

Sri Aurobindo

A beginning to understand his
philosophy through his writings



Special Project -

Sri Aurobindo:

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through his writings

Submitted by -

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Guide -

Prof. Raja Mohanty

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Powai, Mumbai

Approval Sheet

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titled

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through his writings**

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Project Guide –

(Prof. Raja Mohanty)

Acknowledgement

My profound thanks to my guide Prof. Raja Mohanty for putting forward this topic, his guidance and support has made this project possible.

My sincere thanks to Aurobindo ashram, Pondicherry and followers and critics of his philosophy for making all the required inputs for my study.



The year was 1907. The freedom movement in India was gathering momentum. Its leader was detained by the police. The poet Rabindranath Tagore paid him a visit and wrote the now famous lines:

*"Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee! O friend, my country's friend,
O Voice incarnate, free, Of India's soul....The fiery messenger that with the
lamp of God Hath come...Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee."*



Chronology of events



Pre-Pondicherry (1872-1910)

1872, Aug. 15 - Sri Aurobindo is born in Calcutta

1878, Feb. 21 - Mother is born in Paris.

1879, June - Sri Aurobindo leaves India for England

1883 - Poem "Light"

1892, August - Sri Aurobindo passes the I.C.S.

1893, Feb. 6 - Lands at Bombay

1895 - *Songs to Myrtilla*

1900 - Sri Aurobindo takes first contacts with
secret societies in Maharashtra & Bengal

1905 - Sri Aurobindo writes *Bhawani Mandir*

1906, August - *Bande Mataram*





1908, May 2 - Sri Aurobindo is arrested in the
Alipore Bomb Case

1909, June 19 - First issue of the *Karmayogin*

1909, Aug. 23 - First issue of the *Dharma*

Post Pondicherry

1910, February - Sri Aurobindo abruptly leaves
Calcutta for Chandernagore

1914, March 29 - First meeting with Mother

1950, Dec. 5 - “*Savitri*”

Sri Aurobindo leaves his
body. Mother continues his work





"I belong to no nation, no civilization, no society, no race,
but to the Divine.

I obey no master, no rules, no law, no social convention,
but the Divine.

To Him I have surrendered all, will, life and self; for Him
I am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is
His will, with complete joy, and nothing in his service
can be sacrifice, for all is perfect delight."

The Mother



How to read his works: in words of Mother

"... the best thing would be to obtain perfect silence -and achieve a state of immobility of the brain, I might say, so that the attention becomes as still and immobile as a mirror, like the surface of absolutely still water. Then what one has read passes through the surface and penetrates deep into the being where it is received with a minimum of distortion. Afterwards - sometimes long afterwards -it wells up again from the depths and manifests in the brain with its full power of comprehension, not as knowledge acquired from outside, but as a light one carried within."



Words of Subhash Chandra Bose



- *[Aurobindo's] letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, specially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody would read the letter aloud and the rest of us would enthuse over it... We felt convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary for effective national service".*



Words of Dr. Raymond Piper

"Sri Aurobindo's epic 'Savitri' has already inaugurated the New Age of Illumination and is probably the greatest epic in the English language... The most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute."



Words of Pitrim Sorokin



"From a scientific and philosophical standpoint the works of Sri Aurobindo are a sound antidote to the pseudo-scientific psychology and psychiatry and educational art of the West.

Sri Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine' and Yoga treatises are among the most important works of our times in philosophy, ethics and humanities. Sri Aurobindo himself is one of the greatest living sages of our time, the most eminent moral leader."



Direct effect of his ideas: few personalities

Andrew Harvey

*(born 1952) is a Shakespeare scholar
and mystic who was born in India.*

- He envisions true spirituality to be the divinization of earthly life through spiritual practice. These practices can take many forms and can be taken from any religious tradition.
- Harvey sees six poets and religious figures as having universal appeal:
 - The *Dhammapada* of Buddha
 - Jesus as portrayed in the *Gospel of Thomas*
 - Rumi, 13th century Sufi poet
 - Kabir, 15th century Indian poet
 - Ramakrishna, 19th century Hindu sadhu
 - **Aurobindo**, 20th century Hindu philosopher-sage



Kenneth Earl Wilber Jr.

(January 31, 1949, Oklahoma City, USA), is an American New Age theorist and author.

- Working outside the academic mainstream, he has drawn on psychology, sociology, philosophy, mysticism, postmodernism, science and systems theory to form what he calls an integral theory of consciousness.
- Wilber's conception of evolution or psychological development draws on **Aurobindo**, Jean Gebser, the great chain of being, German idealism, Erich Jantsch, Jean Piaget, Abraham Maslow, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Howard Gardner, Clare W. Graves, Robert Kegan and Spiral Dynamics.



William Irwin Thompson

(July 16, 1938) is known primarily as a social philosopher and cultural critic.

- He has made significant contributions to cultural history, social criticism, the philosophy of science, and the study of myth. He is an astute reader of science, social science, history, and literature.
- Thompson is influenced by the Vedantin philosopher **Sri Aurobindo**, British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, Swiss cultural historian Jean Gebser, and media ecologist Marshall McLuhan.



Michael Murphy

(1930) the co-founder of the Esalen Institute, a key figure in the Human Potential Movement and author of both fiction and non-fiction books on topics related to extraordinary human potential.

- During 1956 and 1957 Murphy practiced meditation for 18 months at the **Sri Aurobindo Ashram** in Pondicherry, India.
- **Founding Esalen:** During his stay at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram the ideas developed related to the connection between human evolution, human potential, and spiritual growth.



The writings (An introduction)





While studying Sri Aurobindo's works one important fact should be remembered, Sri Aurobindo's consciousness was in a constant state of development and there was a radical change in his views particularly after 1910.





Sri Aurobindo's earliest writings were poems that he penned as a student in England. This literary interest continued during his thirteen-year stay at Baroda, where he wrote a number of **poems and plays**, and afterwards in Calcutta and Pondicherry.

He first rose to national prominence as a writer for his editorials and articles in **Bande Mataram**, a Calcutta daily (1906 and 1908).





Dharma and Karmayogin

Sri Aurobindo launched a 64-page monthly **philosophical review, Arya (1914-1921)** having some of his most prominent works

- The Life Divine
- The Synthesis of Yoga
- Essays on the Gita
- The Secret of the Veda
- The Foundations of Indian Culture
- The Future Poetry
- The Human Cycle
- The Ideal of Human Unity





Though he retired from public life in 1926, Sri Aurobindo maintained a large correspondence with his disciples, especially in the 1930s.

Other later works include

- Hymns to the Mystic Fire (translations of Vedic hymns to Agni)
- The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings
- Essays Divine and Human (both the volumes contain short prose works on philosophy, psychology and yoga).

Last being the “ **Savitri** ” an epic with 24000 verses



Writings: “Letters on poetry, literature and art”



Poem and poetry:

Existence - Pre-exist in timeless or in some plane where past, present and future exist together.

Source of inspiration
(Power)



Human instrument/ channel
(Individual case depended)



Provides language, rhythm & idea

Some more factors included in formation of poetry -

- Illumination/ excitement
- A conscious labor of creation

6-06-1932



Three elements of poetic creations:

Original source
Inspiration (pure & undiminished)



Vital



Taking native true form
& power of speech
Exactly reproducing the original

2-06-1931



Form and substance of poetry –

Fine or telling rhythms without substance (of idea suggestion feeling) are hardly poetry at all, even if they make good verse e.g. **Swinburne**

*In a coign of the cliff between lowland and highland,
At the sea-down's edge between windward and lee,
Walled round with rocks as an inland island,
The ghost of a garden fronts the sea.*

But that is no ground for belittling the beauty or excellence of form or ignoring its supreme importance for poetic perfection.





Poetry is an art, and poet ought to be an artist of word and rhythm, though something more than that.

One can be strong and powerful, full of sincerity and substance without being rough and aggressive to the ear not like **Browning**

Fear death?--to feel the fog in my throat,

The mist in my face,

When the snows begin, and the blasts denote

I am nearing the place,

Rhythm can be austere to bareness or sweet and subtle; and a harmonious perfection can be attained.



Bi-culturism in poetry:

I don't see therefore the point of remark that the English language cannot express the Indian temperament. It is true of course to a certain extent, first, because, no foreign language does not/ can express what is intimate and peculiar to a national temperament, it tends to become falsified and exotic, and especially imagery or sentiment of one language does not go down very well with that of another; least of all temperament of an Oriental language be readily be transferred into an European tongue.





Am I mere thine? O Love, I am there clinging

*In every limb of thine - there ever in my creation and my
dissolution-*

Comments: The idea is one that would not so easily occur to an English poet, it is an erotic mysticism, easily suggested to a mind familiar with the experiences of Vedanta or vaishnava mystics; but this is not effusiveness, it is intensity – and an English writer – e.g. Lawrence – could be quite intense, but would use a different idea or image.

1.10.1932



Poetic expression and personal feelings of the poet:

Medium of vision and expression that is not theirs, so they not feel except by reflection the emotions they utter. But of course that is not always the case; sometimes what they feel or at any rate what a part of their being feels.

25-09-1934

They feel the emotion of the things they express. But not always as a personal feeling but as something which seizes hold of them for self-expression.

But the personal feelings also may form the basis of the creation.

30-01-1933



Two Parts of the Poetic Creator:

It is well known that the emotion of the external being does not make good material for the poetry; it has to be transmuted into something deeper, less externally personal, more permanent before it could be turned into good poetry.

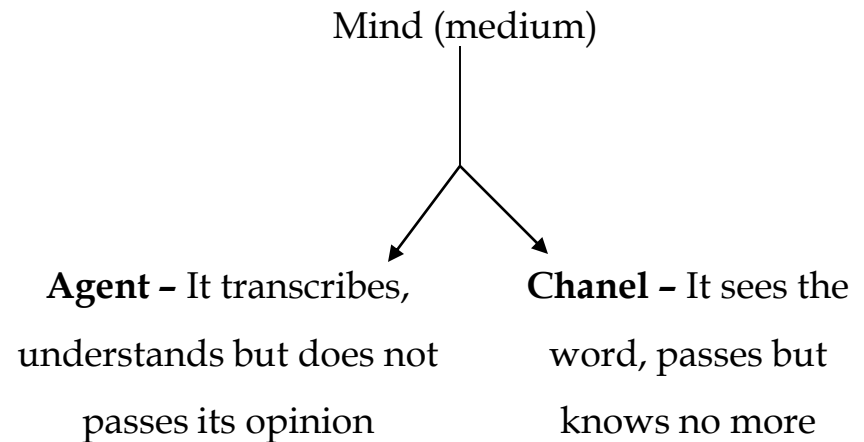
There are always two parts of oneself which collaborate in poetry-

- The instrumental which lives and feels what is written, makes a sort of projective identification with it.
- The Seer-Creator within who is not involved, but who sees the inner significance of it and listens for the word that shall entirely express this significance.



There is always joy in creation

Inspiration and mental understanding:



Improvement has to done by second inspiration and not by mind.

25-9-1934





Artistic temper:

- Every poet should have that feeling of “a miraculous poetic creation existing on a plane” he has not reached, but he should not despair reaching it .

1-05-1934

- If you want to write freely, get rid of self-depreciatory criticism.

14-12-1936

- How can “anything” be used in a poem? A slight change makes all the difference between forceful and a mere literary expression that misses its mark.

27-5-1936

- Impatience does not help; intensity of aspiration does.

21-04-1937





Who could be fluent?

Those who either do not mind if they do not write their very best or those minds are sufficiently poetic to make their “not best” verse as muster.

It is essential to write your best always, at least your “level best” - may have curbed the fluency a good deal.





Inspiration and effort:

Inspiration-

- Very uncertain thing
- Comes when it chooses
- Stops suddenly before it has finished its work
- Refuses to descend when called
- Some command it at will
- Some try to give it a habit

e.g. Indian meditation

Virgil: Nine lines first written everyday correcting till he achieved half of which he wanted

Milton: Fifty epic lines a day





Need of life experience for Literary Creation:

Emotion is alone not enough for producing anything that can be called creation, at best it can give form to something lyrical and passionate or to something charming or appealing.

Requirements-

- Background of life,
- A vital rich and stored or a mind and imagination which has seen much and observed much
- Or a soul that has striven and been conscious of its strivings

30.4.1933



Analysis of the writings

An effort to place in contemporary terms



The terms

- Transpersonal psychology
- Metaphysic
- Psychoanalytic literary criticism
- Formalism
- New Criticism

Transpersonal psychology

"Transpersonal Psychology" is a branch of psychology that is concerned with the study of those states and processes in which people experience a deeper or wider sense of who they are, or a sense of greater connectedness with others, nature, or the "spiritual" dimension.

Transpersonal psychology is, in the broadest sense, a scientific enterprise and is not always associated with a religion or ideology



Transpersonal psychology

Characteristics :

- Creativity and inspiration
- Transpersonal Art
- Altered states of consciousness
- Mind-body relationship
- Mystical experiences
- The psychology of meditation
- Practice and experience within Eastern and Western religious and esoteric traditions



Transpersonal psychology

Quote:

*Source of inspiration
(Power)*



*Human instrument/ channel
(Individual case depended)*



Provides language, rhythm & idea



Metaphysics

- **meta-** (changed in form, altered; higher [used to designate a higher degree of a branch of science]).
- **physic-** (nature, natural, inborn [make grow, produce]).

The metaphysical poetry contains verbal wit, ingenious structure, odd meter, colloquial language, grand imagery, and the drawing together of unlike things.”





Characteristics:

- Intellectually complex
- Conceit, paradox, and hyperbole
- Express unconventional honesty
- Later theme of *carpe diem* (Ananda)

Quote:

- *It is well known that the emotion of the external being does not make good material for the poetry; it has to be transmuted into something deeper, less externally personal, more permanent before it could be turned into good poetry.*





- *What the poet feels when writing (those who are truly inspired) is great Ananda of creation, possession by a great power superior to their ordinary minds which puts some emotion or vision of things into a form of beauty.(26-9-1934)*



Example of western metaphysical poetry

John Donne's "The Message"

SEND home my long stray'd eyes to me,
Which, O ! too long have dwelt on thee ;
Yet since there they have learn'd such ill,
Such forced fashions,
And false passions,
That they be
Made by thee
Fit for no good sight, keep them still.



Psychoanalytic literary criticism

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is literary criticism which, in method, concept, theory or form, is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Sigmund Freud(1856-1939).

The object of psychoanalytic literary criticism, at its very simplest, can be the psychoanalysis of the author or of a particularly interesting character. But many more complex variations are possible. The concepts of psychoanalysis can be deployed with reference to the narrative or poetic structure itself.



Psychoanalytic literary criticism

- The creative process is akin to dreaming awake: as such, it is a mimetic, and cathartic, representation of an unconscious impulse or desire that is best expressed and revealed by **metaphors** and symbols.
- Then, the **juxtaposition** of a writer's works leads the critic to define symbolical themes.
- These **metaphorical networks** are significant of a latent inner reality.
- They point at an obsession just as dreams can do.



Characteristics contd. :

- Psychology of Self and self-realization
- The Higher Self
- Self-transcendence
- Male and female perspectives on the transpersonal
Paranormal experiences
- Transpersonal approaches in psychotherapy /
counseling and in education
- The evolution of consciousness
- Transpersonal research methods
- Integral approaches to knowledge





Quote:

They feel the emotion of the things they express. But not always as a personal feeling but as something which seizes hold of them for self-expression.

But the personal feelings also may form the basis of the creation.



Formalism (early 19's)

In literary studies, **formalism** sometimes refers to inquiry into the form (rather than the content) of works of literature, but usually refers broadly to approaches to interpreting or evaluating literary works that focus on features of the text itself (especially properties of its language) rather than on the contexts of its creation (biographical, historical or intellectual) or the contexts of its reception.



Formalism (early 19's)

Characteristics:

- Aims to explicate the formal properties of the artwork.
- Politics, artist's life, etc. secondary.
- There is a limited number of great works (the canon).
- Great art expresses "universal" themes

Quote:

Poetry is an art, and poet ought to be an artist of word and rhythm, though something more than that.

One can be strong and powerful, full of sincerity and substance without being rough and aggressive to the ear.



New Criticism

New Criticism was the dominant trend in English and American literary criticism of the mid twentieth century, from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Its adherents were emphatic in their advocacy of close reading and attention to texts themselves, and their rejection of criticism based on extra-textual sources, especially biography. At their best, New Critical readings were brilliant, articulately argued, and broad in scope, but sometimes they were idiosyncratic and moralistic.



New Criticism

Characteristics:

- The notion of ambiguity; a text can display multiple simultaneous meaning.
- Claiming that a work has "One And Only One True Meaning" is an act of superstition.
- The words on the page were all that mattered; importation of meanings from outside the text was quite irrelevant, and potentially distracting.
- No proper New Critical investigation should include biographical information on the author.
- They look at, for example, theme, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, meter, etc.



New Criticism

Quote:

Medium of vision and expression that is not theirs, so they need not feel except by the emotions they utter. But of course that is not always the case - sometimes what they feel or at any rate what a part of their being feels.(25-9-1934)



His Words

*“In man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can **only move in a circle**. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle.”*



It is nearly impossible to convey or decipher the meaning contained in the writings of Sri Auroboindo, or to place them in context of any measuring scale.

But it is quite feasible to use them in every possible context.



An addition to the literary criticism -

Utkarsh Gautam



*Winds blow, the lives flow,
Change is inevitable though;
Man tries, and without surprise,
Delaying to meet the glistening glow.*

... Utkarsh

Comments:

Here, the poet tries to explain the life and continuous battle of human nature. Its tendency to term the ending of body as a stage that has to be placed far. Its also emphasize the face of nature that is unpredictable but yet so amazing.

Day and night happen again and again but never they are same for any living/ non-living being.

The human tries to guard this assurance by removing the unpredictability which comes along.



*I am here, in this world,
Full of deception , full of fear;
Foes and enemies thinks everyone,
A space for me, finds anyone.*

...Utkarsh

Comments:

Here, the stress of life is playing a psychological dance on the poet, making him to start questioning the very existence of his life and connection and control placed by surroundings.

The negative forces start to touch the thinking due to the fact that human has the tendency to find fault in his surroundings before analyzing himself.

But it is also true that in this materialistic world everyone stands alone; without any place in any person's mind . The only connection between is the connection of “desire” either psychological, physical or materialistic.





Comments:

Radha asks behind closed doors – Who is on the door? Krishna says- I am Hari . Radha takes the other meaning of Hari as monkey and says- O monkey! Go to the gardens there is no requirement of monkey here. Krishna said- ‘Darling I am Krishna.’ Radha meaning the other synonym of Krishna as ‘Black’ says- I fear from black monkey more. Krishna says- ‘I am Madhusudan.’ Radha taking the other meaning of Madhusudan as bumble bee says- O bumble bee, go to the creepers laden with flowers.

Thus, feeling timid by the usage of shlesha alankar in meanings of his words by beloved Radha, bless you all.



This is part of a style of poetry prevalent in Sanskrit which uses the dialogue between the two people to convey a message. Especially in this the exploration is made for the humor and wit, in which the end is submission making it a unique quality of eastern philosophy and way of life.



*O my world ,I call to you;
I feel trapped, A part of the queue;
There are the times, So hard to define;
When the desire, Feels like fire;
To free the soul, From cries that are foul;
But I am here, More to bear;
There will a moment, When will be the moment;
To be with the truth, And truth is you..*

...Utkarsh

Comments:

In this poem the author tries to express the shackles of life which call to be removed. Life is treated as a waiting period for something that is ultimate. But the sufferings and repetitiveness faced during that time make him to cringe on the longing to achieve that early.

Relating to the environment the author live in, may suggest the tumultuous/ deceptive relationship or it may be due to the complete detached on life.



His Words

Comments:

This is a chaupayi i.e. a part of the Ramcharitmanas where Hanuman decides to go to Lanka for searching Sita. It says that-

“The instant Hanuman puts his feet on the mountain, they descend into the depth of the earth. He moves just like the aimed and unstoppable bow of Raghupati.”

Thus in this poem the poet has used metaphors which are amplified and exaggerated to give bigger that life effect. Or else taking another view, they could also be explained on the symbolic meaning they dictate. Like on the voyage to find Sita, Hanuman crushes very obstacle which looks like mountain to the people. Such dual meaning are conveyed by the chaupayi in Ramcharitmanas.



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