



## Nolini Kanta Gupta & Nirodbaran Two stalwarts of Aurobindonian School of Poets

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### Abstract

Many disciples-poets of Sri Aurobindo wrote poetry in the nineteen thirties but they are mostly unknown to the present generation. As everybody knows that Sri Aurobindo is a multi dimensional personality-he is a yogi, a revolutionary, poet and philosopher and under his tutelage a galaxy of bright and talented poets emerge. This poetry has a distinct flavour, and different from the traditional poetry of the times. It is mystical, spiritual and elevating written in the ancient Vedic tradition. In this paper I have taken two eminent poets- Nirodbaran and Nolinikant Gupta whose poetry falls in the category of Milton and Wordsworth, full of illumination and revelation of the truth of existence.

**Key Words:** Spirituality ,Devotion, mysticism, Vedic tradition, Supreme truth of existence.

The Indo-English poetry faithfully reflects the different phases of Indian Renaissance. In the age of fierce patriotism, in the period of the revival of ancient Indian *Vedantic* and *Upnishadic* learning, the focus of the poetry is once again upon Nature in its various dimensions and more particularly human nature. In the background of two world wars, intellectuals think that the change of human consciousness is impertinent and this truth has already been envisaged by the Indian wisdom thousand years ago. The Indo-English poetry is a fine amalgam of the multi shades of Indian philosophy,

such as mysticism, metaphysics and spiritualism. V.K. Gokak very aptly comments about this school in his book, The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry:

What is the vision of the Indo-Anglian poet? We shall be able to understand it if we examine his creative perceptions with regard to the major themes of poetry- Nature, Love, Man and the Heritage of Man consisting of myth, legend, history and the fine arts. We have, balancing these, another world of themes – metaphysical longing, devotion, mystical contemplation and spiritual illumination. Reflective and introspective poetry act as a bridge between these two worlds. Needless to say, some of the most significant poetry that Indo-Anglians have produced deals with the second set of themes. But it is the chief glory of the Indian Renaissance that it has revolted against the one sidedness of medieval spirituality. Indo- Anglian poetry has also several vital things to say about the destiny of man and his heritage. (31)

Most importantly, the Indian renaissance is memorable because it has given such eminent poets in English like Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. In the glittering spectrum of great literary artists of the twentieth century, none is more fascinating than Sri Aurobindo. Even Rabindranath Tagore, though a senior, bowed to Sri Aurobindo's greatness and declared that future would look at him as world-teacher. Sri Aurobindo was a multi-faceted genius. From time to time; many dimensions of his personality have been highlighted liberally and applauded abundantly. There have been treatises stressing his importance as a radical philosopher of modern times. Some writers exalt his role in the freedom struggle and project him as a great national leader. Others feel fascinated to his yoga and extol him a great spiritualist. His many-sided personality wears such a magnificent mystic halo that everyone for one reason or other is irresistibly drawn towards him. He is the brightest luminary in the firmament of twentieth century literature.

Sri Aurobindo himself wished to be remembered first and foremost as a poet. He started writing poetry at the age of seven and continued it till his passing away. Savitri, Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, is in many ways an extraordinary poem. With a massive frame of twelve books divided into forty-nine cantos, and running into a staggering length of 23,837 lines, it is the longest epic in English language. He has a voluminous poetic output and a great variety of subjects. If poetry is said to be a vision and revelation, then as a poet he is unique and outstanding because his poetry is enriched with an oceanic scholarship and yogic superhuman insight. He wrote what he saw. In his poetry, there is a nice blending

of experience and expression. His poetry is intuitive and illuminative and needs a particular mental make-up, a peculiar mood for right appreciation.

Intuitive or illumined poetry signifies the inner nature and the ultimate reality of existence. The truth of creation is a great riddle, the mystery of mysteries and to solve this riddle is the greatest challenge for man, the only assigned work of works to him, the very religion of his soul. Man, throughout the history of thought, has reflected much on his relation to nature of existence. His concept of truth reveals not only his vision of reality but also his own place and meaning in the cosmos. Indian literary tradition, like its parent body, is, at the core, mystical and spiritual. The Vedic Rishi “pours a direct spiritual meaning in the nature and life to which they belong, applies outward figures to inner things and brings out their latent and inner spiritual or psychic significance into life’s outward figures and circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> The Indian Vedic tradition, thus, seems more concerned about bringing out that which is hidden and real, and much less about detailing things for their own sake as they are seen in their outward aspect by a predominantly physical mentality. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry falls in this Vedic tradition, he is a Rishi and Savitri is rightly supposed the fifth *Veda*. Nature or the vision of reality varies from artist to artist but no poet has such an all-inclusive, all-comprehensive and integrated vision of Nature as Sri Aurobindo. It includes the transcendent, cosmic and individual aspects and leaves out nothing. After peering closely at the external face of Nature one soon becomes aware of the hidden forces – occult and subliminal – working behind the appearances.

In this passage from a deaf unknowing Force

To struggling consciousness and transient breath

A mighty Supernature waits on Time.

The world is other than we now think and see,

Our lives a deeper mystery than we have dreamed. (Savitri p. 169)

Evolution of human consciousness is the key word in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. “All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky.” The movement and growth from the Inconscient to the Superconscient is the hidden purpose behind Nature’s workings:

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,

The Spirit shall take up the human play,

This earthly life become the life divine. (Savitri p. 711)

For him poetry was a means of his *sadhna* to realise the Divine and for that very purpose, he encouraged and inspired his disciples to write poetry. The most illustrious poets of this galaxy are K.D.Sethna, Nishikanta, Nolinikant, Nirodbaran, Punja lal, Dilip Kumar Roy, Arjav, R.V. Deshpandey and Themis and some other lesser-known poets of this school.

The Aurobindonian School of poets mentioned above is a distinct category which requires a specific study. The most surprising factor is that many of them belong to different professions and have nothing to do with poetry so far. For example, Nirod was a medical practitioner. It seems that poetry is a natural medium to experience the different planes of consciousness. For them, it is a means of ascension to the realm of superamental consciousness. This large body of poetry bears a distinct stamp of Sri Aurobindo's style and his philosophy. They sing the glories of their mentors and celebrate the epiphany—the transformation of their ordinary consciousness into higher one. The poets of this group have some commonalities like all the poets have their unflinching and unshakable devotion in Sri Aurobindo and the grace of the Mother. They absolutely rely on their spiritual mentors. Though sometimes they occasionally express their doubts and disbelief in their own limited abilities, but soon they overcome it and reassert their firm faith in the grace and help of their masters.

Good poetry has a vision, a revelation and always appeals to the inner being. This definitely characterises spiritual poetry. The visual perception does not ordinarily penetrate into the inner or deeper reality of those things. But the poet is one who is gifted with a much sharper intuitive perception and perception is a power of spiritual vision. The poet's power of perception or feelings is far more sensitive and his power of communicating his experience to others is far more effective than the perception and conveying power of the common men. That is why a great poem always has something fresh, original and uncommon to say in a fresh and individual way. The poet opens an inner sight in us and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us. This characteristic is the hallmark, the secret of the greatness of every great poet. Sri Aurobindo says in The Future Poetry:

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they

may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. 1-

(29)

Truly speaking, all the disciple-poets have tried their best to keep pace with this basic tenet of their Guru.

All philosophy that keeps its adherence to the intuitive source of knowledge is essentially mystical in nature and it applies to this school. Mysticism means a spiritual grasp of the aims and problems of life in a much more real and ultimate manner than is possible to mere reason. Paranjape, in his book Mysticism in Indian English Poetry explains:

„Mysticism is a broad term signifying an area of concern rather than a specific set of beliefs. It is the concern with the nature of the ultimate Reality. It includes both means and ends, both the goal and the way. Mysticism is the art and science of living perfectly; it is the self-knowledge that subsumes knowledge of the world. It is the quest for, and the union with, the Absolute. (1)

**Nolini Kanta Gupta** (Jan-13,1889-Feb 7,1983)

Nolini Kanta Gupta is a brilliant writer, poet, academician, freedom fighter, distinguished scholar, linguist, critic and a man of deep spiritual realisation. He is held on a high pedestal among the Aurobindonians. He is a torchbearer for the younger ones, pathfinder for the less knowledgeable people and a spiritual guide to the aspirants. He is an authority on Rabindranath Tagore. His works shed a new light on the pressing problems of Man and his future. The Ashram press has published eight volumes of his collected works. Though, largely he has written articles, essays in prose and his poetic output is quite meagre, yet it stands unparalleled so far its literary worth is concerned. Makrand Paranjape pays a glowing tribute to Nolini Kanta Gupta:

An original voice in this group is Nolini Kanta Gupta, perhaps the most distinguished of Sri Aurobindo's disciples. His work shows evidence of an independent mind, of mastery, not merely discipleship. His poetic output, however, is meagre, consisting of one volume of verse, *To the Heights*, and another, *Towards the Light* of aphorisms and poetic prose. One or two poems such as nos.xi and xv (“God the Supreme Mystery”) from the former suggest that he may have experienced a direct communion with Reality.” (Mysticism in Indian English Poetry10)

Nolini Kanta Gupta is a great advocate of spirituality and repeatedly emphasises the dissemination of real knowledge. Ignorance, certainly, is not man's ideal condition; it leads to death and dissolution. But knowledge also can be equally disastrous if it is not of the right kind. The search for knowledge for the sake of knowledge is a dangerous thing if it is based on the pure scientific inquiry and inquisitiveness and neglecting the mystic world. For such a spirit encourages and enhances man's arrogance and in the end not only limits but wraps and falsifies the knowledge itself. Knowledge based on and secured exclusively through the reason and mental light can go only so far as that faculty can be reasonably stretched and not infinitely- to stretch it to infinity means to snap it.

Our senses are tremulous and fearsome

And cling to the empty littleness of the surface moment,

They heed not the vast surges of Infinitude

That sweep and pass by. (Devotion35)

Behind the appearances one finds this infinite, marvellous, all-powerful Grace that knows everything, organises everything, arranges everything and leads us, whether we want it or not, whether we know it or not towards the supreme goal, the union with the Divine, the awareness of the Divine Consciousness and becoming one with it.

The poet sees all the Mother-forces-that is Mahakali, Mahalaxmi, Maheshwari and Mahakali in the Mother and very touchingly he describes them in his poems.

Thou has fashioned thy limbs into the curves of every human contact;

Thou art neither too subtle nor too vast, neither the far transcendent,

Nor the wide universal;

Thou has framed thyself into the limits of common morality,

And standest level upon the earth. —(Collected Works-vol-2-314)

The vital in man is the region of power and it is that which derives him to fight, to fight and conquer. According to Sri Aurobindo it is the most difficult element to deal with; for it is this capacity to fight that also produces in the vital the spirit of revolt and independence, the will to follow its own will. Nolini says, "But when the vital understands and is converted, if it is truly surrendered to the Divine Will, then its fighting capacity turns against anti-divine forces, the forces, of obscurity that prevent the transformation: the powers of the vital are strong enough to conquer the enemies." (Vol-4 92)

The poet, at moments, becomes proud of his strength but the next moment the Supreme Power reveals him his bundle of weakness. When he sinks down and wallows in his weakness, She has set blue-kissing wings to his feet and makes him soar high towards heights beyond all his dreaming. He realises that weakness is but the absence of this supreme Grace.

Faint Heart! Kindle your faith and take courage!

Stupendous obstacles block the way?

But omnipotent is the Power that awaits you, (vol.2-316)

The dumb becomes eloquent and the lame is able to cross the mountains just because of it. Man is a frail earthly vessel but a mighty secret is being wrought upon in the far depths of him. In spite of being a child of clod and clay, the earth-bound worm, through all his failings and erring, this Grace leads and guides him across the shoals and marshes and quagmires to higher, firmer and surer footings.

He is the Soul of our soul, He is the Body of our body-

Our eye veils Him, but He is revealed to the Eye of our eyes;

He is Soul embodied and He is Body ensouled (vol-2-315)

Like the rest of Aurobindonians, he surrenders himself to the divinity of the Mother.

To lay myself bare-limb by limb,

From the outmost to the inmost, from the highest to the lowest,

From the crown of the head to the tip of the toe,

From my senses to my soul.-309

What a beautiful coining of juxtaposed words.

Spirit is Matter sublimated, Matter is Spirit crystalise.

Soul is Body introvert, Body is Soul extravert. —(Vol-2-313)

Nolini is equally excellent in Bangla language, his mother tongue. While in jail, Sri Aurobindo ordered him to translate his works, originally in English, into Bangla for he knows his mastery on it.

Reading Nolinikant's works, both in prose and poetry, is quite educative, a yogic experience that brings to us the integral vision of man, nature and god. Nolini voyages from plane to plane so that his consciousness widens into cosmic dimensions. It is only when the mind is inspired by a vision descending from realms beyond the mind that a spiritual insight can be vouchsafed to man.

The Aurobindonian ambience envelopes the soul of the reader, mesmerizes him unexpectedly. If one offers one's allegiance to the poem as a devotee, the golden gates of higher consciousness open themselves on their own and invite him within.

**Nirodbaran** (November 17, 1903 –July 17, 2006, )

Among the disciples, devotees and admirers of Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran is well known as the Master's amanuensis and attendant. As Sri Aurobindo had already withdrawn from the public life of the ashram, he communicated with and instructed the sadhaks via letters, and Nirodbaran entered into a voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (receiving about 4000 letters), who encouraged and guided his attempts at poetry. He has left an indelible treasure of writings that deals with every aspect of the Ashram life, the innermost dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's personality, their loving concern and care for the devotees and their yogic sadhna. His voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo is a classic example of Guru- Shishya samvad. His poetry is testimony to the fact that by tapasya even a sceptical medical man can become a kavi, a poet of the spirit. It is a testimony that Sri Aurobindo's Midas touch can transmute any rusty piece into luminous gold of poetry. It is a proof that the poetry was a contagion, spread in the very atmosphere of the Ashram in 1930 and any person having strong spiritual leanings could catch it. He published a collection of his poems titled Sun Blossoms and 50 Poems by Nirodbaran, which were revised and commented on by Sri Aurobindo. Later he had published Talks with Sri Aurobindo (3 volumes), Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (2 volumes), and his memoir 12 years with Sri Aurobindo, as well as various volumes of poetry and other writings.

The book Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments is a valuable treasure in poetic criticism. In the foreword of this book, Amal Kiran , rereferring to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, comments, "Guided by these two presences of fostering light and love, diverse souls aiming to be instruments of an inner and higher consciousness were led to attempt a new literature of mysticism no less than a new life of spiritual experience."

Every devotee expresses his deep reverence for the Guru, so also Nirodbaran says:

Out of your face there look at me

Two fathomless inexpressible eyes,

And from the heaven of their gaze

Outpour a wine of gold sun-rise. (Sun Blossoms 2)

From his account, we come to know that Sri Aurobindo adapts spirituality to the modern age. New forms of spiritual discourse were created, the old forms revived. “The old spirituality was based upon vairagya, disillusionment. The new spirituality is based upon samata, equality. And not merely the negative samata of endurance, indifference and submission, but a positive samata of rasa and priti, the mind’s pleasure in every kind of rasa.”(Divinity’s Comrade 246)

Nirodbaran, before coming to the ashram, had a temperament typical of a medical doctor. When asked by the Mother as why he had come to the ashram, he said “For Anand.” This innocent answer is a proof enough that he was not a high-handed philosopher, an impatient aspirant and restless seeker. But as time passed, he proved his mettle. He was a man of sincere will –grappling with the forces that come into play during the course of his sadhna. Though philosophy is not the forte of Nirodbaran, he says striking things about the veiled mystery of life and asserts that the veil of the mystery of life can be pierced and one can look beyond. Life is a veil that covers a spirit-sky:

An infinite range of stars is held concealed,  
 And all that reaches from these firmly sealed  
 Heavens are but dim flickers of things high.-7  
 But only few of them have the courage to find the hidden jewels behind this veil.  
 The veil withdraws, and yet few only see  
 The figure of winged Light, wrapped Mystery! -(Sun Blossoms 7)

Life’s kaleidoscopic nature baffles humanity. There are desert-tracts which are lifeless- cold and strange melancholies are buried under the sand, the earth wants to bring back the thoughts of happiness long lost.

In the poem Beyond, he says-  
 On burning sands life’s futile caravans tread  
 Lured by the passionate flicker-call of flesh,  
 In the same blind eager circles ever led  
 Through the labyrinthine desert’s mesh on mesh. (Sun Blossoms 14)

Life is viewed as a pilgrimage of soul. Life with all its negativity, gives opportunity to realise the peace amid the din, and the divine bliss amid the thorns of pain to an adventurous soul.

A pilgrimage of the solitary soul

Risen from earth's dark tomb of death

To whence began these conscious throbs of life

And end in the one ultimate Breath. (Sun Blossoms 20)

Echoing the very utterance of Sri Aurobindo, that spirit is the only reality and matter is the willed manifestation of the spirit, he says

Life is a veil that covers a spirit-sky (7)

And the veil withdraws but few only see the figure of winged Light, wrapped in mystery. In the infinite yogic silence, the poet awakes and enjoys an immortal rhythm of measureless felicity and experiences vistas beyond mortal vision.

Behind the veil of time, from an invisible height the masters, with infinite care and pains, carve on each cell of the poet's body, the beauty and delight that never wane. The poet flies in the blue spaces of his soul where all creation is a Godward cry in a vast plenitude of ecstasy. Mother's birth was a celestial mission. The sky, the earth and the rocking sea are the sleepless cradle of her vision. She is a growing flame of infinity.

The inexhaustible celestial stream

Whence she came veiled like an embodied dream. (Sun Blossoms 6)

When Nirodbaran reaffirms again and again his unshakable faith in the Master, he recurrently refers this earth and life as narrow in comparison of his soul's infinity.

Earth's narrow cage dwindles into a dot

The hills and trees with their cool, emerald shade. (Sun Blossoms 4)

Or

An ocean-like immensity

Invades my narrow earthly stream. (Sun Blossoms 2)

In the poem, Eearth-Cry the soul of the earth cries night and day and climbs to the topless distant peaks. Her murmuring voice is heard, answered.

These desert-tracts, as they lie lifeless, cold-

Strange melancholies buried in their sand,

Are like dry barren moments deeply scrolled

On endless canvas by an inscrutable hand. (11)

The poem depicts the hidden aspiration of the Mother Earth- to touch the sky and regain her lost divinity.

Whence like a cry of fire night and day  
Your soul climbs to the topless distant peaks  
In the heart of solemn vastness holding sway,  
Lined with immutable silence's golden streaks. (Sun Blossoms 11)

Dawn is a favourite word with Aurobindonians as it heralds an age of supramental awakening, the divine descent on earth. Each poet visualizes and celebrates this in his peculiar manner. Sri Aurobindo says about Usha or the Goddess of dawn in the Secret of the Veda:

Constantly the idea of the Truth is associated with this luminous goddess Usha. She awakens full of the Truth by the illuminations of heaven; she comes uttering words of truth; her dawns are luminous in their entering in because they are true as being born from the Truth; it is from the seat of the Truth that the dawns awake. She is the shining leader of perfect truths who awakens in perception to things of varied light and opens all doors. (484)

The silken garb of night veils no more dawn's soul's eternal beauty. The sudden stream of splendour breaks along time's lonely shore, the voiceless grandeur of the Infinite shines like a star on the brink of mystic shores.

A Grey line of old memory recedes  
Before the rumour of dawn-awakening,  
And from my heart break out the flaming seeds  
Of light in an immaculate offering. (Sun Blossoms 111)

The poet has a child like trust in the benevolence of the Guru. He never asks what he has gained or lost. He even never thinks about his spiritual progress or ignorance. He simply goes led by his Master.

Childlike I learn to abide  
In thee with perfect trust  
And all obscurities hide  
Behind thy sun as they must. (Sun Blossoms 59)

The poet feels ensconced him on a mystic height of space like stars glowing with unknown ecstasy. Whenever the poet drinks from his earthly lips the secret wine, it shall brim his very self fully. The poet deifies the Mother in many ways.

Two strange inscrutable eyes,  
Two frail transparent hands,  
Shape now our festivities;  
But their force none understands. (Sun Blossoms 82)

The vast creation bears the grandeur of her soul and our veiled spirit shares her splendour's aureole. This is the real and the most genuine tribute of the poet to the Mother.

For mortal beauty I can crave no more,  
Thou art the centre of my universe;  
And in thy heart I have found the secret door  
Leading to the ecstasy of the hidden spheres. (Sun Blossoms 94)

A forgotten divinity is the cause of ignorance. But the poet has some vague reminiscences, the inklings of that divine world in his childhood. In those moments a vision awakes in his heart and he gets a hint.

I felt as if I were a wave  
Of some vast consciousness (Sun Blossoms 61)

In that state of oneness, his soul is linked with each fire-breath of life and inanimate. He has come to a silent shore where his spirit is at rest: it has regained infinity. Embarking upon the path of spirituality, the world, life, existence, all change their colour and contours to a seeker. There resides beauty, ecstasy, love and the spirit ascends to the lone empyrean height. In day, today life this voice comes to the ears of human beings but he, in his ignorance, takes no heed.

The tree, birds, fire, stars are the frequently used images and symbols through which the poet suggests the vastness, infiniteness, freedom, growth and self-consecration. The short poems are highly musical and few long poems are in blank verse. The poet is very experimental so far metre is concerned. Some poems have the pattern of run on line to line. The book Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran presents a thrilling account of the Master's patience and his concern with the slow emergence of a poet in the disciple. He reads every single line, brings correction and explains the right place and meaning of

each word. For example the original draft of the poem Liberation by Nirodbaran is below and how the

Master revises it.

(Original)-I dive deep in the ocean of my being

*To gather jewels of deathless thought*

*Hidden beyond the pale of mortal seeing,*

*Nor in its imagination caught.*

Sri Aurobindo gives the final shape to it:

I dive in the ocean of my being

To gather jewels of deathless thought

Hidden beyond the pale of mortal seeing,

Never by leap of fancy caught. (145)

Once Nirod was upset, as he was sick of repetitions in his poetry. How Sri Aurobindo consoles him, “Well, if the book had to be published, a selection would have to be made. But as you are writing in order to open yourself more to the source of full inspiration, it doesn’t matter so much.” (131) Sri Aurobindo ,being a true teacher, motivates the disciples and reminds them the real purpose of writing poetry. It is for unveiling the hidden, dark layers of the consciousness to the sun of truth consciousness. Kishor H. Gandhi pays a glowing tribute to Nirodbaran in the foreword of Sun-Blossom:

The height and intensity of the poet’s inspiration no doubt varies, but even at his lowest pitch he never forsakes the intuitive felicity of the genuinely inspired word and vision; never does he lapse into the mere intellectualised or the externally vital or sensational mode of speech or seeing....Even at a moderate estimate Nirodbaran’s poetry must rank very high indeed; truly evaluated, it must be acclaimed as a definitive milestone on the slowly unfolding path of the evolution of the future poetry. (1)

Thus these two poets carried the tradition of intuitive poetry established by Sri Aurobindo. The contribution given by this school of poetry is immense and immortal. The materialistic consciousness of the present stress-ridden society will find succor and strength in such mystical poetry written by this school. This is the need of the hour that such type of poetry and such mind-set will be developed in the present times of pandemics.

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