



POETRY, THE ETERNAL QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL PERFECTION: A VIEWS OF SRI. AUROBINDO

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ABSTRACT

Poetry stirs the soul with the deepest delight. First, the poet himself feels “a divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, and formative”² and then, he succeeds in pouring this deep spiritual joy into all those who are prepared to receive it: ‘This delight is not merely a godlike pastime, it is a great formative and illuminative power.’

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo has evolved a definition of poetry which is remarkable for its visionary spiritual character. He says: “The highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit.” Pleasure alone is not the function of art and poetry. It aims at providing ‘the inner imaginative pleasure’ as its chief function. Defining poetry, Sri Aurobindo writes:

“For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear is the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creation; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry.”¹

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Poetry, according to Sri Aurobindo, determines its own form, which is not imposed on it by any law mechanical or external to it. In the heat of spiritual emotion in which real poetry is born, the poet forgets the form and technique. The inspiration spontaneously flows out of the poet’s lips in the form of inspired rhythm or word. Sri. Aurobindo writes:

“For then the perfection of his sound – movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul : that utters itself in an inspired rhythm and an innate, a revealed word, even as the universal soul created the harmonies of the universe out of the power of the word secret and eternal within him, leaving the mechanical work to be done in a surge of hidden spiritual excitement by the subconscious part of his nature. It is the highest speech which is the supreme poetic utterance, the immortal element in his poetry, and a little of it is enough to save the rest of his work from oblivion.”³

The poet transcends reason and taste which are important factors in prose. The poet is a seer and visionary. He is a revealer of truth. He is endorsed with a divine insight with which he pries deeper and deeper into the things around him and reveals the Truth, Beauty and Joy hidden from the sight of an ordinary man Sri Aurobindo says:

“Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see and since it is the inner senses that it has to address itself, - for the ear is its only physical gate of entry and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing – and since its object is to make us live within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is an inner sight which he opens in us and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.”⁴

Kalidasa, Valmiki, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare etc. are great because they have ‘a large and 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.’ The poet seer differs from the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet gives a message and reveals the truth as the Word, the Law or the command of the Eternal ; the philosopher discriminates truth and puts its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other. The poet “shows us truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or image, or reveals it to us in the workings of nature or in the workings of life and when he has done that, his whole work is done; he need not be its explicit



spokesman or its official messenger.”⁵ The poet is the representative of the Divine. His function is creation and not recreation. The cosmic spirit illumines him.

Poetic speech is the instantaneous expression of the poet’s inspired spiritual vision. “But the privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover the more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain heads of the spirit within us. He may not always or often find it, but to seek for it is the law or at least the highest trend of his utterance, but when he cannot only find it, but cast into it some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the *Mantra*.” He further writes:

*“But always, whether in the search or the finding, the whole style or rhythm of poetry are the expression and movement which come from us out of a certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be of anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things, it may be a vision of force and action, or of sensible beauty, or of truth of thought, or of emotion, of pleasure and pain, of this life or the life beyond. It is sufficient that it is the soul which sees, and the eye, sense, heart and thought mind become the passive instruments of the soul. Then we get real, the high poetry.”*⁶

The poet embodies in his inspired speech truth of life or truth of nature. Sri Aurobindo remarks:

*“It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy forever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. This greater element, the more timid and temperate speech of prose; can sometimes shadow out to us, but the heightened and fearless style of poetry makes it close and living and the highest cadences of poetry carry in on their wings what the style by itself could not bring. This is the source of that intensity which is the stamp of poetical speech and of the poetical movement. It comes from the stress of soul-vision behind the word; it is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds.”*⁷

Sri Aurobindo thinks that the highest form of poetry is *Mantric*. Defining it he writes :



“But poetry is the mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. And the ancient poets of the Vedas and the Upanishads claimed to be uttering the mantra because it was always the inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The mantra in other words is a direct and most heightened, an in tensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensues the mind with the sight and presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth.”⁸

Mantra comes as expression of great heights of inner freedom; for example :

*“A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal’s world.
On nature’s luminous tops, on the spirit’s ground,
The superman shall reign as a king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven.”⁹*

Poetry which is intuitively revealed expresses five external powers – truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and Spirit. These five powers work in unison. Beauty and Delight are spiritual in essence and they are incomplete without the other three. Truth and life cannot attain their perfection until they are suffused and filled with the completing power of delight and the fine power of Beauty. The spirit has no full revelation with Truth and Beauty. Sri Aurobindo remarks: “it is the significance and spiritual function of art and poetry to liberate man into pure delight and to bring beauty into his life.”¹⁰

The unison of these five eternal elements finds expression in Mantra. The Mantric expression, which is the poetic revelation of the deepest spiritual reality, requires the following elements:

The highest intensity of rhythmic movement : It does not imply harmonious, musical rhythm. A very perfect rhythm will often give immortality to work which is slight in vision and very far from the higher intensities of style. Defining rhythmic movement, Sri Aurobindo says :

“There must be a deeper and more subtle music, a rhythmical soul-movement entering into the metrical form and often over flooding it before the real poetic achievement begins. A mere metrical excellence, however subtle, rich or varied, however perfectly it satisfies the outer ear, does not meet the deeper



aims of the creative spirit; for there is an inner hearing which makes its greater claim, and to reach and satisfy it is the true aim of the creator of melody and harmony.”¹¹

The highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought substance of style : The aim of poetic style is to make the presented thing living to the imaginative vision, the spiritual sense, the soul-feeling and the soul sight. Poetry appears to the spirit of man through significant images – images which make us see, and not make us think or feel. Thought and feeling must arise out of the sight or be included in it. Sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. To arrive at the apt word which is not only adequate and effective but illumined and illuminating, the inspired and the inspiring, through which the poet reveals his felt vision of the spiritual and compels us to see also, is the endeavour of the poetic style.

The highest intensity of soul’s vision of truth; vision is the characteristic power of the poet. The ancient Vedic word *Kavi* means “the seer and revealer of truth.” The poet embodies in his verse “an inner sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.” The greatest poets of the world had a large and 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.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry and theory of poetry have a forward-looking quality. He envisions man as an evolving being with the possibility – or rather the assurance of hitherto unrealized capacities opening up in him. Man is a transitional being. He is marching to attain over mind consciousness, spiritual perfection, and in short super manhood. Sri Aurobindo says, an eternal perfection is moulding us into its own image :

*“A mutual debt binds man to the supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he;
His human portion, we must grow divine.”¹²*

Poetry is the quest for the attainment of super manhood, the eternal quest for spiritual perfection. It ushers us into spiritual dawn, the real future of humanity. Commenting on the nature of the poetry of future Sri Aurobindo remarks :

“It is in effect a larger cosmic vision, a realizing of the godhead in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well as of the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualized uplifting of his thought and feeling and sense of action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of



diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and now more clearly disclosed self of the universe. The nations that most include and make real these things in their life and culture are the nations of the coming dawn and the poets of whatever tongue and race who most completely see with this vision and speak with the inspiration of its utterance are those who shall be the creators of the poetry of the future. ”¹³

Thus, According to Sri. Aurobindo Poetry, The Eternal Quest For Spiritual Perfection.

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