

Illumination of Mind in the Light of Sri Aurobindo's Sonnets

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The aim of true poetry is to interpret the hidden meaning that are concealed from the common sight. When the poet approaches in the right direction to bring about the truth of vision, the revelation takes place. The intensity of the inner sight is evidently much stronger in the poet as he is able to awaken the readers to the inner sight as well. Sri Aurobindo points out that “powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of nature and life and man whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it” (CWSA 26:30).

Sri Aurobindo speaks of mind and its division into different parts –Higher Mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind and Over mind. By Higher Mind, he means it is a mind of larger clarity of spirit, luminous thought – Mind, a mind of spiritual conceptual knowledge. It is the self-revelation of eternal knowledge. It can freely express itself in single ideas but its most characteristic movement is a mass idealisations, a system of totality of truth-seeing at single view. It purifies, delivers and creates through knowledge. Illumined mind is that which lies behind the surface mind (ordinary mind) and can only be directly experienced by sadhana, by breaking down the habit of being on the surface and by going deeper within. It infuses the senses into a direct and total spiritual sensation so that our vital and physical being can contact the divine in all things. It throws a transforming light on the physical mind, which breaks its limitations, inertia, narrow thought power and doubts. Both higher and intuitive mind depend for their authority on a yet higher power, the Intuitive Mind. It transforms not only mind but also heart, life, senses and even body. It changes the whole consciousness into stuff of intuition, for it brings its own greater radiant movement into will, feelings and emotions. Beyond intuitive mind is Over Mind, which is Super mind's delegate to the ignorance. Overmind is the cosmic consciousness. It is the place of God. Overmental plane is the highest consciousness one can achieve without transcending the mental system. Sri Aurobindo speaks of another mind that is Super Mind. Beyond Overmind are the planes of Supermind or unity of consciousness. Supermind is the infinite unitary consciousness or the truth-idea beyond the three lower planes of matter, life and mind. Supermind is the dynamic form of Sachchidananda and the necessary mediator or link between the transcendent Sachchidananda and creation. Sri Aurobindo says,

At the outset man lives in his physical mind which perceives the actual, the physical, the objective and accepts it as fact and this fact is as self-evident truth beyond question: whatever is not actual, not physical, not objective it regards as unreal or unrealised, only to be accepted as entirely real when it has succeed in becoming actual, becoming a physical fact, becoming objective. (The Life Divine 429)

Man is engrossed in worldly dreams and takes material things as real. As he sates in *The Divine Comedy* “... a dream is real to the dreamer so long as he sleeps but waking shows it to be unreal ,so our experience of word seems to us positive and real but when we stand back from illusion, we shall find that it had no reality...” (*The Life Divine* 436).

Sri Aurobindo retired completely from the physical atmosphere in order to bring about the descent of what he called the supermind. “By the supermind is meant the full Truth-Consciousness of the Divine Nature in which there can be no place for the principle of division

and ignorance; it is always a full light and knowledge superior to all mental substance or mental movement” (*Letters on Yoga*, Part one, 257).

In *The synthesis of Yoga* he states “The integral Yoga of knowledge has to recognise the double nature of this Sachchidananda in which He is veiled – and to reconcile and unite the two in the oneness of the illumined realisation”. The transformation from mind to supermind cannot be completed or really executed without the awakening of the truth-mind which corresponds in the mental being to the supermind and is capable of receiving mentally its illuminations.

In sonnet “Man and Enigma”, Sri Aurobindo says that man is entrapped in the riddle of thought as ‘His conscious life obeys the Inconscient’s rule/His need of joy is learned in sorrow’s school’ (2-3). He wonders through mud of life and ignorant mind crawls towards light as ‘The slave and creator of his fate’. Earth is a place which provides human worldly matters and ‘Earth; by accident endangered man’. He is ignorant of his own life ‘A mindhalf shadow, and half gleam; a breath/ That wrestles, captive in a world of death’. The life on earth of ignorant is like ‘lame brief years’. Aurobindo shows inner light of human soul, ‘Attempt of divinity within/A consciousness in the inconscient Night /To realise its own supernal light.(9-11 *Man The Thinking Animal*)

In the sonnet, “Contrasts”, Sri Aurobindo lighted on the contrast of thinking of human life as ‘A thinking mind starts from the unthinking strife’ and he puts light on ‘Immortal life breathed in that monstrous death’. According to Sri Aurobindo, “All illimitableness, all infinity, all absoluteness is pure delight”. All things are terms for Sachchidananda. Just as Sachchidananda moves towards the realisation of universal existence in the individual and of the form exceeding consciousness in body and mind, so it moves towards the realisation of universal, self-existence and objectless delight in the flux of particular experience and objects. As Sri Aurobindo says in the sonnet *Evolution* [1],

Of ignorant life and death to the spirit’s light.

Mind liberated swam Light’s ocean vast,

And life escaped from its grey tortured line;

I saw Matter illuminating its parent Night.

The soul could feel into infinity cast

Timeless God-bliss the heart incarnadine. (lines 9-12)

Evolution is the key to understand the purpose of individual and cosmic nature. The evolutionary purpose is determined by the very nature of creation. Spirit is involved in matter for the pure delight of manifestation and when that purpose is achieved, it must by its very inherent teleology evolve again to its original form. This is clearly exhibited by the process of evolution in Nature. In the sonnet *Evolution* [2], Sri Aurobindo writes,

A might no human will nor force can gain,

A knowledge seated in eternity,

A bliss beyond our struggle and our pain

Are the high pinnacle of our destiny.

O Thou who climb'dst to mind from the dull stone,

Face now the miracled summits still unwon. (lines 8-14)

Mind founded in life developed intellect, developed its types of knowledge and ignorance, truth and error till it reached the spiritual perception and illumination and now see as in a glass dimly the possibility of the supermind and truth-conscious existence. In sonnet 'Mind the Mediator', Sri Aurobindo says

Our mind was framed a lens of segment sight

Piecing out inch by inch the world's huge mass,

And reason a small hard theodolite

Measuring unreally the measureless ways.(5-8)

We can see the mind of light gathering itself out of ignorance, assembling its constituent elements, building up its shapes and types, however, imperfect at first and pushing them towards perfection till it can cross the border of ignorance and appear in light, in its own light. The sonnet 'Liberation' expresses the separation of the larger self from the small self which is linked to mind. The larger self is the immortal soul bathed in pure bliss, Sachchidananda. And this blissful larger self dissolves into the infinity. The liberation is but an escape from the 'Whirling dance of mind' prone to obsession destroying 'the spirit's silence'. He has risen above birth and death and from the pretty ego of the being. His mind and body have become luminous with 'endless light' flowing in him and he has realized his real self in the soul who is in everyone and yet beyond everything. The poet, Sri Aurobindo depicts his state after the liberation in the sonnet *Liberation (1)* – 'My sense unsnared by touch and sound and sight,/My body a point in white infinities'(lines 11-12). Life in the transcendental consciousness is eternal as it is beyond the cycles of life and death, beyond joys and sorrows; it is pure existence, consciousness and bliss. It is not possible to describe this plane as it is beyond manifestation and all the mental gymnastics is inadequate to describe it. 'The Cosmic Spirit' has a similar content where Sri Aurobindo talks about his identity with every creature of the universe. His mind and life have enlarged to such a consciousness that all joys and sorrows, all the galaxies reside in him. His mind is silent and it is only the soul or the spirit that acts in him. "Impressive, I bear each act and thought and mood: / Time traverses my hushed infinitude" (lines 13-14).

We can see mind of light developing itself in that greater natural light taking its higher shapes and forms till it joins the supermind and lives as its subordinate portion or its delegate. In the sonnet *The Pilgrim of the Night*, Sri Aurobindo expresses 'I left the glory of the illumined mind/And the calm rapture of divinised soul' (lines 5-6). *The pilgrim of the Night* symbolically indicates the journey of ignorance to light. There is a struggle of the speaker to get rid of egoistic ignorance. The visual image of 'footprints' and 'tract' explicitly indicates protagonist's march towards immortality and in the couplet of the poem he speaks out 'And yet I know my footprints' track shall be/A pathway towards immortality' (lines 13-14).

In the sonnet *Discoveries of Science*, he describes the efforts made by humanity to discover the truth behind the physical existence of things. He discovers that the discoveries of science are only fragments of the truth. Science is not able to discover the complete truth as it

works with the material objects and according to Sir Aurobindo there are other planes of consciousness and the material objects are governed by other planes of consciousness too. As he speaks out, “Our truths discovered are but dust and trace/Of the eternal Energy in her race.”(13-14). The sonnet *Science and the Unknowable* indicates the limitation of man’s power. He contrasts science with the unknowable in this sonnet where he describes the working of science. The science fails to give clear and visible idea of invisible things. It shows limited power of Science to the unknowing. He says that science sums up everything into formula. It cannot see the force behind the material objects. He describes science, ‘It is a brain and hand without a soul’ but it cannot know the unknown behind the objects. But mind has ‘A piercing eye behind our outward stare’ and it helps to meet ‘infinite, wayless, mute, unknowable’. ‘Electron’, an indivisible unit of negative electricity and fundamental constituent of matter used in the sonnet named after the image aptly illustrates the abode of the infinite. Shiva, the omnipotent Hindu God resides in everywhere in hidden form:

His oneness in invisible forms he hides
Time’s tiny temples to eternity.
Atom and molecule in their unseen plan
Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,
Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man,—
Man on whom the World-Unity shall seize,
Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany
Of the timeless vastness of Infinity. (*Electron* lines 8-14)

According to him, science needs to discover the soul and not put everything into mechanical formulae. He did not find science to be an antagonist of the spirit, but a part of it. Sri Aurobindo finds the union of the two as the future of humanity, for science is incomplete unless it reaches the knowledge of God which is the aim of religion too. In the sonnet, *Electron*, he resolves this problem when he finds electron to be the chariot of Shiva, which means that the supreme consciousness has got embedded in the small particle (electron) known to humanity. He believes that even an electron potentially is God. His vision of science gives science, a larger scope to explore the non-material levels of existence as he describes science to be an instrument of God and not against Him. He writes in the poem, *Electron*, “His oneness in invisible forms he hides, / Time’s tiny temples to eternity” (lines 7-8).

In the sonnet *The Indwelling Universal*, the speaker’s omnipresence in all things is highlighted, ‘unborn I sit, timeless, intangible’. The soul of the protagonist expands and contracts as a result of containing ‘the wide world’ in his ‘souls’ embrace’. The colossal transformation of the being due to ‘Indwelling Universal’ has been clearly explained in this sonnet- ‘All things are shadows in my tranquil glass / My vast transcendence holds the cosmic whirl’ (lines 12-13).

The sonnet *Cosmic Consciousness* expresses the speaker’s enlarged self to his spirit’s vision of time and space. He is omnipresence and his identity is found in every spirit in universe. ‘I am the god and demon, ghost and elf, /I am the wind’s speed and the blazing star’ (lines 3-4).The visual-cum-kinaesthetic image of measureless wings illustrates the ‘I’

consciousness enlarging into cosmic consciousness, and yet it maintains intimacy with life, time and with 'born and unborn things'. He explains that this consciousness is expansive and he has risen above the divine consciousness that divides god and demon, joy and sorrow, and even separates the individual from another individual. He identifies with all joys and sorrows of human beings. He is beyond time and space and yet identifies himself with animate and inanimate things of the universe. It expresses one of Sri Aurobindo's life time yogic aim; striving for divine realization not for his self alone but for the whole mortal world- "I pass beyond Time and Life on measureless wings, / Yet still am one with born and unborn things" (lines 13-14). The same kind of cosmic consciousness is reflected in the sonnet, *The Hidden Plan*. He wants to break the 'small ego' and 'person task' and wish to unite with 'a bright persona of eternity'. The protagonist wants to unveil 'inert blind nature'. The golden light is symbolic of illumination of darker corner of ignorant mind. Even the brain, symbolic of the source of thought and logic and 'grey rooms of mind' became illuminated by the divine light. The colossal transformation due to the divine descent within the protagonist self is expressed through different words 'flame', 'wine', 'golden light' and 'illumination'.

In the sonnet, *The Universal Incarnation*, the sun is representative of wisdom. There is universal unification of human hearts. As the poet says 'The heart of a world in which all hearts are one.' The ray of divinity pervades over the universe. "Our mind is glimmering curtain of that Ray, / Our strength a parody of the Immortal's power" (lines 9-10).

'The Godhead' expresses the poet's individual experience of how his inner being became one with God. The momentary experience is a part of his yogic feat. His inner being, the soul could see the Godhead above his brow, within his body. The omnipotent head ponders over the poet's head. A face of calm immortality and omnipotent eye encircled its eye's sovereign power. The mingling of the heart of the poet and Godhead are manifested. Thus, the poet with his visionary sight could visualise the Godhead within him. Therefore the poet speaks out "I housed in me the Everlasting's peace, / The strength of One whose substance cannot die" (lines 11-12).

In the sonnets, *Krishna* and *Shiva* are his realisation of the personal or the individual aspect of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo had the vision of Vasudeva (Sri Krishna) when he was imprisoned in Alipore Jail during 1909. He saw Him in every material object and human beings around. As he says- 'I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes, / And heard the passion of the Lover's flute'. His realization was such that he did not see any criminal or murderer or judge but only souls in everybody. The sonnet 'Krishna' describes Sri Aurobindo's complete identity with Sri Krishna, 'For one moment lived the ages past; / The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last'. He also had the vision of Lord Shiva. In one of his letters he describes Krishna and Shiva which corroborates with his expression in poetry. He wrote —"Shiva is the lord of Tapas. The power is the power of Tapas. Krishna as a godhead is the lord of Ananda, Love and Bhakti; as an incarnation, he manifests the union of wisdom (Jnana) and works and leads the earth-evolution through this towards union with the Divine by Ananda, Love and Bhakti" (letters on Yoga 1:391).

The sonnet 'Shiva' speaks out about the abode of Shiva on 'white Summit of eternity' and his spouse Parvati and the poet expresses the nature of austerities that God is involved in. He sees him as a creator of the world whose dance is symbol of creation. The sonnet expresses Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experiences, realizations and visions of the personal Gods. The love between Shiva and Parvati is focussed in the sonnet, 'She lifts to Him who is Herself, until / The Spirit leaps into the Spirit's embrace' (lines 13-14).

The yogic feat of seeing the infinity of his soul is illuminated in the sonnet, *The Self's Infinity*. There is no barrier of time. Divine touch has pacified his thought and senses. All the excitement created in mind turned into void and mute magnificence. He wants to mix his life with the timeless hand of immortality. His heart and body fuses into eternity. He speaks out--“A momentless immensity pure and bare, / I search to an eternal everywhere” (lines 13-14). *Surrender* records the absolute submission of the poet's ego to the Godhead. He thinks all mortal beings should surrender to the glory of divinity. He wants to surrender his mind and his will to the will of Divine power. He leaves nothing untouched to the divine power but unite with the supreme power. His heart become indivisible to the beats of divine power. His body is used for ‘Thy engine’ bearing the message of divinity. The nerves and vein of the poet will bear the stream rapture of God. Thoughts of his will be the only thoughts of God only. The cause of the surrender reflects in the poet's wish mentioned in the last lines--‘Keep only my soul to adore eternally/And meet Thee in each form and soul of thee’ (lines 13-14).

The union of the Divine with the poet's soul is voiced in the sonnet, ‘The Divine Worker’. The unseen power of divinity controls the destiny of the poet. The ‘theorem’ of his life is completed by the presence of the invisible power. No outward danger can disturb the inward calmness of his spirit. As he unites with the Divine power, his act means the act for the divine. As result of the Divine descent into his soul, he has gained His Force which frees his being from the passage of time. The smiling power of the Divine makes his heart strong but fate and time have no significance to him. As he confesses “No power can slay my soul; it lives in Thee. /Thy presence is my immortality” (lines 13-14).

The protagonist in the sonnet, ‘The Guest’ has inner realization about death. Pain and sorrow of the living world cannot disturb the pure sanctuary of heart. Danger, fear, pendulating fate can rend the body and nerve but not the spirit which is free from the bound of time. He just prays to the God to awake his soul and God like Flame gives him company as guest. So he prays--“Awake, God's ray and witness in my breast, /In the undying substance of my soul/Flamelike , inscrutable the almighty Guest” (lines 9-11).

God plays different roles of creations like sculptor of living shapes, actor of life and death and artist of manifestation of forms and hues. He also plays the role of Scientist and mathematician mind without any mistake. As Sri Aurobindo speaks out in the sonnet, *Creation*,

Building a universe from Thy theories?

Protean is Thy spirit of delight,

Craftsman minute and architect of might,

World-adept of a thousand mysteries. (lines 9-12)

The word ‘wounds’ and ‘fight’ explicitly convey in the sonnet, *In the Battle*, the name of Jesus Christ nailed on the Cross. ‘I am full of wounds and fight mercilessly: / Is it not yet Thy hour victory?’(11-12). The poet can accept death and defeat without any regret but only for clutching the God.

In the sonnet, *The Little Ego*, the poet compares the ego of human being to puppet that little ego is created in world for the little profit of man in the world. Even ego fills each thread of life in each movement of life in earth. But there is no corner of heart free from egoism. Therefore he bends his mind, heart body and soul to the supreme power --“Our body and mind

to Thee and every cell,/And steeped in Thy world-infinity to live./The lost in light, shall fade the ignoble spell” (lines 10-12).

The sonnet, ‘the Body’ describes an idea in three quatrains and gives the final realization in the couplet. His body was limited with its limited consciousness and he nurtured it as his universe. When he realized the cosmic consciousness the body become only a small vehicle that carries the soul and noting more itself. The soul, supported by this small chariot is large and moves in this large space of the universe. In the second quatrain he admits that body is too small and fragile to carry out the magnanimous task of soul, but it has its own purpose in evolution and so it has been kept alive by soul. The quatrain describes the vision of the infinite before the body. It can see the “endless Time and Space” and the beautiful world beyond mind. Its heart is full of joy with this realization and its mind constantly thinks about the beautiful and distant things. The couplet gives the final statement of the poet in admiration of the body-“How grown with all the world conterminous/ Is the little dweller in this narrow house!” (lines 13-14). In the sonnet “Form” the poet describes the significance of form in the first eight lines. This poem has a philosophical tone. It addresses to those who reject the form or material existence in pursuit of the infinite and the formless. Sir Aurobindo says that the infinite dwells as finite in the form and that each microcosm inhabits infinite in it. The mystery of the Infinite is hidden in the form which is slowly revealed with time. In sestet the poet describes that it is the form that manifests the mysteries and the beauty of God. The flowers, the marvels of nature are but the expression of the Infinite in finite. The form expresses the One in its multiple forms and it is the form which is the base of further evolution.

The sonnet, ‘Omnipresence’ expresses how the poet has become one with God, ‘He is in me, facing everywhere.’ He expresses the qualities of the Divine who exists in different forms and names, who is the cause of all and yet beyond everything. God is one who is found everywhere and even in the smallest flower. By the light of Divine he is lighted and his body is a prison house to the divine power. He feels His presence everywhere in him and He is the cause of everything in his life. As he says,

He has become my substance and my breath;

He is my anguish and my anguish and my ecstasy.

My birth is His eternity’s sign, my death

A passage of His immortality. (lines 9-12)

‘The one self’ gives expression to the idea of seeking one’s self in those of others. Our self is two sides of a coin. The hater and lover both are unaware of hate and love themselves. Even the Lord Shiva and Krishna are but the manifestation of the single self. Both the Krishna and Shiva living with humanity seek for love and joy and fight against grief respectively. The seeking of identity of one’s self into other’s self is typically a Hindu idea of universal brotherhood that seems to have been expressed here. Thus the idea of unification of self is expressed –‘One self in all of us endures annoy, / Cries in his pain and asks his fate’s relief” (lines 11-12).

Sonnet after speaks of the joys of his enlarged awareness. A poet of the cosmic mysteries is to use his own phrase, he knows the greater and the hidden plan. And though his mind is ‘upon great and distant things’, the vision is clear and imperative, the unadulterated truth of human situation. Only when the mind is stilled, there dawns a deeper and higher

consciousness which bear golden within it the harmony we are hungering after. The mind yearns to immortalise its products and find means to transcend the limits of space and time. There is integral evolution of mind which is not merely confined to the material world. Sri Aurobindo says, "Authenticity is the first step towards absoluteness." Human values like truth and error, good and evil are relative and uncertain. This is all due to wrong consciousness. In the presence of the divine force, all things become lighted. Actually all the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo clearly focusses on the Divine consciousness and illumined ideas about limited bodily existence and beyond bodily consciousness. Actually he focuses his main thought by the illumination of mind through his sonnets.

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