Reflections on the Mysticism and Philosophy in Sri Aurobindo’s Poems

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ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo revolutionized the human thought and had tremendous impact on the people all over the world. As a poet, he is endowed with a poetic consciousness that is unobtrusively committed to achieving social amelioration and spiritual consciousness. He mastered several poetic modes but then, he evolved a writing style of his own that would be in line with his spiritual thought.

It may be observed that mysticism is embedded in Sri Aurobindo’s poems. His philosophy appears to be a modernized version of the scheme of the Taittiriya Upanishad. He says that man should transcend the conscious level and realize the super conscious level through the medium of yoga. This mode of seeking reality in its true nature is not the unique possession of saints but of all aspiring humanity. This can be attained by internal surrender or total dedication to the supermind or God. This union with God can transform a person into a worthy human being.

Sri Aurobindo’s mystical experience has revealed to him the significance of human life. He not only put forth in verse his rich experience of the metaphysical system embodying a grand ideal, but also outlined the way to attain it. His mystical thought, though complex in nature, can illuminate the world and destroy ignorance and fanaticism. It can also enhance the tolerance level in an individual which in turn can lead to a peaceful mutual co-existence. Thus, he held out the hope of a world-union through divine consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo, a great sage of Modern India, inundated the entire world with spiritual consciousness. He revolutionized the human thought and had tremendous impact on the people all over the world. As a poet, he is endowed with a poetic consciousness that is unobtrusively committed to achieving social amelioration and spiritual consciousness. Like the great poets, Coleridge and Heine, he shows a piercing and instantaneous insight into the heart of his subject. He came under the influence of poetic movements of his time like Decadence and Modernism. As a result, jewelled phrases, over-wrought diction, imagism, symbolism and classicism find a place in his poems. He mastered several poetic modes but then, he evolved a writing style of his own that would be in line with his spiritual thought. As an eminent critic, Prema Nanda Kumar, puts it: “Sri Aurobindo’s chosen aim in life was to show earth-bound mortals the path that leads to the Life Divine.” (Nanda Kumar 69).

One of his early poems is Ilion. The significance of this unfinished poem lies in its profound epic vision, in its uniquely innovative hexameter and in its synthetic character. It is a truly Homeric epic based upon Homer’s theme in the Iliad. The lyric range of Sri Aurobindo embraces Songs to Myrtilla. Though it is one of his early poems, it is amazing to find such disarming play or fancy and rhythmic lilt and skill in it. It also revealed the influence of the Greek and the Decadent English poets. It is poetry which has its own pretty conceits:

“Snowdrops are thy feet, 
Thy waist a crescent moon.” (5)

During the Baroda period, Sri Aurobindo produced a number of short reflective poems and three long narrative poems besides his translations of Kalidasa and Bhartrihari. There is great heroic poetry in Baji Prabhou. It focuses on a thrilling episode in Maratha history. There is great imaginative daring in passages like the one in Love and Death which describes Ruru’s invasion of the underworld to reclaim lost Priyumvada:

“Then with a prone wide sound
All ocean hollowing drew him swiftly in,
Curving with monstrous menace over him.
He down the gulf where the wide waves collapsed
Descending, saw with floating hair arise
The daughters of the sea in pale green light,
A million mystic breasts suddenly bare,
And came beneath the flood and stunned beheld
A mute stupendous march of waters race
To reach some viewless pit beneath the world.” (248)

In Urvasie as well as in Love and Death, indomitable love is presented as fighting mortality and ultimately is triumphant over death. Both these narratives are Romances, for Pururavas in Urvasie, and Ruru in Love and Death are great lovers and Urvasie and Priyumvada are truly worthy of their love. In this context, Srinivas Iyengar observes,

Yet Sri Aurobindo seems to imply that the lovers have somehow failed and have after all, preferred the lesser realization of personal felicity to the greater
realization of world redemption and total transformation of our earth-nature. It is Savitri alone who fuses the lesser and the greater realizations into an integral and total transformation of limited human life into the fullness and splendor of the Life Divine. (Iyengar 154)

His short poems like The Fear of Death, The Sea, A Vision of Science and The Rishi are packed with profound thought. There are full of philosophic beauty. This is how the Sea is addressed:

“I come, O Sea, To measure my enormous self with thee.” (46)

The poetry of pure sight also kept pace with other kinds. His poem, Revelation is a beautiful example of it.

“Someone leaping from the rocks Past me, ran with wind-blown locks… Someone of the heavenly rout From behind the veil ran out.” (47)

Sri Aurobindo wrote a few poetic plays in blank verse in the Elizabethan manner. They may be treated as poetic drama. They contain many passages of poetic beauty. The best of them is Perseus, the Deliverer.

During the Pondicherry period beginning with 1910, the poet of yoga in Sri Aurobindo comes into full bloom. Many of his mystical poems are couched in new verse forms or in quantitative foot-measures. Poems produced during this time are sublime in nature and are full of transcendental wisdom. Descent reveals the nature of yogic inspiration. It is a pure mystic cry of the soul:

“Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings; Thoughts that left the ineffable flaming mansions, Blaze in my spirit.” (563)

A God’s Labour conveys a psychic inspiration which sustains itself over thirty one stanzas:

“He who would bring the heavens here Must descend himself into clay And the burden of earthly nature bear And tread the dolorous way.” (99)

This kind of poetry reached the zenith of excellence in poems like A Bird of Fire, Thought the Paraclete and The Rose of God. This last poem is suffused with a philosophical or mystical glow. The mystic Rose is the symbol of the essence and efflorescence of God. Bliss, Light, Power, Life, Love are the five essences that fuse as the integral perfection of God and all these put together bloom eternally as the Rose of God in Heaven. Just as Ganga comes to the parched earth from Heaven, the mystic Rose too, should blossom on earth in the human heart. Being is asked to enact becoming. It leads to the experience of an accession of inner poise and strength. This poem, which I may quote here, is a vision, invocation and action all put in one.

“Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity’s face, Rose of love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace! Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature’s abyss: Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude’s kiss.” (584)

Sri Aurobindo’s monumental epic, Savitri, reflects the consummation of the many poetic styles that he attempted in all his works. Like Dante and Milton, he produced in Savitri, an epic of universal significance. Like Goethe, he chose an ancient story from mythology and molded it into a legend summing up the past, a symbol projecting the future and a philosophy based on his own experience. It is concerned with the destiny of man and his relations with the Divine. It is an inner drama, the inner epic of man. The following appraisal of Savitri deserves attention:

[Savitri] is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth’s darkness and struggle, to the highest realms of supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence and metaphorical brilliance... Savitri is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man’s mind towards the Absolute. (Verma 36)

Like the two Indian epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, Savitri, has a romantic inwardness and an insistent emphasis on the mystical. In this respect, this poem can be regarded as a consummation of the tradition of the inward or romantic epic exemplified by Wordsworth in The Prelude and by Keats in Hyperion. The marriage of Savitri and Satyavan fits in with a definite stage in the spiritual evolution. Savitri is looking for inward expansion of her spiritual energy. Satyavan is looking for the transcendent power, the power that unites the finite with the infinite. They find the fulfillment of their quest in each other. The two lovers were born to realize the words of Divine Mother, “…Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will” (346). Together, they are able to assert the victory of love over death. In this context, a distinguished critic, Gokak comments:

For purity and for tenderness and for the soul that does not deny the body but gives to human values their due place in a scheme of life, it would be difficult t find a more powerful episode of love in the
companion, the marriage, the death in the forest and the salvation. An accomplished critic, Paul Verghese opines, but also it reflects the myth of social or collective and Yama not only reflects the myth of individual freedom to exist. Thus the mythic conflict between Savitri accepting Satyavan’s death would mean acceptance of a deterministic order of lower nature and also denial of spirit. She is the vanquisher of evil. Commenting on the symbolic significance of the poem, Sri Aurobindo remarked that “Savitri is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure.” (qtd. in Naik 69)

In Savitri, the central myth is the myth of freedom. This myth emphasizes on the evolutionary view of human nature. It focuses on soul’s ability to experience infinitude and to attain freedom from a deterministic order of lower nature. As Divine Mother says, “One shall descend and break the iron Law, Change Nature’s doom by the lone Spirit’s power” (346). According to Aurobindo, Savitri accepting Satyavan’s death would mean acceptance of a deterministic order of lower nature and also denial of freedom to exist. Thus the mythic conflict between Savitri and Yama not only reflects the myth of individual freedom but also it reflects the myth of social or collective salvation. An accomplished critic, Paul Verghese opines,

And this belief in spirituality which in India, has meant hitherto a recognition of something greater than mind and life, the aspiration to a consciousness pure, great, divine beyond our normal mental and vital nature, a surge and rising of the soul in man out of the littleness and bondage of our lower parts towards a greater thing secret within him. (Verghese 82)

Savitri is also a cosmic epic as it denies private and personal salvation as an end in itself. Aurobindo’s conception of the evolutionary progress implies cosmic consciousness. Cosmic consciousness concerns humanity as a whole. The incessant search for the unity of the finite and the infinite is the key to grasping Aurobindo’s vision of human salvation. Savitri’s struggle in the epic is two-fold. In her human form, she undertakes the process of realizing her inner unity, through a rigid discipline of yoga and by inward expansion of consciousness. This reveals the divine energy in her with the help of which she wages a war against the god of death and of a lower order of nature. Yet, on the other hand, she is the symbol of power or shakthi and love. She redeems the universe from the tyranny of Yama and restores to earth the paradisal vision of life and of an ideal communal existence. The submission to the death-state would mean submission to the state of matter. But in her victory, there is affirmation of the spirit. There is ascent from lower consciousness to the next higher level of consciousness and this is a precondition for the progress of civilization. There is continuous and upward progress of the human race. In this regard, K.D.Verma remarks, “Aurobindo’s cosmic vision of humanity is the vision of humanity-divinity in its fully liberated and integrated form.” (Verma 43)

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Sri Aurobindo’s mystical experience has revealed to him the significance of human life. He not only put forth in verse his rich experience of the metaphysical system embodying a grand ideal, but also outlined the way to attain it. His mystical thought, though complex in nature, can illuminate the world and destroy ignorance and fanaticism. It can also enhance the toleration level in an individual which in turn can lead to a peaceful mutual co-existence. Thus, he held out the hope of a world-union through divine consciousness.

In today’s world so much of importance is given to yoga and meditation which is what Sri Aurobindo spoke about regarding the illumination of mind, spirit, and soul. If we can transcend beyond the limits of our own voracious ego through yoga and meditation, we don’t need any prophets or saints to show us the path of enlightenment.
WORKS CITED


