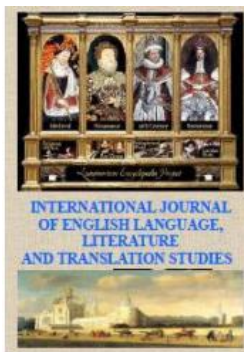


METAPHOR AND THE POETIC DISCOURSE IN THE SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo's writings on aesthetics, poetics and his exegesis on the Veda and Upanishad have already established him as a poet, critic, aesthetician and translator in the 20th Century. He wrote prodigiously all through his life on various disciplines of knowledge. Literary discourse is motivated by figurative schemes of thought structuring our understanding of experience. Literary criticism is concerned with commenting and evaluating literary works and is not necessarily focused on criticizing, or indicating the faults in a disapproving way. In the present paper, I have reviewed the argument that metaphor is a key ingredient linguistic device in common as well as literary discourse, adding a recent view of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. Sri Aurobindo's work in this area could make a major, perhaps a decisive contribution. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is able to serve as a comprehensive alternative to the fundamental ontological and epistemological premises on which science at present is basing itself. Employing an adequate metaphor, Sri Aurobindo says: "Our mind and ego are like the crown and dome of a temple jutting out from the waves while the great body of the building is submerged under the surface of the waters." (*The Life Divine*, 556) Using a still more powerful metaphor, he states: "We are not only what we know of ourselves but an immense more which we do not know; our momentary personality is only a bubble on the ocean of our existence". Sri Aurobindo envisioned heightened levels of consciousness and strove to reach there with his efforts and experiments.

Introduction

Poetry I take to be the measured expression of emotion... it is the natural and predestined blending or rather inseparable existence of great matter with great verse producing high emotions or beautiful matter with beautiful words producing soft emotions that gives us genuine poetry. (Sri Aurobindo, 1: 123)

Poetic discourse is a type of literary conversation which focuses on the expression of feelings, ideas, imaginations, events, and places through specific rhymes and rhythms. Poetic discourse makes use of common words in appealing ways to present feelings and emotions. The mechanism of poetic discourse involves certain steps starting from different sources, then entering the mental process, mental realization, and then finally into a finished product as poetry¹. On a narrow definition poetic diction can be viewed simply as the words that are used exclusively or primarily in poetry or used in meanings that are not normal to them in prose discourse. A broader definition would include also phonetic characteristics, the patterns of sound that are

created in the choice and organization of the vocabulary, most conspicuously those dictated by metrical conventions, and grammatical distinctions exhibited in the choice of morphological forms and syntactic structures.' In general the distinguishing characteristics are not the presence or absence of a particular linguistic phenomenon but its relative frequency in comparison with prose. Poetic discourse is of course an occasional mode of communication. It is not the way poets talk or write all the time but the product of a consciously creative process that is activated only on particular occasions. Yet there must always be a considerable input from their own normal and largely unconscious linguistic habits. If we have no other representative of their idiolectal practice, there is a very real danger of confusing these linguistic habits with the linguistic peculiarities of the poetic register in which they are composing.

Sri Aurobindo is an outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian literature. He represents a new poetic consciousness which seeks to create a more refined instrument to express the new version and experience. So his poetry has a distinction of its own in its rhythm and language. It is no exaggeration to say that Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo) is one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. Aurobindo the mahayogi, Aurobindo the philosopher, Aurobindo the poet, Aurobindo the interpreter of Indian thought, Aurobindo the critic and Aurobindo the radical politician—all these hats fit him. Sri Aurobindo's writings on aesthetics, poetics and his exegesis on the Veda and Upanishad have already established him as a poet, critic, aesthetician and translator in the Twentieth Century. He wrote prodigiously all through his life on various disciplines of knowledge. His writings encompass poetry and poetics, philosophy, psychology, philology, sociology, polity, culture, translation. They show a synthesis of the thoughts and cultures of the East and the West of which he had intense study and experience. He was able to amalgamate these two diverse cultural traditions not only on the basis of his study, but through his spiritual power of which he grew aware quite early in his life. He was a yogi and a seer-poet (*Kavi*), one who could envision and act through his spiritual powers. The present paper focuses on "vision", "experience", "experiment", "aesthetics" and "aesthesis" and studies the formation of Sri Aurobindo's poetics through them. "Vision" forms the essential link between all the concepts as it keeps Sri Aurobindo's idea of vision being the "characteristic power of the poet" at the center of analysis. The experiences and experiments discussed in one of the chapters ensue from the greater vision and experiences of Sri Aurobindo.

Discussion

Sri Aurobindo's poetry stands apart in Indo-Anglian poetry and offers scope for critical assessment. Sri Aurobindo was not merely a writer who happened to write in English, but really an English writer. English was close and natural language to him more than his mother tongue and his belief that "Many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen" is proved by his own writings. Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius bloomed softly at an extraordinary tender age in an alien land. At the age of nineteen he was an unmistakable poet. In the span of nearly fourteen years in England, the most formative time in his cultural make-up and intellectual set-up, he read with great fondness and keen interest English poetry, literature and fiction and as he himself says, "spent much time too in writing poetry."

Sri Aurobindo's poetic career spreads over a period of sixty years from 1890 to 1950 amid which he has enhanced the domain of letters by a 'regal amount of value'. In the expressions of V. K. Gokak, he is without a doubt "the most remarkable Indo-Anglian author for volume and also for variety." The two volumes of 'Collected Poems and Plays', the multi-aspected epic *Savitri* with its 24,000 lines, story poems, an extensive assemblage of philosophical poems other than the bunches of verses speak to the inventive exertion of around sixty years and give the impression of the colossal poetic stature of Sri Aurobindo – the poet. But there are poems like *God's Labour* which, with lucidity and ease of expression outline and explain the central beliefs. The poem reveals the poet's beliefs of God, of the problem of evil and suffering in the world and of man's evolution to greater and more glorious heights.

The poem perfectly communicates Sri Aurobindo's conviction that the change of man into superman is conceivable just if two essentials are there—the yearning call from underneath and the Divine Grace from above. In various poems like *Thought the Paraclete*, *Rose of and The Bird of Fire*, Sri Aurobindo has deciphered his enchanted encounters and accomplished in English stanza something identical to the Mantra He makes us see what he himself has seen—dreams of close profound fellowship. While *Thought the Paraclete* is a dream

or disclosure of a climb through otherworldly plane & Rose of God with the most celebrated of magical images introduces the Divine Glory and Reality. It is significant to take note of that Sri Aurobindo has managed mysterious encounters in a route not the same as other spiritualist poets. He has not dressed them in human images and moral stories, in pictures and figures of natural and mainstream life. He introduces them in their exposure, similarly as they are seen and acknowledged, and subsequently seem cloud to the normal human comprehension.

He was writing poetry since his stay in England but he could not get due recognition among the critics. He was well known as a philosopher, Yogi, Prophet of nationalism, journalist but very few knew him as a poet before his publication of *Collected Poems* on his 70th birthday. It is partly because his aim was not success and personal fame, but to express spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry. It was in 1942 that Sri Aurobindo appeared prominently as a poet with the publication of his 'Collected poems and plays'.

His first book of verse, *Songs to Myrtilla*, contains poems written mostly between the age of 18 and 20. These are the youthful poems, mainly secular and rich in experiment. These are poems of love and beauty, youthful outburst of joy and despair and of patriotic zeal. As Rameshwar Gupta rightly observes,

His earliest poetry is a lyrical impulse.... a joyous reaction
to the beauty of nature and the grace and charm of human
feelings; the reaction of a fresh, pure poetic sensibility
when youth only half-opens itself to the world around;
reminiscent of the early lyrical Milton, Spencer, and the
sensuous Keats. The Shelley of unpremeditated strains (Gupta, Rameshwar, 1969)².

The work presented here is only a small portion of what he has actually written, but bulk of which has not yet seen the light of day. Yet it is hoped that even this fragment will serve to give an idea of the poetic genius that seeks expression in it. Sri Aurobindo, once said that he had been first and foremost a poet and politician, only later he became a Yogi. We can safely amend the statement by saying that even before he became a politician he had been a poet, indeed he was born as a poet and he is a born poet³.

Love and Death is perhaps the most satisfying and enjoyable poem composed by Sri Aurobindo during his early poetic career. Written as early as 1898 the poem shows the 'sunrise splendours while lingers yet unseen the glorious sun' or 'what now we see is a shadow of what must come' i.e. the superb Epic of epics, *Savitri*. The poem forms 'a companion legend to the story of Savitri'. To judge a poem it is always advisable, at the first instant, to see what the poet himself speaks of his creative inspiration, what the poet intends to say and how he says it. 'The poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing—in the mornings, of course...', says Sri Aurobindo. Commenting on the speech of the Love-God he gives his self-assessment, 'I do not think I have, elsewhere [in the poem], surpassed this speech in power of language, passion and truth of feeling and nobility and felicity of rhythm all fused together into a perfect whole.' There is 'a certain completeness of poetic sight and perfection of poetic power, which puts it on one of the peaks – even if not the highest possible peak – of achievement'.

"Vision is the characteristic intensity of the poet, as is discriminative idea the fundamental endowment of the scholar and scientific perception the regular virtuoso of the researcher. . . Accordingly the best poets have been dependably the individuals who have had a substantial and great interpretative and instinctive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has emerged out of that in a preminent life-changing expression of it. . . Sight is the basic poetic blessing. The model poet in a universe of unique thoughts is, we may state, a Soul that finds in itself personally this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of creatures and sets spilling out of its inside a flood of innovative beat and world-pictures which turn into the expressive body of the vision; and the colossal poets are the individuals who rehash in some measure this perfect creation, "kavayah satyasrutah", diviners and listeners to the poetic truth and poetic word." [The Future Poetry, pp. 29-30]⁴

Sri Aurobindo places Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, and Kalidasa on one plane, for in his erudition despite differences in content and outlook their greatness lies in the essential oneness of vision and revelation of poetic truth. In *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo analyzes the development of English poetry, indicates the significance and direction of its drift, and then traces the lines of its future development. Sri

Aurobindo indicated that the poetry of the future would embody a harmony of five eternal powers: Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and the Spirit⁵.

Sri Aurobindo considers technique to be inseparable. "Certainly in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection"⁶. But poetry is not merely a matter of correct technique, for "technique is a means of expression; one does not write merely to use beautiful words or paint for the sole sake of line and colour; there is something that one is trying through these means to express or to discover."⁷ The best or highest technique, he believes to be descending from above, from the Yogic consciousness. But the human instruments of verbal expression have to be perfected through knowledge, understanding and practice. And it is here that the technique enters. Sri Aurobindo stresses on a proper balance between technique and substance of poetry. He says, "The search for technique is simply the search for the best and the most appropriate form for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it."⁶⁶ He warns that attention to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it and he becomes indifferent to substance.

The poet, J. A. Chadwick (Arjava), wrote in 1936 of Sri Aurobindo's Consciousnessp Considered merely as a poet and critic of poetry, Sri Aurobindo would still rank among the supreme masters of our time. His poetical output represents the creative effort of about sixty years and, on a modest estimate, may run to some three thousand pages Sri Aurobindo's poetry stands a class apart in Indo-English poetry and offers scope for critical reassessment. George Sampson has referred to Sri Aurobindo as "more famous as an exponent of Indian nationalism than as a poet. K.R.S.Iyengar has made a substantial and balanced contribution to Aurobindonian criticism. He realises that a new kind of poetry like Sri Aurobindo's "demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer"⁸.

Poetry and life are intimately connected as he points out, "Poetry is the rhythmic voice of life, but it is one of the inner and not one of the surface voices". And that the "Poet's first concern and his concern always is with living beauty and reality of life."⁹ Poetry in its course has reflected the life as it has evolved from one stage to another- physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and now the spiritual. Art is not divorced from life; it is all inclusive and integral. He always insisted on the need of life experience for literary creation. Art gives something more than what already is in real life. For art is not simply reproduction or imitation of life. It enriches life by attributing to it something which it lacks in reality, something more inwardly true and beautiful than the external life. He states, "The poet's greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the World's and he does it even when he is dealing with actual things."¹⁰

According to Sri Aurobindo, the highest power, the highest achievement of poetry is Mantra. By the word Mantra, Sri Aurobindo connotes poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, the union of the highest intensity of rhythmic movement, the highest intensity of verbal form and thought and the highest intensity of the soul's vision of the truth. Thus Mantra is "the highest intense revealing form of poetic thought and expression."¹¹

Thus the discovery and description of the higher planes of consciousness from which our inspiration generally comes is a unique contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the aesthetics. The distinctions enunciated by him are based on his own experience and on ancient Indian thought and have a revelatory importance, not only for aesthetics, but also for yogic psychology and metaphysics. Sri Aurobindo's overhead creation of Savitri and his overmind aesthesis has opened a new age of poetry and poetics. This is the future poetry, the poetry of perfection.

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