

THE PROCESS OF POETIC CREATION IN THE POETRY OF Sri.AUROBINDO AND SHELLEY

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If poetry is the revelation of an inspired moment, the poet is only a medium of such a revelation. A Swiss critic Breitinger affirms that “the poet through the power of his inspiration creates entirely new things.”[1] The poets recreate an ideal world which allures man from the phenomenal world. The function and significance of poetry in man’s life is not a criticism of life but a contribution to a new awareness of a greater life.

The poet is the medium connecting us with the source of all creativity. It is an error to assert that the finest passage of poetry is produced by labour and study. The poet has a vision and he participates in this vision which may be said to be eternal, infinite and one. The work of art is something which one cannot approach through will and reason. The intellect may actually hinder its production, According to Sri Aurobindo, “however it is the pseudo-classical or lower kind of classical art and literature which depends upon the faculty of intellect for achieving perfection, for real classical art, works by a large vision and inspiration not by the process of intellect.”[2]

In the inspired moment there is a tremendous transformation in the individual consciousness. This process is beyond any rational explanation because poetry is not a creation but a revelation of the supreme power. Thus inspiration plays an important role in the poetic composition. Mere recording of images, vision and dreams could not be sufficient. It is the poetic inspiration that records them with the right use of words and thereby bringing out the poetic substance. As K.D.Sethna says the choice is not made by the poet, but is made by some mysterious power of inspiration itself, whether it flows through some kind of a “subliminal upsurge or supraliminal downpour.”[3]

Poetry draws into itself “a fuller language of intuitive inspiration, illumination or the higher thinking and feeling, the kind of thing that we find in the ‘Upanishads’, in the ‘Vedas’ and in the passages of the *Gita*.”[4]

The function of poetry should be to channelize human mind from mundane and materialistic disorder towards intellectual maturity and spiritual orderliness. In this context the observation of E.M.Forster would be relevant. “Art is valuable not because it is educational ... not because it is recreative ... It is valuable because it has to do with order and creates little world of its own, possessing internal harmony in the bosom of this disordered planet.”[5] There is powerful unconscious element at the very basis of poetic process. It is not the emotion itself that the poetic seeks, but the soul of the emotion. Thus the poetic creativity is essentially an activity of the spirit within us. As Blake said ‘one power alone makes a poet; Imagination, the Divine vision.’ “It is by this psychised or spiritualised romantic imagination or by intuitive power of discrimination one can best

seize the inner truth.”[6] It is this contemplative faculty which Sri Aurobindo and P.B. Shelley would like the literary critics to possess.

Both P.B.Shelley and Sri Aurobindo were alike in their depth of knowledge and drew their inspiration from similar sources. Though Shelley follows Coleridge in emphasizing the function of imagination, he interprets it in the light of Sri Aurobindonian idealism.

Nolini Kanta Gupta, in his *Poets and Mystics* says, that Sri Aurobindo has illustrated that “Poetry is not merely beauty but power. It is not merely sweet imagination, but creative vision- it is even the Rix, the Mantra that impels the Gods to manifest upon earth, that fashions divinity in man. [7]

Sri Aurobindo has done the work of an ideal poet who creates, reveals and become a mediator between God and man. As Heidegger asserts “Between ... Gods and men,” the poet interprets “the timeless to me.”[8]

Like Sri Aurobindo, Shelley also believes that poetry is the creative principle in man and poet lives in eternity. He admits the reality of the supreme power which is the realised perfection of the Good and Beautiful. It reveals the unity in life. It appears in his poetry in the form of intellectual beauty.

Sri Aurobindo also says in his epic *Savitri*, “there can be an aesthetic response to truth also, a joy in its beauty, a love created by its charm a rapture in the finding.. an aesthetic joy in its expression.”[9] The poet can also be a seeker and lover of beauty. Like Shelley he believes that “He (poet) can feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of truth as well as in the expression of the beautiful.”[10]

To both, Shelley and Sri Aurobindo, poetry is one of the modes through which the supreme power is revealed. When Shelley says, in the moment of inspiration the poet reaches the eternal regions and has his materials, and that the poem is a melody emerging from the interaction of the external and internal, and the divine inspiration is poetic, he comes nearer to Sri Aurobindonian poetic theory to whom the higher and the highest uses of poetry can be achieved only when the poet develops a truly intuitive, psychic, illuminative or in other words spiritual consciousness and vision.

Poetry is not only pleasing and moving but is inspiring and elevating. N.K.Gupta, says, “The Greek sings of the humanity of man, Sri Aurobindo the divinity of man, under the Hellenic influence we have forgotten that an equally poetic world exists in the domain of spiritual life, even in its severity, as in that of earthly life and its sweetness.”[11]

The ultimate aim of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is to life us to the level of the supermind. “The poet celebrates his glimpses of something beyond, revealing the holy, the way towards transcendence.”[12]

The early poetry Sri Aurobindo is not different from that of the Romantics and the Victorians “But poems like ‘Ahana’ the last poems, “Rose of God”, and *Savitri*, have been composed in an entirely new world of poetic inspiration and fulfilment.”[13]

The famous English weekly *The Times Literary Supplement* praised him as a prose writer and criticized him as a poet saying that “Sri Aurobindo is not another Tagore or Iqbal or even Sarojini Naidu. “[14] K.D. Sethna refutes this charge for it denies ‘inspiration completely’ and says it would be really sad for humanity to ignore Sri Aurobindo and his poetry. Some of the western critics fail to see the divine in him. He writes, “In poetry, music does not stand just for one particular arrangement and movement of speech- a simple dance or a rich swirl, a slow gravity of a swift puissance. It can be anything and it is born fundamentally of kindled emotion and vision setting language astir and aglow so that words and phrases become intense and harmonious in a vital suggestive way fall into suitable metrical patterns that ring significant changes on a recurrent base. In short it is inspiration adequately expressing itself.”[15] His conclusion is that to read Sri Aurobindo is to believe in immense human possibilities. Here is in fact the hope for the poetry as well the hope for man. “With him we have the return of the Rishi. It is in this light that he is not only a great poet, but poet’s poet.”[16]

Thus to both Shelley and Sri Aurobindo, poetry written under the pressure of one’s intellect and wit is very superficial, ingenious to touch the inner being, and therefore false poetry. Both them agreed that the genuine poetry is the expression of the soul. They believed in the reality of the soul and considered that all true artistic creation as the natural and necessary overflow of the soul vision of the inspired seer-artist. As Sri Aurobindo himself says “Shelley had what Coleridge had not, poetic grasp of metaphysical truths.”[17] Thus, both Shelly and Sri Aurobindo believed that it is the spirit in man that is responsible for the shaping of the poetic utterance.

Shelley followed Plato in the theory that one cannot create poetry unless inspired by madness. Writing to Peacock, he says, “What a wonderful passage there is in the *Phaedrus*, the beginning, I think, of one of the speeches of Socrates in praise of poetic madness and in definition of what poetry is and how a man becomes a poet. Every man who lives in this age and desires to write poetry ought... to impress himself with this sentence.”[18]

Inspiration is something that the poet does not understand and cannot control. It drives him to produce images of perfection which rather form themselves in the mind than are formed by that mind. In other words, the poet’s mind is completely passive and a diviner nature seems to inter-penetrate his own and illuminate his thought and feeling, Shelly contends that inspiration enables the poet to pierce the barriers of phenomenal reality and to display the underlying eternal archetypes. But the author (Shelly) of *A Defence of Poetry* also believes that the particle of the transcendent power, resides within the individual mind, where, like the power from which it derives, it acts intermittently and independently of consciousness and the will. So he shadows forth another hypothesis. The fading coal gives illumination and in that very act burns itself out. “For the mind creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind,

awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of the flower which fades and changes as it is developed and the conscious portions for our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.”[19] The poet must arrest and give form to the vision that arise in those exceptional moments. Poetry makes immortal all that is the best and the most beautiful in the world. Since the inspiration seeks to make that experience, concrete and durable we are told the poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man. Shelley also speaks of the “evanescent visitations of thought and feeling... as if it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own. “[20] Thus poets are compelled to serve the power which is seated on the throne of their soul.

Shelley also speaks as if inspiration is a metaphor for instinct and intuition. The poetic inspiration is divine. A kind of divine afflatus flows into the poet and transforms him completely. We may say that while Shelley maintained the faith in the one ultimate Reality and Absolute perfection, understood in partial contexts, as the True, the God, the Beautiful in his later years, he also thought that a particle of this transcendent power resides in every human being and it acts like the transcendental power. Each mind is essentially and equivalent particle of the Absolute. And since for Shelley, all minds perform according to the same laws, the mind of the creator, (that is the poet) itself is, the image of all other minds. The poet “participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one”[21] not because he is transported to that transcendent one but because his internal spirit is a portion of it. Thus, we find that Inspiration and Intuition come to the same thing. The poet is only the creator besides God. The poet is in a mystic union with the scholar, philosopher and he is therefore described in religious terms. The poet is inspired by the transcendental power or he intuitively perceives the reality, thanks to the intuition provided by the essential particle of the transcendent power immanent in man. To him, inspiration, inside or outside, occurs only at exceptional moments. And so Shelley says that when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably, a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. In short, poetry is not art but vision, incommunicable vision, and inexpressible state of mind. As Desmond King-Hele would put it, “For Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley poetry was in a sense, a religion; they were as mystics waiting for the god-head to speak. When this afflatus failed Coleridge wrote no more poetry and Wordsworth wrote no more good poetry. Shelley and Keats did not live to see the day when they would have to ask in earnest “Whiter is fled the visionary gleam?”[22]

As Rene Wellek says, in Shelley the Platonic vision is at the centre of the argument. The Defence shows very clearly the influence of Plato and Sidney on Shelley. Like Plato Shelley also thinks that inspiration is very essential for poetic creation. The only difference between Shelley and Plato however is that Plato thought inspiration to be external force which possessed the poet, whereas Shelley thinks that inspiration is something internal which springs from within. The inspirational theory is also in tune with Shelley’s philosophy. He looked on the world of ours as a vast cimmerian desert, lit up by rare flashes of divine fire, which are preserved, if at all, in inspired poetry. It is an error to assert that Shelley is exaggerating when he attributes poetic creation to inspiration. Most poets who have written on the subject seem to agree with him and

modern depth psychology enables us to understand the truth of Shelley's view. So Desmond King-Hele remarks that "even the harder-boiled critics usually admit that poetry wells up from the unconscious to be observed, criticised and edited by the conscious mind." [23] And Shelley's emphasis on inspiration does not mean that he denies the role of conscious labour in embodying the vision in acceptable poetic form. Nor will he deny that while composing and correcting, the poet can revive, in some degree, the fire of the first impulse. His own practice proves that while the source of his poetry was involuntary, he worked hard in its development. In *The Defence of Poetry* he chose to lay emphasis on the source of poetry rather than on the development. But on that score, one cannot rush to the conclusion that Shelley denies the role of reason. All he says is that reason and toil can only shape the out pourings of the inspired soul.

To Shelley the poet is the Aeolian harp and that the poem is the chord of music which results from the reciprocation of external and internal elements, of both the changing wind and the constitution and tension in the strings. No wonder that Shelley prays in the strings. No wonder that Shelley prays in the "Ode to West wind", to the wind – spirit, to play on him as it plays on the harp of the forest for producing a deep, autumnal tone, sweet though sad.

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet, though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce
My spirit, Be thou me, impetuous one." [24]

Earlier, struck by the despair caused by the poet's alienation from the Spirit in the wind, he cried:

"I fall upon the thorns of life: I bleed
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud" [25]

No wonder, then he wanted to be lifted like a wave, a leaf, a cloud! but now, he wants it to drive his dead thoughts like dead leaves for quickening a new birth. Some of his thoughts are truly dead; but they may help other people's live ideas to grow, just as dead leaves serve as manure. Some of his thoughts are dead, but the poet is very much alive he prays to the Spirit to be his spirit so that its impetuosity and energy may become his and its message may be his message.

The need here is mutual. If the poet-prophet needs the Spirit, the Spirit too needs him. Hence he says,

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind;
Be through my lips to unawakened Earth,
The trumpet of a prophecy.”[26]

There is in this poem a blend of natural and spiritual forces. It also symbolizes the inspiration of the poet and becomes the message of the prophet. The essential message of the wind is the message of hope.

The Ode itself is perhaps the result of the awakening of mind (‘Unextinguished hearth’), by the Wind-spirit to transitory brightness. Its words are the sparks. They are alive, unlike the poems enshrining dead thoughts comparable to withered leaves, the live poems are like the ‘winged seeds’ of the first stanza and will redeem mankind. Since, for Shelley, images rather form themselves in the mind when he is inspired, than are formed by that mind, the poet is only the mouth of the revelation. So, it is not surprising that the poet wants the spirit to be the trumpet of a prophecy, which is its own, not his, through his lips. The poem ends with a rhetorical question:” .. O! Wind if winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”[2] It shows that the despair has been overcome, that the divine wind-Spirit has inter-penetrated his nature and that he looks forward to the dawn of spring, of a redeemed world. It is on this hopeful note that the poem ends. The ‘Ode’ is indeed the most prophetic of Shelley’s shorter poems. It indicates Shelley’s claim in the ‘Defence’, that poets are prophets in as much as they behold the future in the present. And true to his creed, Shelley in his poetry takes upon the role of the prophet. Shelley was not only a reformer but he was also a prophet and an idealist. Of course, one should be on one’s guard against vulgarising the meaning of prophet. So Shelley warns in the ‘Defence’:

“Not that I assert poets to be prophets in
the gross sense of the word of that they
can foretell the form as surely as they
foreknow the spirit of events; such is
the pretence of superstition, which
would make poetry an attribute of
prophecy, rather than prophecy an
attribute of Poetry.”[28]

Indeed Shelley seeks essential reality in his poetry. He pursues it by means of creative imagination, synthetic and intuitional. It is embodied in ‘Vitally metaphorical’ poetic language, in itself creative in so far as it “Marks the before unapprehended relation of things.”[29] His characteristic imagery seeks to grasp and express an unseen and unattainable truth. Feeling the inadequacy of language to produce the precise effect, he is aiming at, he cannot tell as he would wish what manner of creature the skylark is:

“what thou art, we know not;
what is most like thee?”[30]

But by creative imagery, he can roughly approximate his architypal conception of it, as far as the resources of language will aid. For instance in the 'Ode to a Skylark' the Skylark, a symbol of perfection and absolute truth, is significantly unseen and remote, like a poet hidden in the light of thought, like a high-born maiden in a Palace tower, like a glow-worm golden and so on. The poet is *hidden* in the light of thought. The maiden is *secluded*, the symbol of withdrawal; the glow worm scatters 'unbeholden', its aerial hue. The unique value of the imagery is its complexity. This concrete abstractive dualism is notably present elsewhere too. One may not pierce the secret being in the West wind for, it is an 'unseen presence.' In the visible world, it is objectified by the leaves, the winged seeds, the clouds and the waters upon which it acts.

Yes, Shelley's poetry claims towards abstraction but it does so, on steps of concrete imagery. His imagery is always dramatic, expressive of struggle and aspiration toward heights which enchanted him through the very difficulty of scaling them

It will not out of place if we recall here the expression of Shelley's philosophy in impassioned language in 'Adonais'. The substance of his informing vision is briefly summarised in the words of Carlos Baker in his book *'Shelley's Major Poetry-A Fabric of vision,*

“ The World we know is spiritually a Cimmerian desert, dark, storm-ridden, suffused with must. Far above it arched beyond mortal sight, is the primum mobile, the divine light of the World-Soul, the white radiance of Eternity, a burning fountain like a spiritual sun. Its effluence is felt everywhere in nature and in man and its effectiveness corresponds precisely to the 'sensitivity of that which receives it. As a vitalizing force it impels all things in their degree to aspire towards the condition of immortality, in Shelley's very exact phrase, it tortures the unwilling dross 'toward' Heaven's light. Idealistic poets are the most sensitive receivers of this light, and in them the driving force, the *eros* or aspirational principle, is almost unendurably strong. In a very real sense, psychologically speaking they are 'tortured' by the desire to clarify and to spread among mankind, the wonder of their vision of Eternity. As splendours of the firmament of time, they occupy after death the third sphere of heaven where they reign immortal in the memories of man. But their souls, like those of all men after death rejoin the world-soul and thus carry, as it were a joyous double

burden in the enlightenment of the world.”[31]

The experience that comes in the moment of inspiration has unity. The poet has a vision of this unity which later on tries to unravel and develop in to the form of the work of art. What is needed is this primary vision which cannot be fully “Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having ‘dictated’ to him the unpremeditated song.”[32] What he is to compose later appears in a flash and the work of art seeks to translate this vision into specific medium.

The great artist is one who always alert to capture these fleeting experiences. But once it comes there is a tremendous transformation in the individual consciousness. But the work cannot adequately express or translate the vision. This creative power is compared to the embryonic development. “A great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother’s womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.”[33]

In the vigorous panegyric which forms a fitting finale to the essay, Shelley unveils the greatness of poetry. “Poets are hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present. The word which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”[34]

For Sri Aurobindo too, Inspiration alone accounts for the dynamic of poetic creation. Inspiration plays a supreme part in his poetic composition. He not only knows the fact of inspiration, he knows the way of it, rather the myriadfold way, or the many ways. He knows that Homer’s Olympian Muse is not fiction but a living godheads and powers.

The poet can be inspired from or through any level or part of his complex being-whatever poetically is dominant in him. The subtle-physical inspiration worked in Chaucer (and Homer); the Vital in Shakespeare (and Kalidasa), the mental in Milton (Dante), The higher, the spiritual inspiration can work through these lower parts of the nature, but it hardly every gets through completely in its true character. It did perhaps occasionally in some of the Vedic Poets, and Sri Aurobindo has rediscovered the secret, and opened the way to a progressively fuller discovery. In one of his letters of 1934, he says

There is invariable ‘how in inspiration
except that I receive from above my
head and receive changes and corrections
from above without any initiation by
myself or labour of the brain. Even if
I change a hundred times, the mind does

not work at that, it only receives. Formerly
it used not to be so, the mind was always
labouring at the stuff of unshaped
formation. My poems come as a stream,
beginning at the first line
and ending at the last.”[35]

This letter is an interesting revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s experience of inspiration. Even changes and corrections in his composition are received from above without any initiation by him. That is to say, at all the stages and moments of composition, it was the power of inspiration alone that took the initiative and shaped his creation and he had only to make his whole being including the labouring brain completely receptive to it. Sri Aurobindo did not depend upon the labour of the brain or allow any intellectual or emotional or imaginative initiation of his own to go ahead with the task. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the force of inspiration elsewhere: “Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well known affliction perhaps of all artists, but certainly poets.”[36] He makes it clear in *The Future Poetry* that poetry, even when dominated by intellectual tendency and motive cannot really live and work by intellect alone. He thinks that its impetus is not created and its functioning and result are not shaped either wholly or predominantly by reason and judgement. An intuitive seeing and an inspired hearing are its natural means or its native sources.

Inspiration is to be inwardly felt and realised rather than mentally understood and grasped. He says that the creative source sends down the substance or stuff, the force and idea, and may give its own spontaneous gift or it may give something which corresponds to the idea or the aspiration of the poet. But although the poet feels the joy of the creation, the human being is only a channel or receptacle. The poet has to find the human transcription of something that is there in diviner essence above. “Something of the language may be supplied by the mind or vital, something may break through from somewhere behind the veil, from whatever source gets into touch with the transcribing mind in the liberating or stimulating excitement or uplifting of the consciousness.”[37]

Sri Aurobindo recognises that the poetic inspiration cannot be subject to rational scrutiny. We have already seen how he speaks of it as an uncertain thing. None the less, a mystic and Yogi as well as a born poet that Aurobindo is, he has explored and examined and classified the planes of poetic inspiration. He labels them Higher Mind Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind. Above even Overmind is what he calls Supermind which has remained unexpressed upto now.

It may be difficult for us to understand Sri Aurobindo’s classification of the various levels of overhead Inspiration. But it cannot be denied that they constitute a challenging contribution to aesthetics.

Of course, Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that the quality of the poems does not depend on the overhead level from which it hails. He remarks:

If I have given high praise to a passage, it does not follow that it is from the Overmind; the poetic (aesthetic) value or perfection of a line passage or poem does not depend on the plane from which it comes, but on the purity and authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense vision and inspiration from whatever source. Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature. No doubt, if we can get a continuous inspiration from the Overmind, that would mean a greater, sustained height of perfection and spiritual quality in poetry than has yet been achieved...[38]

Thus for Sri Aurobindo art is not something that can be learned from outside, it requires inspiration not only for its perfection, but for its genuine life. The poet must hear and see and be a divine instrument, not merely labour in a 'workshop'. No man makes his own poetry. Purely mind-spun stuff may be good technique as far as it goes, but it is seldom even that because it has no light and no filling and living power. Poetry must flow and sing, with a sovereign rhythm, and the movement and measure and the song must be the Muse's. Sri Aurobindo tells us that not even a man's thoughts and feelings are really his very own: they come to him from the large surrounding subliminal and occult nature, and he seizes them with his ego-propensity and builds them around his ego, and thus lessens and distorts them. It is the same with poetical creation-it comes from outside and it never gets through quite purely and completely. The poet always gives something of his own substance and nature to the poem; the great poets are those who have the greatest and fullest natures, poetically, to give and receive most fully and substantially. The fact of inspiration is no guarantee of perfection, but without inspiration there can be no poetry.

The psychic inspiration, according to Sri Aurobindo, is rare in poetry, and one who could tap it largely would add a rare wealth to poetical literature, and gain a unique place among poets. Sri Aurobindo says that a perfect example of the psychic inspiration is Shelley's lyric, "I can give not what men call love." [39] Sri Aurobindo paid very particular attention to metre, versification, form, but still the inspiration is paramount. "He is the Vates, the Prophetic Voice, the Mediator; he is the Aoidos, the hearer and singer of divine songs; he is in Vedic terms the Kavi, the Seer and channel of the word: Vision indeed, not thought or feeling, being the poet's primary power." [40]

Thus for both Shelley and Sri Aurobindo, to find the inevitable word, the supremely inspired utterance is the poet's fundamental task.

Shelley lays stress on the divine element in poetry. So we have no doubt in our mind that he is thinking of Poetic activity as spiritual and not merely a sensuous, aesthetic, emotional or even imaginative one. Shelley begins his essay with a common romantic distinction between Reason and Imagination. Reason analyses. It views thing, to quote Wordsworth 'in disconnection, dead and spiritless'. Imagination, says Shelley, thinks in terms of totalities rather than proceeding by artificial analysis. It grasps the inner activity animate the changing, evolving reality outside, reacts to the varying crosslights in it, and captures the qualitative value potential in them.

To quote Shelley

Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.[41]

Sri Aurobindo does not deal with poetry "in the most universal sense as Shelley does. He does not like Shelley include all arts within the ambit of poetry. But he recognises that poetry, like the kindred arts of painting and architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference, that in this case the image is meant to be mental and verbal and not material. This is to quote Sri Aurobindo

The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of or rather be included in the sight, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. For the poet has to make us live in the soul and in the inner mind what is ordinarily lived in the outer mind and the senses, and for that he must first make us see by the soul, in its light and with its deeper vision what we ordinarily see in a more limited and halting fashion by the senses and the intelligence.[42]

Sri Aurobindo will accept the modern distinction that the poet appeals to the imagination and not to the intellect. But he adds there are many kinds of imagination,

the objective imagination which visualises strongly the outward aspects of life and things; the subjective imagination which visualises strongly the mental and emotional impressions they have the power to start in the mind; the imagination which deals in the play of mental fictions and to which we give the name of poetic fancy; the aesthetic imagination which delights in the beauty of words and images for their own sake and sees no farther.[43]

All these, Sri Aurobindo says, have their place in poetry; but they only give the poet his material, they are only the first instruments in the creation of poetic style. “The essential poetic imagination.”

he proceeds to say

does not stop short with even the most subtle reproductions of things external or internal, with the richest or delicatest play of fancy or with the most beautiful colouring of word or image. It is creative, not of either the actual or the fictitious, but of the more and the most real; it sees the spiritual truth of things,-of this truth too there are many gradations,- which may take either the actual or the ideal for its starting-point.[44].

In a celebrated passage in ‘The Human Cycle’

it is said

To us, poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy, imagination, a plaything and a caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch girl of the mind. But to the men old, the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination, no dancing courtesans, but a

priestess in god's house, commissioned not to spin fictions, but to image difficult and hidden truths; even the metaphor or simile in the Vedic Styles is used with a serious purpose and expected to convey a reality, not suggest a pleasing artifice of thought. The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed and it was used because it would hint luminously to the mind what the precise intellectual word, apt only for logical or practical thought or to express the physical and the superficial could not at all hope to manifest.[45]

All these may lead us to wonder whether the approach of Sri Aurobindo to poetry is not fundamentally different from that of Shelley, but the difference is more apparent than real. For Shelley's understanding of imagination, is something different from what Sri Aurobindo speaks of in his reference to objective, subjective, aesthetic and other kinds of imagination.

In 'Defence of Poetry' Shelley writes

Poetry is indeed something divine, It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge, it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred, It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all ... It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; ... Whatever virtue love, patriotism, friendship-What were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave-and what were our aspirations beyond it if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?[46]

Poetic activity is a spiritual and not merely a sensuous aesthetic, emotional or even imaginative one, The Shelleyan view of the poetic imagination is thus sufficiently uncommon. It is transcendental. No wonder that Sri Aurobindo declares

... Shelley was very nearly fitted to be sovereign voice of the new spiritual force that was at the moment attempting to break into poetry and possess there its kingdom ... If the idea of a being not of our soil fallen into the material life and still remembering his skies can be admitted as an actual fact of human birth, then Shelley was certainly a living example of one of these luminous spirits half obscured by earth ...[47]

Though Shelley follows Coleridge in emphasizing the function of the imagination, he interprets it in a Platonic way. Shelley differs from Coleridge when he argues that poetry is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, Shelley makes the poetic act literally spontaneous. This unconscious aspect of imagination brings Shelley nearer to Sri Aurobindonian concept of poetry.

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