

REVIEW OF CONCEPT OF MAN IN SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY BY DR. JITENDRA SHARMA

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Photo credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

The poetic genius of Sri Aurobindo has attracted many a scholars and poetry lovers. Some simply admire his poetry and some choose to think and write about them. The *Concept of Man in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* by Dr. Jitendra Sharma is an admiration of and reflection on Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius.

Separating Sri Aurobindo's poetry and philosophy has always been a difficult task for writers; for his poetry and philosophy all are the expressions of his own experiences and experiments with consciousness and different modes of writing. Dr. Sharma seems to have found a middle way by studying the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in his poetry. He chose to focus only on one aspect, i.e. the concept of "man" and seems to have eschewed other concepts like God and Nature. With the magnanimity of Sri Aurobindo's poetry and its range perhaps it was convenient and safe to deal only with a single concept in detail.

The author begins his journey to explore the "rhythmic voyage on the ocean of life, discovering unknown truths of one's self and evolution" by introducing the life of Sri Aurobindo—"a great philosopher, yogi, and poet of the twentieth century." This introduction serves as a background to understand the evolution of Sri Aurobindo as at yogi and a poet. He then explores the growth of Sri Aurobindo as a poet. Sri Aurobindo's poetry evolved through first expressing his experiences of his growing contact with the West and then with India. His poetry grew from musings over the adolescent adventures to philosophic expressions canvassing his readings and then his ever growing inner growth and spiritual experiences. Dr. Sharma takes up all the stages in the life of Sri Aurobindo and deliberates upon them.

It is in the third chapter that we come to the theme of book, "the concept of man." The author cites from different religious scriptures and intellectuals who have deliberated upon the purpose of man's birth on earth. He then

takes up the concept of man given by Sri Aurobindo. He refers to the famous description of Sri Aurobindo, "Man is a transitional being, he is not final; for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood." It is difficult to understand this definition in isolation. Therefore, the author goes to the extent of describing the process of evolution of consciousness through different stages of the Matter, Life, Mind, Higher mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind and Supermind. The concept of transformation is also taken up to show the result of the evolution charted out by Sri Aurobindo.

In the next three chapters, the author picks up each section of poetry as classified in "Collected Poems," published in the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* edition, volume 5. For the first section, early poetry, the author explores the poems thematically and deliberates briefly on many poems explaining Sri Aurobindo's expressions of man in relation to matter, life and mind and nature. In the longer poems, a debate about the life, love and death is taken up at length and the author observes that "the poet has an integral, spiritual insight in Man, Nature and God." Sri Aurobindo expressed the concept of man in many of his sonnets. Therefore perhaps the author dedicated a separate chapter to analyze various sonnets of the poet. He begins by taking up the poems "Man the thinking Animal," "Man the Enigma," "Man the Mediator," and the poems which directly point out who and what man is. He slowly glides over the subtler poems which actually give a world view from which the concept of man may be easily deciphered; like the "Cosmic Dance," "Evolution," and "Nirvana." He traces the evolution of Sri Aurobindo's sonnets to the final "Transformation."

The most prominent and underscored description of man is found in Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*. The canvas of this epic is the whole Universe and its creation. Sri Aurobindo charts the creation from the very beginning, "It was the hour before the Gods awake," to the final and irrevocable transformation and the "life divine." In his process, he not only describes various stages of evolution of consciousness from the Inconscient to the Mind, but also foretells the imminent evolutionary stages to be achieved by the soul on its journey on Earth. The author touches briefly upon the importance and various aspects of *Savitri*. He says, "His [Sri Aurobindo's] poetical consciousness with a glorious vision for mankind finds fullest expression in the epic form." Dr. Sharma traces the stages and the vision of man as portrayed in *Savitri* by quoting long passages from the text.

The author concludes by summing up all that he dealt with in the book. This book may be taken as an entry point into the poetry of Sri Aurobindo; as the concept of man may be taken as one of the themes amongst many. As there are abundant quotes from Sri Aurobindo's poems, the reader gets a very refreshing reading of some of the most important lines on Sri Aurobindo's concept and vision of man – a theme which is central to Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future!