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Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 05: Sri Aurobindo (Part I)

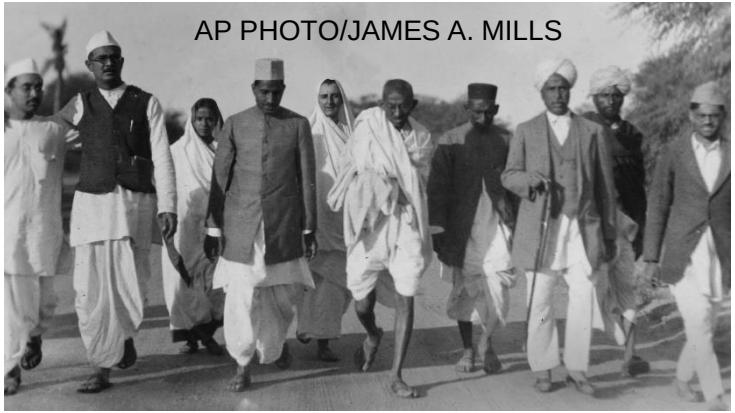
BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



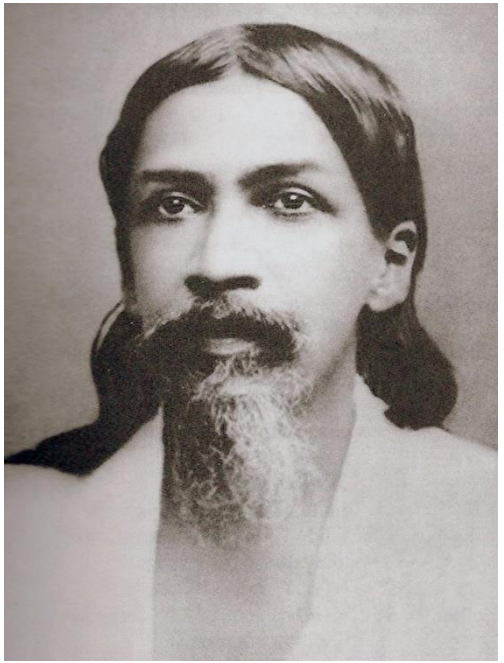
Socio-Political Conditions

- India under alien rule
- Unlike in prose, no new major voices in poetry emerged.
- Reflective mystical verse or Romantic-Victorian verse.
- New-poetry emerged



Introduction to the Poet

- Born on 15th August 1872 in a Bengali family in Calcutta
- He left for England at the age of 7 and returned to India at the age of 21.
- He worked in Baroda State from 1893-1906.
- Aurobindo edited newspapers like *Bande Mataram, Arya, Karmayogi etc.*
- He was sent to jail several times but was released unstained.
- He escaped to Pondicherry in 1910 and spent his entire life there as a Spiritual guru, founded Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926.
- He left for heavenly abode on 5 December 1950



Aurobindo's Poems and their Features

- ✔ Lyrical, narrative, philosophical, and epic
- ✔ Audacious and full of technical innovation
- ✔ Emotional rapture, verbal exuberance romantic and mystical

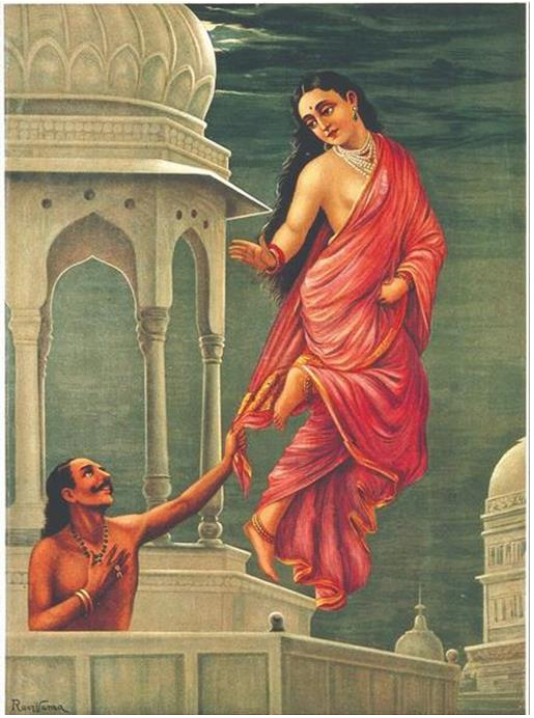
- ❑ "Urbasie", "Love and Death", "Baji Prabhou"
- ❑ *Short Poems (1890-1900)*
- ❑ *The Short Poems (1895-1908)*
- ❑ *Short Poems (1902-1930, 1930-1950)*

His Narratives

- *Urvasie*
  - A poem of 1500 lines, blank verse
  - Ancient legend of king Pururavus and his love

for the celestial damsel.

- Miltonic diction, romantic ethos, with all its agonies and ecstasies.
- Keatsian touch



“ The elaborate epic machinery has the look of an intruder in this narrative with its essentially romantic ethos; and the best parts of the poem are those which offer a lyrical evocation of intense love with all its agonies and ecstasies”. (Naik)

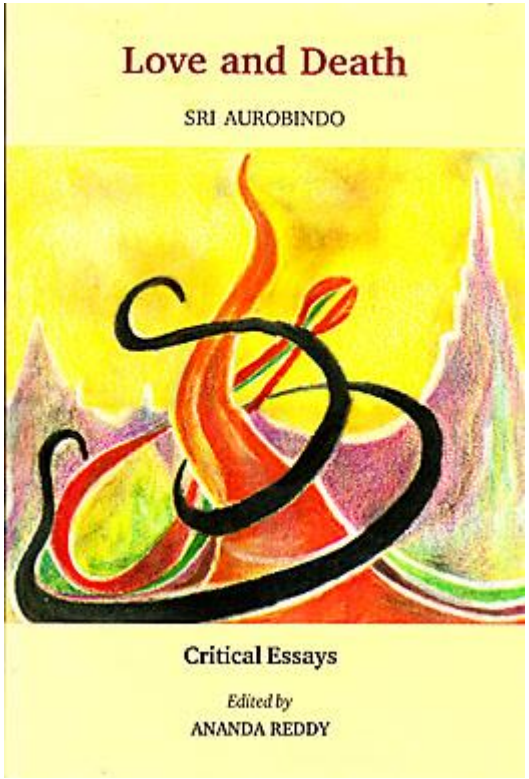
Contd...

He moved, he came towards her. She, a leaf
Before a gust among the nearing trees, cowered… Pururavas
Seized her and caught her to her bosom thrilled
Clinging and shuddering all her wonderful hair.
Loosened and the wind seized and bore it streaming
Over the shoulders of Pururavas,
And on his cheek a softness. She overborne,
Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
like a slim tree half seen through driving hail
Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss. (From *Urvasie*)

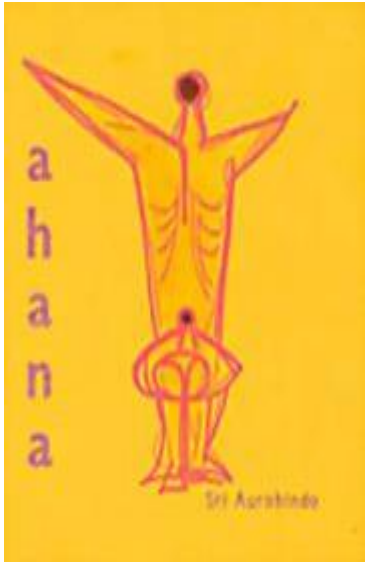
Aurobindo's Narratives

Love and Death (1899)

- 1100 lines of blank verse
- The story of Ruru and Priyamvada
- Resembles the Greek legend of Orpheus and Euridice
- Ruru invades Patala to reclaim lost Priyamvada
- Lovers have failed and preferred 'personal felicity to the realization of world realization and total transformation'



“Ahana” and “Ilion”



- "Ahana” was originally written at Pondicherry, and it has 250 rhymed lines
- Attempt to naturalize the classical Hexameter in English
- Ahana is the Divine dawn who descends into the world and is greeted by the Hunters of joy, Seekers of knowledge and Climbers in quest of power
- Rhymes can be used for poems of reflective thought or lyrical feeling” without resulting in ‘melodic monotone

‘Thou shall not suffer always nor cry to me , lured and forsaken.’

Contd…

- More ambitious attempt than “Ahana”
- A Homeric exercise in the heroic
- Background of Trojan war
- Built around Achilles and Pentheselia, the Amazonian queen
- The actual action of the epic takes on a single day.
- Inner epic, few characters, and takes place on a symbolic plane.
- Prophetic vision of a glorious future.

“Transformation”

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;
It fills my members with a might divine;
I have drunk the infinite like a giant’s wine.
Time is my drama or my pageant dream.
Now are my illumined cells joys flaming scheme.
And changed my thrilled and branching nerves to fine
Channels of rapture opal and hyaline
For the influx of the Unknown and the Supreme.

Contd…

I am no more a vassal of the flesh.
A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;
I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.
My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit is a vast sun of deathless light.

Characteristics of the Poem

- Poet, part of the material world, experiences mystical transformation.
- Joy of the spiritual world
- Tantric elements
- Human to Divine
- Development of the psyche
- Process of being without unnecessary epistemological concerns

Aurobindo's Translations

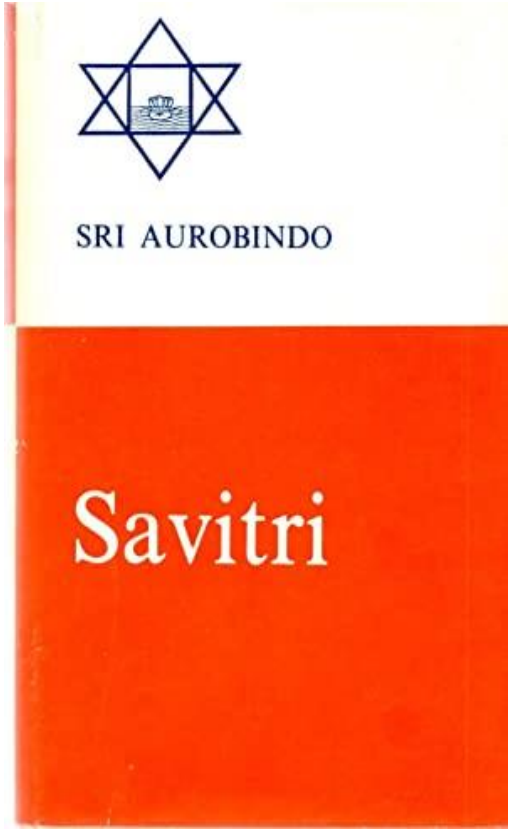
- *The Hero and the Nymph (from Vikramorvasie)*
- *The Century of Life(From Bhartrihari)*
- *Devotional songs of Vidyapati and Chandidas*
- *Vidula(from the Mahabharata)*
- *Songs of Sea (from C.R. Das)*

What word is it thou sing'st? What tune
My heart is filled with, and it soon
Must overflow? What mystical unborn
Spirit is singing in thy white foam-caves?
What voice turns heaven to music from thy waves?

(*Songs of Sea*, C.R.Das)

Levels of Reality as presented in the Poems of Aurobindo- **Kees W. Bolle**

1. Existence, divine existence, Pure existence, Ultimate reality
2. Absolute spirit, *Saccidananda* (unmanifest)
3. Bliss
4. Supermind, Gnosis.
5. Mind
6. Psyche, Soul.
7. Life.
8. Matter.

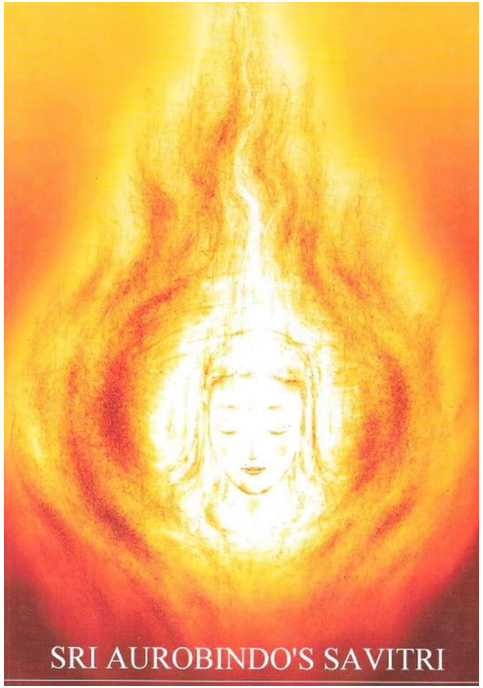


Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol

- '*A sort of poetic philosophy of the spirit and life*' and '*an experiment in mystic poetry and spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure*' - **Aurobindo**
- A magnum opus in three parts comprising 2400 lines, 12 books and 49 Cantos.
- Legendary verse narrative on the legend of Satyavan and Savitri

Division of *Savitri*

- Part I (Book I to III): Aswapathy's spiritual quest
- Part II(Books IV to VIII):Savitri's upbringing
- Part III(IX to XII): Savitri's encounter with Death and her claim for Divine Truth
- Forceful presence of the poet's own voice- '**Internal yoga'**
- An epic of humanity and divinity of the death and life divine





Contd…

- Descent of the divine to the earth
- Symbolism of dawn, man's realization of life divine
- Expansion of Aswapathy's yoga fills half of the poem.
- Savitri's penance developed into a yoga, 5000 lines.
- Confrontation expanded more than ten fold.

This world is a beginning and a base
Where Life and Mind erect their structured dreams;
An unborn Power must build reality. (Canto IV, Book I)

Thank You

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