

RELOCATING SRI AUROBINDO'S AESTHETICS: SOME CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

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Tam durdarsam gudham anupravistam guhahitam
gahvareshtam puranam
Adhyatma-yogadhigamena devam matva dhiro
harsa-sokau jahati

[Realsing through self-contemplation that primal god, difficult to be seen, deeply hidden, set in the cave of the heart, dwelling in the deep, the wise man leaves behind both joy and sorrow-**Katha Upanishad** I.2.12]

A silence that it like a lake, a smooth and compact surface. Down below, submerged, the words are waiting. And one must descend, go to the bottom, be silent, wait.

Octavio Paz, *The Poetic Revelation, The Bow and the Lyre*. 1973: 131.

I am not a Bhakta, I am nota a Jnani. I am not a worker for the Lord. What am I then? A tool in the hands of my Master, a flute blown upon by the divine Herd-Boy, a leaf driven by the breath of the Lord.

Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Aphorisms: Bhakti, SABCL XVII*, p. 129.

This essay is an endeavour to examine the deeper interlocking structures of Sri Aurobindo's thought that frame his reconstruction of the poetic—as an alternative to the decay and crisis hastened in by colonization and close in its wake, modernity and its gran narratives. His was not a mere superficial involvement with the political an social forces of his times—a mere tip of the ice-berg for him-- but a more profound one that led on to a deeper engagement with the total transformation of human's being. Towards that end he raised

cardinal questions about human evolution and spiritual intersection, and problematised the location and position of the human (in his specific *systemental*) being. He experienced the anguish and laceration of a soul in the mystical quest of the absolute and it is in his poetry and the continued attempt at a poetic resolution of the situation of being that we sense the evidence of the struggle. And as I attempt to show, the two cardinal features of his aesthetic are *austerity*— that led him into yogic askesis—and his notion of *avesa*—that led him on to his theorizing of an *overhead aesthesis*. Either way his is a philosophy of integral bliss, of *ananda*, of *akhanda rasa*.

That Sri Aurobindo* (1872-1950) attempted a creative and critical engagement with the Western history of ideas, in an intellectual and radical manner, locating himself in a pan-Indian context is a fact that cannot be overlooked. It was an intimate part of his nineteenth century intellectual legacy—Platonic, Hegelian, Bergsonian and romantic at the same time. And yet, at almost every point in his life his was an “integrative” eye that sought a holistic vision, and to that end his works are attempts toward a *unifying awareness*— an ultimate *communion and transformation in poetic terms*, which constituted his *Indian* legacy. This could be among the major reasons why he chose to disengage himself from political action as a *violent nationalist* and moved to Pondicherry, in south India, in relative isolation and poetic solitude. The search for the ultimate all-inclusive vision that transcended all differences and territories—which was *a-historical*— in an austere space, lies at the root of his life and work.⁹² This search is evidenced right from his early works—poetic pieces that were composed while a student overseas, and the trajectory finds its culmination in his major work of the later period – between 1910-1950. This involvement also forms the very foundation of his life’s work: a poetic view of all existence: it reveals traces of his engagement with the Vedic sruti, as well as with the grand pursuit of excellence and perfection in the wake of Sanskrit aestheticians. In essence, the Aurobindian vision is a poetic one because, as he realized, only as an *aesthetic experience* could the universe be finally resolved. And the process of seeking out this resolution forms the leitmotif for his work. In the final analysis, his entire life was in communion with the superior command- the *avesa*—or the *elation of the inrush*.

⁹² The search for all inclusiveness could have motivated the founding of various ashrams by many of the nationalist leaders—Mahatma Gandhi had his Sabarmathi, so did Jayaprakash Narayan and Vinoba Bhave, the founder of the Boodan movement etc).

In an early essay – *The Strength of Stillness*—he writes of the two great forces in the universe, silence and speech, and relates them to action in the world:

When we strive to act, the forces of Nature do their will with us; when we grow still, we become their master.... The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.⁹³

And the limits of action reach *overt inaction* and touch upon the deep roots of being. Here the access to the self-sustaining harmony of the Spirit begins, and all contraries and differences cease to be. Much later he writes:

When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty.⁹⁴

Action, silence, harmony and beauty—form the corner stones of the aesthetic resolution that Sri Aurobindo drives towards conceptually. And it is out of a source of austere stillness that he seeks the will to *supramental transformation*. We read in one of his letters: *In my view a man's value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame, or what he does but on what he is and inwardly becomes*. And this inward becoming is the creative self, becoming conscious of its spiritual affinities. In the Aurobindian scheme of things poetry “opens a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital...”⁹⁵ And, this it achieves through the surrender to the *avesa* from the *above-mental* planes—it is an inrush and overflow to the level of *ananda*.

In what follows, my endeavour is to examine the deeper interlocking structures of Sri Aurobindo's thought that frame his reconstruction of the poetic—as an alternative to the decay and crisis hastened in by colonization and close in its wake, modernity and its grand narratives. His was not a mere superficial involvement with the political and social forces of his times—a mere tip of the ice-berg for him— but a more profound one that led on to a deeper engagement with the total transformation of human's being. Towards that end he raised cardinal questions about human evolution and spiritual intersection, and problematised the location and position of the human (in his specific system—*mental*) being. He experienced the anguish and laceration of a soul in the mystical quest of the absolute and it is in his poetry and the continued

⁹³ Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library Vol.XXIX. (Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972): 811.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ SABCLXXVI, 278.

attempt at a poetic resolution of the situation of being that we sense the evidence of the struggle. And as I attempt to show, the two cardinal features of his aesthetic are *austerity*—that led him into yogic askesis—and his notion of *avesa*—that led him on to his theorizing of an *overhead aesthesis*. Either way his is a philosophy of integral bliss, of *ananda*, of *akhanda rasa*.

Sri Aurobindo's life falls into three phases, as the biographer would perceive it: first, boy hood and university education overseas till the return to Baroda as an academic; second, as a firebrand revolutionary and non-pacifist; the third the recluse in Pondicherry. The significant aspect that links these three divergent phases is poetry; he constantly worked at it—composing or writing/thinking about it. In view of the literary aesthete, perhaps, his compositions in English might bespeak only of his amateurish reworking of the high romantics and later the echoing of a decadent sensibility of late nineteenth century English poetry. However, a closer scrutiny would reveal the workings of incessant critical temperament, and a critical mind that tirelessly kept refining itself. Sri Aurobindo's poems trace the graph of an awakening poetic insight. Poetry designed for him the trajectory of an ascending curve—that would faithfully reflect the evolution of humanity into what he envisaged as the next stage in evolution. His superman was distinct from the Nietzschean kind—not only in terms of sensibility and value but also in terms of humility and acquiescence. His superman was no achiever but one who realized the true value of asceticism and austerity—*the rishi*.

In a significant poem composed sometime before 1900, with the title "*The Rishi*,"⁹⁶ he strikes a typical Upanisadic-dialogic note and sets forth the aspiring ideals of the maturing poet:

RISHI

He sat on being's summit grand, a peak
Immense of fire

MANU

Knows he the secret of release from tears
And from desire?

RISHI

His voice is the last murmur silence hears
Tranquil and dire

MANU

The silence calls us then and shall enclose?

RISHI

Our true abode
Is here and in the pleasant house He chose

⁹⁶ See *Collected Poems*. 1972; rpt. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1986: 297-312.

To harbour God.

The context of his thinking then was certainly inspired by his immediate political pursuits—the nationalist rebel was then in the thick of political pamphleteering and his avowed interest was *to instill a vigor and spontaneity into the tamasic-strung religiosity of the Indian psyche and at the same time implant a divine human face on the mechanized march of western materialism*. The austerity that the rishi here projects is not one of total withdrawal and retreat from the karmic world, but on the other hand, one grounded in Yogic metaphysics that is inclusive of action and being in a much higher level of consciousness. We need to remember that Sri Aurobindo lived with his spiritual and aesthetic quests as we live with our everyday realities.

Of course, Sri Aurobindo had access only to the late nineteenth century terminology in which to couch his metaphysical theory and poetics. While nationalism provided him with the incentive to reinvestigate pan Indian values and contextualize them, in order to counter the dehumanizing process of imperialism and colonial dominance, his intellectual inquiries led him onto territories beyond the known. His was definitely a mystical quest but at the same time a practical one. Therefore, a limited value judgement—in terms of his textual output— fails to bring out the magnitude and totality of his work. Sri Aurobindo participates in a global debate- a creative dialogue that is timeless and beyond history. When the “*avesa*” or “*enthusiasmos*” (in Platonic terms)— as he envisions it—pours out through the Overmental consciousness the Overhead aesthesis commences, and the experience passes through the multiple planes and parts of consciousness and ends in *delightful wisdom* a complete transformation.⁹⁷ And this is how he reconstructs the poetic that he visualizes at the heart of a divine creative evolution. We could term his theory as a spiritualised aesthetic. All art, as Sri Aurobindo envisioned it, seeks to arrive at a concentrated expression of the Spirit and it is from the soul that the expression originates and it is to the soul that it unveils the real.⁹⁸ We could attempt to situate his spiritual aesthetic at the nexus of the east and west. His reading of the Indian tradition that he chose to differentiate from the colonized legacy was one founded on the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita—the *prastanatrayi*. And in the aesthetic evolution of the human race he recognized the unfolding of the divine creatrix.

The transforming power of poetry has been conceptually recognized by the Sanskrit aestheticians.

apare kavya samsare kavir eva prajapatih
yathasmai rocate visvam tathedam parivartate

⁹⁷ For a detailed description of the *overmental aesthetics* see my *The Mantra of Vision* (1989).

⁹⁸ *The Future Poetry*. 2nd ed. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1985. p.11.

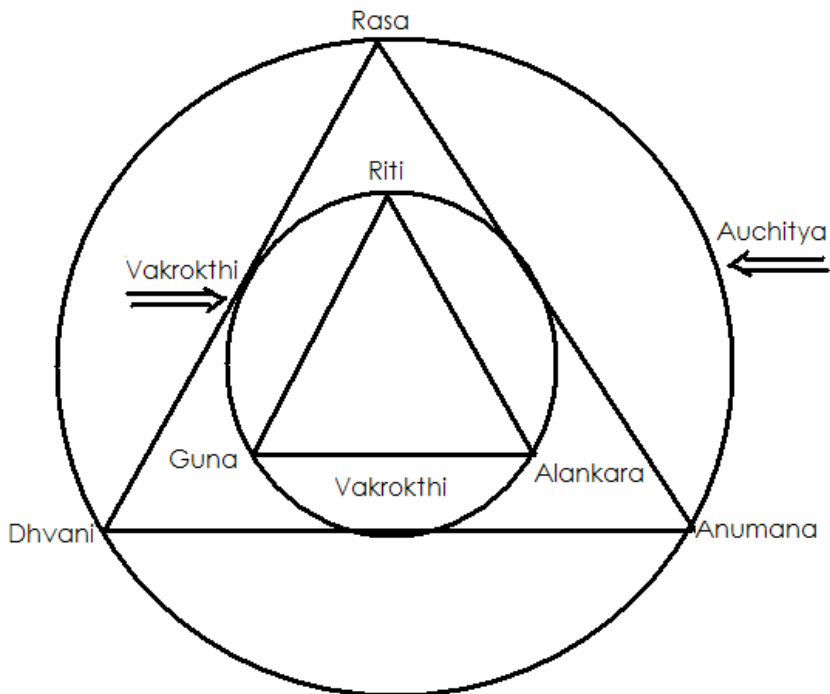
(In the boundless realm of poetry the poet himself is the creator,
and as it pleases him, so does this world transform itself)

Anandavardhana, *Dhvanyaloka* (*udyota III, vritti on karikas 41 and 42*)

Not only in the context of the world thus created does the poet effect transformation, but by extension once the created work reaches across to the *sahrdaya* the process of transformation also attains new dimensions. In a way, as the Sanskrit aestheticians visualized it, *rasa* constitutes the essence of the aesthetic circuit. This is a *holistic* concept especially in comparison with the fragmented approaches of Anglo American theorists: while formalists would lay inordinate stress on the formal and structural properties—the text— other theorists of meaning would concentrate on those aspects of meaning production like the reader, history, class, race, gender etc. *Rasa*, as a conceptual aesthetic incorporates the three nodes of the aesthetic act—the creator (in terms of the work), the text (the nexus or the intersection), and the reader, or the producer of meaning.⁹⁹ Alongside *Dhvani*, *Rasa* constitutes the other major school of critical theory in the Sanskrit canon. The *navina* or new school of *Alankarikas* beginning with Anandavardhana, brought in emotion in the form of *bhava* into the mainstream of critical analysis, and argued that the process of communication of emotion in art demanded closer scrutiny—*dhvani* or the *infinite reverberation of suggested meaning* became an indispensable tool for critical analysis. In their fine hair-splitting theoretical arguments, the Sanskrit aestheticians from the 1st century in the line of law-givers like Bharata, have propounded multiple perceptions and points of reference in approaching a work of art—the text, the context, the meaning and its subtle processes have been quite well studied. In an equally systematic manner, in order to understand the welter of theories comprehensively, Kuppuswami Sastri¹⁰⁰ provides a graph that could very well form a key to the whole geography and terrain. (See Figure)

⁹⁹ See G B Mohan Thampi. “Rasa as Aesthetic Experience.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24 (1965-66):75-79; Radhakamal Mukerjee, “Rasas as Springs of Art in Indian Aesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24 (1965-66): 91-96; and Pravas Jivan Chaudhury. “The Aesthetic Attitude in Indian Aesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24 (1965-66):145-217.

¹⁰⁰ *Kuppuswami Sastri Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume part I* . Ed. S.S. Janaki. Madras: The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1981: 132.



In Sastri's view, *Rasa* is one of the highways toward an understanding of the text, and as the figure shows, *Rasa* is the mainspring of action while *Dhvani* and *Anumana* or inference are ways of understanding it, and the main circle that encompasses these—*Auchitya*—is the notion of appropriateness or propriety that constitutes a work of art, although *Rasa* is the main *raison-de-e'tre* for the entire process. The inner circle that nestles the inner trio of *riti*, *guna* and *alankara*—constitute the formal elements of style, quality, and embellishment, wherein *vakrokthi* or deviant/ specialized statement would encircle them.

The graph also represents their historical inter-relation. The bigger circle encloses the bigger triangle, which stands for *auchitya* which may be termed as 'adaptation' to be understood in its philosophical sense. Adaptation is understood in this sense as standing for the perfect harmony which parts bear to each other and to the whole. (Sastri 1981:132-33)

Now, as the foregoing arguments would show, the aesthetic circuit begins and continues from/through the experiential nexus of the artist and the world. A work of art continues to be a transforming force—mainly because it occurs in the locus of the essential *rasa* of being—very much in the line of the visionary

poets of the Veda: *kavayah satya srutah*, the poets are the seers and hearers of truth. However, in Sri Aurobindo's aesthetic theory, there are multiple planes and parts of being through which this interface is achieved. As he envisions it, the psyche or the soul is that spark of the essential divine that works out the aesthetic destiny of man in the universal system of becoming. In the Aurobindian scheme of things *Rasa is the mind's understanding of beauty and pleasure in it accompanied usually by the vitals enjoyment of it ("bhoga")*. *Mental pleasure or vital enjoyment are not "ananda," but only derivations from the concealed universal "ananda" of the spirit in things* (SABCL IX, p 493) The artist/poet is one who has the inner receptive faculty to sense the passage of the divine afflatus. In this Sri Aurobindo is not far from the aesthetic theory (albeit with differences and subtle modifications) propounded by Anandavardhana, Bhamaha, Vamana, Rudrata and Mammata—the major difference is that he maps out the deep and innermost sources of poetry and describes them in a subtle manner with the profound precision of a systematic scholar or a physical scientist. Bhamaha, often considered as the originator of the *alankara prasthanas*, holds that the most important faculty of a poet is poetic intuition or *pratibha*. This faculty is not something that can be achieved through *abhyasa*, or practice under good guidance, or the discriminating scholarship acquired through a teacher or guru, *vyutpatti*. The author of *Kavyalankara Sutra*, Vamana believes that *pratibha* is an acquired impression from previous births. However, almost all the theories propounded by the Sanskrit aestheticians, endeavour to approach the work of art in its later manifested stages and close-examine its form and structure—Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, grounds his theories on the *origin* and source of the work of art, and this gives his views their distinction.

Sri Aurobindo's reconstruction of the poetic informs his entire work; in fact his is a poetic resolution of the problem of human existence—be it worked out as a full-scale philosophical position in *The Life Divine* or as a practical guide to application through *The Synthesis of Yoga*, or finally evidenced in his life work, the epic *Savitri*. It is my contention that his involvement in poetry is what provided him with meaning, and his philosophy is the poetic. At every stage in his life, as I have pointed out, he composed poetry. In one of his letters he wrote that he used *Savitri*, his most ambitious poetic exercise as a means of ascent and at every new stage attained by his poetic consciousness he rewrote it.

THE SOURCES OF POETRY

In an essay composed in 1912 and first published posthumously in the *Advent* (1953) Sri Aurobindo anticipates some cardinal issues of the later, fuller, reconstruction of his poetics as it appears in *The Future Poetry* (1953; 1985—occasioned by the debate on James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature* (1917) Madras:Ganesh and Co.)

All poetry is an inspiration, a thing breathed into the thinking organ from above; it is recorded in the mind, but is born in the higher principle of direct knowledge or ideal vision which surpasses the mind. It is in reality a revelation.¹⁰¹

Revelation is the revealing power or the transparency of the poetic vision that inducts the influx of the supramental, and *Inspiration* formulates the articulation of the primal vision. And as Sri Aurobindo sees it, the *vision* and the *word* combine in their unique order in the *Mantra* or the seeing speech. Now, with an assured scientific precision, he goes on to qualify and mark out the graduated levels of the origin and manifestation of the poetic.

Sri Aurobindo resorts to the terminology of yoga in order to distinguish the planes of revelation and inspiration: in its highest elemental manifestation the revelation-inspiration complex “works above and outside the brain, above even the hundred petalled lotus of the ideal mind...” and great *truth-seeing* poetry of the Veda results. The “uncertain process” of the “mind” dilutes and corrupts the order of revelation as it is worked out in the mediating poet. Sri Aurobindo uses specific terms in order to distinguish the levels and planes of inspiration—the *heart or the emotionally realizing mind*, the observing and *reasoning intellect* with its aids, fancy and memory, and the *intuitive intellect*—in a qualitative order. However, poetry written from the reasoning intellect is bound to be “unemotional and unlifted”—in short, the *neoclassical*. It needs to be either resuscitated by the *heart*, the seat of emotions, or “lifted up” by the *intuitive intellect*. As he puts it “...poetry to be great must have either enthusiasm or ecstasy” (106). Even when the inspiration is from the heart, he perceives a dual level—one of lower and higher—the emotional drag often curtails the higher ascension of the inspired. The hallmark of the best is that it would be “rapturously inevitable.” Even in the case of the higher centers of the *intuitive intellect*, there could be the mix up of form and content that would structurally reorganize the creative influx or revelation. With the characteristic insight of the

¹⁰¹ *The Sources of Poetry*, SABCLIII, p. 105.

scholar-critic, Sri Aurobindo, cites the instance of the works of Wordsworth and Milton—as he sees it, there is an imbalance of the revelation-inspiration complex that informs their work. If the inspiration falls short of the levels of the manifested revelatory the result would be nothing extraordinary. In his terms, *minor poetry* is poetry that is purely *mental* without either the revelation or the inspiration from *above*. It is instrumental in delighting the vital elements through its sheer jingle and sensational qualities.

There are three *gunas* or qualities that could inform the activity of inspiration—*tamasic*, *rajasic* and *sattwik*. In their distinguishing and stimulating qualities the Aurobindian critical vision demarcates a *poetic of inspiration*. The poignancy of the *avesa* or the elation of the inrush from above, is intercepted by the inspiration in different ways which results in markedly different kinds of poetry. When it is the gross senses it would result in the tamasic or merely sensational, when it is the fiery stimulus of the rajasic inspiration—(he marks out the poetry of Shelley and Spenser, Keats and the Elizabethans) a poetry that is incomplete in vision but bold and vibrant in expression would result. However, the perfect inspiration in the intuitive intellect is the sattwic or “luminous inspiration”

which is disinterested, self-contained, yet at will noble, rich or vigorous, having its eye only in the right thing to be said and the right way to say it. It does not allow its perfection to be interfered with by emotion or eagerness but this does not shut it out from ecstasy and exaltation. (109)

All these distinctions might sound so subjective and founded on personal taste. But the vivacity with which Sri Aurobindo discusses the issues, and the effortlessness and ease with which he moves in and out of critical insight, history and metaphysics citing instances from the canonical British poets and texts he is so familiar, gives his arguments a certain kind of conviction and validity. We should keep in mind that his was a life grounded on austerity and seclusion in the yogic strain. “A poet need not be a reflective critic,” he writes, “he need not have the reasoning and analyzing intellect and dissect his own poetry.” But he necessarily needs to be equipped with two qualities: “intuitive judgment” and “intuitive reason.” The first, to judge whether he is in possession of the required level of inspiration, and, the second, to comprehend its validity. It is the self-assurance that is born of long years of austerity and *tapas* that gives rise to such interior conviction and finer discrimination. It is also the sufficient *distancing* that history accorded him that perhaps gave Sri Aurobindo that tone and faith distinguishing him from the other law givers in the line of Bharata and Anandavardhana. What the poet is to achieve through this spiritual aesthetic of revelation and inspiration is that final leap into the *mantra*.

Since his aesthetic theory is formulated from the Vedic vision the idea of the *mantra* is cardinal to it. In *The Future Poetry*, he defines it thus:

The mantra or the poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. (17)

The three interrelated elements of rhythm, style and vision, in their highest possibilities unify to form the mantra. And it is through a rediscovery or reinventing of the mantra as the unifier of sound and sense, as signifier and signified, that Sri Aurobindo effects the alchemy of an aesthetic transformation.

Now, it is my contention that Sri Aurobindo was essentially a poet and his major contribution is the reconstruction of the poetic at the heart of being. [Perhaps the closest that any non Indian seers have come towards such a position would be Martin Heidegger, Octavio Paz, Harold Bloom] I have argued elsewhere that "it was not merely the urge to redefine a nationalistic tradition and validate its futuristic insights on the face of an oppressive cultural onslaught that resulted in *The Future Poetry*, but something more of a significant involvement with the larger questions of poetry and human life."¹⁰² At no point in his life has he circumvented his socio-political and cultural situation. His thought and action sought to reintegrate the multiple planes of consciousness. His futuristic project was to bring to bear recognition on the true essence of the poetic. In him we recognize a visionary who brought his extraordinary enlightened values to bear on his times and actions—quietly doing his work with the single-minded, simple trust of the *bhakta*—asserting his Indian ness, all the while recognizing the heterogeneity of the poetic.

What I have attempted to reread was the singularity of his aesthetic—based on values gained in austerity and through an openness to the divine enthousiasmos, or *avesa*. What Sri Aurobindo did was to conceptualise and problematise certain issues with relation to the human being's changing encounters with consciousness and the world. He occurred at a crucial point in the formation of a nationalistic awareness, when a whole people were struggling to redeem their history from an oppressive present, and he attempted a conscious recovery of a collective heritage, in order to reconstruct an identity through *difference and integration*.

The connection between capitalism and the project of European modernity is by now well recognized. Whether capitalist forces shaped the process of modernity or the struggle of the modern churned out of industrial revolution the capitalist world is a moot point. However, capitalism did indeed create its own alternatives in the guise of communism and Marxism from within its own socio-

¹⁰² S.Murali. "Sri Aurobindo's *The Future Poetry*: A Critique" *Litt Crit* 41(1995):81-94.

political situations and contradictions. In the Indian context the collective forces of modernity were thrust upon an unprepared situation by the power structures of an oppressive imperialism and in its wake colonial dominance. The response was many-faced. On the one hand there was Mahatma Gandhi's alternative model of passive resistance and satyagraha, with his own special mode of ashram life emphasizing traditional, self-dependent, appropriate technology and indigenous values. Balgangadhar Tilak and others countered the onslaught in its own terms of aggression and arms—through the militant nationalist version of *swaraj*.¹⁰³

Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, attempted to subvert the forces of dominance and oppression by seeking recourse in conceptual and ideological alternatives—his reconstruction of the poetic that subsumed all differences was formulated as an *alter/native* in terms of *knowledge* and *culture*. In more ways than one Sri Aurobindo's is a self-reflexive *postcolonial* consciousness, for the most, *not* defining itself *vis-a-vis* the history of colonial oppression and domination—for its stance is defined by *beyonding* and its reference points are a-historical. It could also be read as defining for the most the concerns of the later *postmodern* in its deconstruction of knowledge and culture.

Further, I argue, that Sri Aurobindo's involvement with the poetic is not merely at the literary or *simple aesthetic* level, but his aesthetics is an *all-transforming vision*. It is one of the *strategies* that he evolved *intuitively* in order to counter the forces of modernity and colonization. To that extent his was an exemplary life and vision that requires to be reread. It not only reinstates the validity of intellect and intuition but also *through a reconstruction of the poetic at the heart of being* revalidates the relevance and significance of surrender and acceptance. Little wonder that Sri Aurobindo insisted on reading the *Gita* as a text of Bhakti yoga. His vision and significance remains to be relocated, from the point of view of his poetics. Hence the significance and relevance of my reading—*Austerity*, as I see it pertains to culture, while *Avesa* pertains to revelation—knowledge.

All this might sound so remote and alien in the present day world pervaded as it is for the most by a culture grounded on sheer superficialities and surface textures. Our times are marked by the over-dominance of market values, and a consumerist culture pervades all and everything. Those values for which

¹⁰³ Gandhi of course belongs to the third phase of the Indian National Congress. If the first phase was the rudimentary congress as a formulating force mostly given to requests and supplications at the doors of the British, the second was the violent nationalist one represented by Tilak and his followers where Sri Aurobindo belonged, and the third phase was Mahatmaji's period of passive resistance and the founding of the soul-power. In their various ways the nationalists attempted to counter the onslaught of colonialism.

Socrates died and the Buddha renounced his all might sound so wayward and way off to our present day world. Intellectuality and the pursuit of deeper truths through intuition and an informed quality of life are a thing of the past, part of the grand narratives. The postmodern apparently has thinned out any final vestiges for any relevance for the sublime and the profound. The disappearance of universal validity and universally recognized criteria in our academic, ideological and intellectual front seems to have stranded us midstream, but the complexities of our existence are clear not even to us.

Now when one reflects upon Sri Aurobindo in the context of Indian literary consciousness, one cannot but cease to wonder at his continued relevance and role. Granted we live in a terribly complex age of information and market capitalism where the values and aspirations he embodied would sound apparently so remote, however, the revolution that he hastened in through his reconstruction of the poetic is still so fresh and so potent. And perhaps, he continues to exert his influence in the creative minds of the contemporary generation—they hold him in awe and reverence. Whether they internalize his spiritual poetic is a different question. Indian cultural history has a strange integrity despite its many turns, deviations and external interpolations. Sri Aurobindo's poetic reconstruction has been indelibly ingrained in it. However, in clouded times like the present we need to dig a little deep in order to bring it to the surface and reclaim its potential as transforming conceptual force.

*Sri Aurobindo** (1872-1950) was among the significant patriotic nationalists who fought against the British Raj, and quite unlike Gandhi he was never a pacifist. Although, right from his early childhood he was brought up in England by his anglophile father, Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose, became one of the most noted of Indian thinkers and philosophers, a radical mystic par excellence! He wrote profusely on various topics ranging from political issues to abstract philosophy, poetics, prosody and history to social and psychological issues, literary criticism to yoga and mysticism, sociolinguistics to Tantric and Vedic studies. His direct involvement in Indian revolutionary nationalism, however, was quite abruptly terminated when he withdrew to the safe haven of Pondicherry (which was a French colony), and continued to live as a recluse. Almost all his major writings and translations have been serialized in his journal *Arya* that he edited. *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) is his major philosophical contribution. Despite all his multifarious involvements in issues relating to politics and society, Sri Aurobindo continued to write poetry. His magnum opus is, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, which he continued to revise and redraft till his death in 1950.