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Discourse of Love and Beauty in Selected Poems of Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo is a great Indian poet and philosopher. His "Urvasie" is a brilliant symbolic love poem. Urvasie is the companion nymph of Pururavus. She is a manifestation of splendour. She and Pururavus are two physical emanations in human forms inhabited by the same secret - self or Nature. It is the pilgrimage of the Self in quest of the alter-self.

In "Urvasie", the mind of the lover-king is clouded by ignorance at the beginning. The urges are guided by the mental and vital being. But in the later poem Pururavus is depicted only as a descendent of sun, the 'Supreme Liberator' and 'Energy'. He tries to realise infinite Truth through the attainment of 'Eternal Beauty'. He follows the path of ascetic self-denial and practical wisdom. His inner contradictions disappear and in conscience is turned to the consciousness of the Divine. He surrenders himself to the Divine Mother's Grace who lifts him to higher psychic regions in Nature. Thus the transforming power of psychic consciousness is introduced. The universal consciousness is represented in Uravasie which can only be realised through the spiritual identity of the ego with the divine will.

Love is a creative force and a continuous quest. Man or woman yearns and struggles for completion which he/she never does attain or attains only for a moment. Whereas Sri Aurobindo says that true love is a spiritual union. There is one cosmic mind, life, body. Love neither gives nor denies life, it only makes us realise life. It is a passion that seeks eternity and intensity. Therefore, to approach God by love is to prepare oneself for the greatest possible spiritual fulfillment.

Keywords: Divine love, Incarnate and Eternal beauty, Grace, True love, Cosmic mind, Life and Body.

Sri Aurobindo is a yogi, seer, philosopher, poet and Indian nationalist who propounds a philosophy of divine life on earth through spiritual evolution. His long poem, "Urvasie"

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is a brilliantly told symbolic love story with the theme of eternal quest and deliverance. The mythological incident is picked up from the *Mahabharata* and is reinforced with the symbolism of the immortality of Beauty and Truth. Although there is no detailed symbolism, the act of love is symbolic and is characteristic of the semi-mystical life of the hero and his beloved.

I dream upon a woman's glorious breast,
And watch the dew-drop and am glad with birds,
And love the perfect coilings of the snake,
And cry with the fire in the burning trees,
And am a wave towards desired shores.
I move to these and move towards her bosom.
And mystic eyes where all these are one dream.

("Urvasie", Canto II, p. 84)

Pururavus' divine erotic intensity is expressed here where compelling love is a spiritual achievement, an experience and a moral force.

… O King; for never man
With Opsara may dwell and both be known:
Either a rapture she invisible
Or he a mystic body and mystic soul.

("Urvasie", Canto II, p. 85)

The ideal of the poet is love with a rich abandonment but it is underlined by a sense of mystical privacy. There is no romantic melancholy and emotional dissipation in Pururavus. He has been given a psychological representation of the human ego and its psychic longing. Moaning of Pururavus, the intense breathing and deep embraces of Urvasie and the hidden conquest of heart are the true revelations of our psychic longing. Urvasie beckons Pururavus to stand against time and enter the chamber of eternity. The warrior hero rises to spiritual heights. The hero, in search of the inner light of the soul, enters a world of mystical realities. He finds in Nature a secret soul and by dint of mystic intuition realises that he and Urvasie are two physical emanations in the human forms inhabited by the same secret self or Nature. It is the pilgrimage of the Self in search of the alter-self.

The mountains seemed to recognise a soul
Immense as they, reaching as they to heaven
And capable of infinite solitude.
Long he, in meditation deep immersed,
Strove to dissolve his soul among the hills
Into the thought of Urvasie. The snow
Stole from heaven and touched his cheek and hair,
The storm-blast from the peaks leaped down and smote

But woke him not, and the white drops in vain
Froze in his locks or crusted all his garb.

("Urvasie", Canto IV, *Collected Poems*, p. 101)

The psychic life has been sublimated to the world of spiritual existence. The imagery is symbolic of the hero's unconscious mind. Transcending the world of arguments is the world of symbols. The mountain of cosmic expression is both logical and supra-logical. It is fixed and unchanging including both a desire for power and stoic resignation. Pururavus is capable of facing this duality. He rises to the higher levels of inner consciousness wherein he and Urvasie become one soul and remain two bodies. It is in the assimilation of matter and spirit that the integral consciousness is involved.

Mute she arose and with wide quiet eyes
Came towards him. In their immortal looks
Was a deep feeling too august for joy,
The sense that all eternity must follow
One perfect moment. … .

("Urvasie", Canto IV, *Collected Poems*, p. 108)

Sri Aurobindo says, "In any case, love has necessarily a two-fold fulfilment by its very nature, that by which the lover and the beloved enjoy their union in difference and all too that enhances the joy of various union, and that by which they throw themselves into each other and become one self. (*The Synthesis of Yoga* 560) He also elaborates the philosophy of integral love:

> All those that cannot coexist with the perfect union of love, must eventually fall away, while only those that can form themselves into expressions of divine love and into means of enjoying divine love, can remain. For love is the one emotion in us which can be entirely motiveless and self-existent; love need have no other motive than love. For all our emotions arise either from the seeking after delight and the possession of it, or from the baffling of the search, or from the failure of the delight we have possessed or had thought to grasp; but love is that by which we can enter directly into possession of the self-existent delight of the divine Being. Divine love is indeed itself that possession and, as it were, the body of the Ananda. (*The Synthesis of Yoga* 559)

Sri Aurobindo maintains that the act of love is a symbolic process. Here the soul is its own betrayer and its own deliverer. The long-urge fashions forth its own world of symbolic expressions. Richard Ellmann has rightly pointed out, while explaining the nature of urges in Yeats' poetry, that human existence is a spiritual symbol. He writes, "Not only are the symbols like men but conversely the men are like symbols or actors ..... A man is welded to his image, a player to his role: when we speak of the drama of heroic action our language is no more figurative than when we speak of its reality." (Ellmann 285)

In *Urvasie* there is a desire for spiritual oneness. The romantic and symbolic story of Pururavus and Urvasie had great fascination for Sri Aurobindo. While

translating the *Vikramorvasie* of Kalidas he was conscious of the romantic and semi-divine king Pururavus.

Thus with a mind stored and brimming with poetry, a habit of speech of royal splendour and fullness and an imagination fired and enlarged by the unequalled grandeur of his own destiny, Pururavus comes to the great event which shall be the touchstone of his nature. Such a man was alone fit to aspire to and win the incarnate beauty of the world and its sensuous life, the *Apsara* who sprang from the thigh of the Supreme. And again in appreciation of Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Urvasie* (1895), Aurobindo writes: "The Urvasie of the myth, as has been splendidly seen and expressed by a recent Bengali poet, is the spirit of imaginative beauty in the universe, the unattainable ideal for which the soul of man is eternally panting, the goddess adored of the nympholept in all lands and in all ages." ("Kalidasa's Characters - Pururavas" 270)

The Pururavus of another fragmentary poem *Urvasie* lives in the world of occult realities. The earlier hero of the narrative poem *Urvasie* has a diversified personality. He lives in the world of delight and love. His life is a ritual and his aspirations are the aspirations of all living beings. He is constantly in search of his alter-ego. His realisations and visions are the testimonials of divine grace. But this lone Pururavus is a Gnostic creature. He is a vaster force, intense and deep in the joy of seeking. From mind-self he enters the domain of knowledge-self and he is advancing towards Yoga-realisation. He is a bright star between earth and heaven.

> He reached the crossways of eternity.
> A Soul to our apparent life reborn
> Out of the vastness of the original Self,
> Journeying in dim momentous solitude
> Led by the flickering of uncertain suns,
> He essayed the fringe of Night's tremendous home.
> Before him lay the subtle realm of light
>
> ("Pururavus", *Collected Poems*, pp. 663-664)

In the *Divine Comedy* Virgil, who accompanies Dante, can be regarded a positive example here. Mythology is replete with such alter-egoes that take us to the realm of the unconscious. Pururavus is such a personality. His mind is consistently confronted with ambition and attainment. His desires and attainments in love for Urvasie are symbolic of the collective unconscious in the personality of man. He feels isolated after the disappearance of Urvasie. Urvasie for him is existence personified and what is universal is interpreted by him as a purely personal assessment although the celestial companions of Urvasie have time and again explained the unearthly and supramundane nature of his union with her.

Pururavus has his guiding image in Urvasie like the light of grace in Beatrice for Dante. He tries to establish the essential identity of himself with all and all with himself. These two forms of consciousness are human and spiritual. The universal consciousness is represented in Uravasie which can only be realised through the spiritual identity of the ego with the divine will.

In his long wandering search for Urvasie, Pururavus discovers the Mother of the Aryans who holds a mystic lotus in her hands as the external symbol of sacrifice and redemption:

Then with a sweet immortal smile the mother
Gave to him in the hollow of her hand
Wonderful water of the lake. He drank,
And understood infinity, and saw
Time like a snake coiling among the stars;
And earth he saw, and mortal nights and days
Grew to him moments, and his limbs became
Undying and his thoughts as marble endured.

("Urvasie", Canto IV, *Collected Poems*, pp.105-106)

Pururavus is guided by the mother of the Aryans to the Mighty Mother of the Summit who breathes on the cosmic Summit and rectifies pain.

… Thence, enshrined
In deep concealing glories, came a voice,
And clearer he discerned as one whose eyes,
Long cognizant of darkness, coming forth,
Grow gradually habituated to light,
The calm compassionate face, the heaven-wide brow,
And the robust great limbs that bear the world.
Prophetical and deep her voice came down:
"Thou then hast failed, bright soul; but God blames not
Nor punishes. Impartially he deals …

("Urvasie", Canto IV, *Collected Poems*, p. 106)

Similar ideas about the relationship of the male are expressed in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that uneasy in its loneliness, feeling no delight, the primordial self-divided. His self into two-and thence came husband and wife. Love is a creative force and a continuous quest as Berdyaev considers: "Man is a being divided into halves, that is to say he is a sexual creature. He yearns and struggles for completion, for the attainment of wholeness which he never does attain or attains only for a moment." (Berdyaev 118)

On various occasions the hero-lover is assisted by divine grace. The mother of Aryans makes him drink the wonderful water from the lake- the divine source of human life. The seeker understands the true source of infinity. Kierkegaard says: "love's secret life is in the heart, unfathomable, and it also has an unfathomable connection with the whole of existence" (Works of Love, p.8).

In another small poem dealing with the theme of Urvasie the hero-king is an embodiment of the vital love yearning for a spiritual life:

As yet some largeness was of inmost things
And he remembered in the formless sense
Proud kingdoms of intense and beautiful life
And love left free to do his absolute will
And dreams at once commuted into power.

("Pururavus", *Collected Poems*, p. 665)

Thus "Urvasie" is a love poem where the conventional love quest is given a symbolic meaning of spiritual realisation. Abandonment of the ego and complete non-attachment is essential for the full vision of Divine Love.

"Love and Death" as a poem is equally a story and a symbolic romance that forms a sequel to "Urvasie". The poet had attained a mystical and spiritual vision in the search of Pururavus. Although he had seen Divine Beauty, the Unknown still remained a mystery in the form of Death. The task is undertaken by Ruru (in "Love and Death") who is the son of a great *rishi* and is selected on earth for special disaster. He lives with his young wife Priumvada in a happy union of deep idealistic love. It is in the wide garden of nature that Ruru and Priumvada speak out and express their longing and love. But Priumvada dies prematurely of a snake-bite and expresses her anguish and longing at the time of death in the following words:

I have not learned the names of half the flowers
Around me; so few trees know me by my name;
Nor have I seen the stars so very often
That I should die. I feel a dreadful hand
Drawing me from the touch of thy warm limbs
Into some cold vague mist, and all black night
Descends towards me. I no more am thine,
But go I know not where, and see pale shapes
And gloomy countries and that terrible stream.
O Love, O Love, they take me from thee far,
And whether we shall find each other ever
In the wide dreadful territory of death,
I know not.

("Love and Death", *Collected Poems*, p. 117)

In this poem the power of love is a manifested. The infinite psyche has to be realised deep within the sense-experience. After obtaining the release of Priumvada from the control of Death, Ruru falls into a psychic sleep. His body and mind are tranquilised and he is gifted with the sweet familiar looks of his beloved. Priumvada is not a love goddess. She is only an aspect of human life that is troubled in separation and longs for union. She is not the inspirer of a mood but the mood itself.

Moreover in true love a sense of identity is born with the idealised object. Love becomes the law of universe and both the lover and the beloved yearn for absolute

oneness. A universal delight pervades all trannsient beings. Life has got a double living. The emotional and temperamental life of the heart is widened to the aesthetic and intellectual living in reality. In both cases love is self-seeking as well as self manifesting. The lover presents himself as a medium and instrument of Nature for the adoration of Divine will. The lover is both a champion and an embodiment of sweetness and delight.

On the other hand, love today has lost its super humaneness. It is not an aspiration but an activity. And in this way "Love and Death" is a poem of the past. It still believes in transcendental love. Love neither gives nor denies life; it only makes us realise life. Modern love has its basis in actual life and does not believe in mystification. The beloved is not imparted a mystical personality. Her appearance and expressions are not idealised. Voltaire scandalised love and Flaubert rationalised it and the romantic intensity of love has been put to question in this rational age. But when human beings try to be one with the divine the whole process of love becomes a symbol. There is a wide gap between the world of senses and the ideal beauty. They are only harmonised. Irving Babbitt has remarked critically about romantic love:

> For though the romanticist wishes to abandon himself to the rapture of love, he does not wish to transcend his own ego. The object with which Pygmalion is in love is after all only a projection of his own "genius". But such an object is not in any proper sense an object at all. There is in fact no object in the romantic universe-only subject. This subjective love amounts in practice to a use of the imagination to enhance emotional intoxication, or if one prefers, to the pursuit of illusion for its own sake. (Babbitt 93)

Babbitt has reduced love to a primitive faith. He believes that the lover is possessed by his own individuality and very little of a higher motive can be seen in his renunciation in search of his object.

In the poem "Love and Death" the duty of loving is the predominating theme. Ruru's soul maintains the deep consciousness of unity with Priyumvada. Love takes a definite shape in him. His feelings and desire for oneness is deep and forceful in the following lines:

> …. For a moment,
> One blissful moment he had felt 'twas she.
> So had she often stolen up and touched
> His curls with her enamoured fingers small,
> Lingering, while the wind smote him with her hair
> And her quick breath came to him like spring. Then he,
> Turning, as one surprised with heaven, saw
> Ready to his swift passionate grasp her bosom
> And body sweet expecting his embrace.
> Oh, now saw her not, but the guilty tree
> Shrinking; then grief back with a double crown

Arose and stained his face with agony.
Nor silence he endured, but the dumb force
Ascetic and inherited, by sires
Fierce-musing earned, from the boy's bosom blazed.

("Love and Death", *Collected Poems*, pp.120-121)

Sri Aurobindo regards love as a passion that seeks eternity and intensity. To him love is also a yearning for beauty and the lover is a seeker of delight. When human motions turn God wards the whole personality is divinised and love becomes an eternal quest for the eternal and unalloyed bliss.

The power that shall lead to spiritual transformation is rooted in the Earth-Nature of humanity itself. We are all hunters of joy, power and knowledge and we should not dim our vision of reality through a limited self-seeking. We must not separate earth from heaven but should respond to the stirring call of the Divine. We shall be the true pilgrims of light if we understand the comprehensive power of love – the rhythm of the Infinite, the potent power that gives be atitude to the life of man. The finite and the Infinite, the changing and the Eternal, the human and the Divine are the two apparent "denials" in the cosmic creation. But these two contradictions are resolved when the touch of the Divine is there.

Two are the ends of existence, two are the dreams of the Mother:
Heaven unchanging, earth with her time-beats yearn to each other,-
Earth-souls needing the touch of the heavens peace to recapture,
Heaven needing earth's passion to quiver its peace into rapture.
Marry, O lightning eternal, the passion of a moment-born fire!
Out of thy greatness draw close to the breast of our mortal desire!

("Ahana", *Collected Poems*, pp. 477-478)

Integral truth and divine joy should be confined in human life. It should be a realm of Vrindavan-consciousness where the Divine and the devotee - God, man, life and all nature live in perfect harmony and peaceful bliss. The secret of the universal game of love and seeking is explained in following words of Sri Aurobindo:

Life in my limbs shall grow deathless, flesh with the God-glory tingle,
Lustre of Paradise, light of the earth-ways marry and mingle.

("Ahana", *Collected Poems*, p. 489)

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