana” written on the scale of classical meters are the fruits of his efforts. He generated the possibility by himself exemplifying poetry in hexameter. Indeed it is to be noted that he did not attempt this till he thought that the new spirit can take over and bring the new form. Once the spirit was ready, he simply moulded it into hexameter. In his essay “On Quantitative Metre” he deals on the essential nature of English poetry and the reasons of the past failures. Poets in the past have been quite fascinated by the Greek and Latin meters. By nature these languages depend on the length of sound than the stress on the syllable. Quantity in the words of K.D. Sethna is “is the time taken by the voice to pronounce the vowel on which a syllable is supported” (*Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*: 30). He further explains how the Greek and the Latin poetry is read – “A Greek or Latin line is never read primarily with an attention to accents: in it the voice has to spread out more evenly, giving each syllable the full sound-value demanded by the inflected character of the language.” (32) This is the fundamental difference between the English language and the classical languages. One is accentual and the other quantitative. The poetry rendered in English has usually been based on accent and is read with jumps and leaps, gliding and sliding over one or the other syllable. It moves on the scheme of stressed and unstressed syllables and the length comes to it depending on the stress. Sri Aurobindo quotes example from Harvey’s hexameter to show how a forced meters sounds -

Fame with a|bundance maketh a | man thrice | blessed and | happy.| (CWSA 26: 332)
Here, ‘and’ has been used as a short sound, whereas Sri Aurobindo remarks that by the rule of the classical meter it should have been used as long one. The poets of the past have used their eyes and mind to construct hexameter. They use accents in English and create hexameter on the same principal sometimes blending it with quantitative length. Now, he says, that along with eyes and the mind, the ear too has to be brought to judge the nature of poetry. It is the ear which can decide upon its true quantity. “If we are to get a true theory of quantity, the ear must find it; it cannot be determined by mental fictions or by reading with the eye: the ear too in listening must exercise its own uninfluenced pure hearing if it is not to go astray.” (CWSA 26: 332) He introduced the quantitative meter in English in order to enlarge the scope of expression in English language. The other forms will continue to express through their medium, but other ways of expression may also evolve. Sri Aurobindo has written poems like - “Illion”, “Ahana”, “The Tiger and the Deer” , “The Lost Boat” etc in quantitative hexameter. There are many which are not in hexameter but are based on quantity and not on accentual stress like – “Ocean Oneness”, “Soul in Ignorance”, etc. Few lines from “Ahana” exemplifying hexameter are –

Calm like a goddess, alarmed like a bride is my spirit descending,

Falling, O Gods, to your arms. I know my beginning and ending; (CWSA 2: 545)

Sri Aurobindo made it possible to write English poetry in the European classical meters. He emphasized that the ancient seers of Veda, Upanishad and the masters of European classical poetry gave equal importance to the metrical qualification of poetry. It is significant that Vedas and Upanishads are subtly weaved into meters. The contention of some critics that meters bring the monotony is because the attempt to write in meter became more and more mechanical and the rhyme and rhythm assumed importance over poetic appeal. The Vedic mantras are not monotonous because they are the revealed Word clothed in the perfect meter which was not created by mind, but heard by the inner listener. They called it śruti – the inner hearing. Sri Aurobindo did not negate the past efforts and experiments in any