

Mystical Elements in the Select Poems of Sri Aurobindo and Francis Thompson

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Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo from India and Francis Thompson from England had the blend of the concept 'Mysticism' in several of their poems. The quest for truth and surrendering to the supreme power are the vital themes in many of their poems. Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri' and Francis Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven' are the true examples representing the concept 'Mysticism'. These two mystic writers had a sturdy intention of finding the infinite in all the efforts they undertook. Though both these poets had one vision with mystic sense, their method and direction to achieve the mystic state was a bit different. The present paper brings out the mystic elements in the two select poems of these two great poets.

Introduction:

Curiosity is the prime source of development of one's knowledge. This was proved true multiple times in the field of research. Since the time immemorial, many have tried their hand to come to a conclusion with regard to creation of the universe, and the questions regarding time and space. The understanding one gets is that the supreme consciousness desired to have its representatives. Sri Aurobindo and Francis Thompson were convinced that God created the universe and manifested in their creations. The two mystic poets drew their concept with this strong belief.

Mysticism:

The practice of religious ecstasies in addition to concepts like myths, rites, ethics, ideologies, legends and magic may be termed as 'Mysticism'. In other words, it may also refer to the accomplishment of insight in decisive or hidden truths. The term, 'mysticism' has Ancient Greek origins with a difference in the meanings. According to Greek language, it refers to the biblical liturgical, spiritual and medieval Christianity. However, the meaning and definition of the term 'mysticism' varies in the modern times.

Sri Aurobindo

Born in 1872, Sri Aurobindo was known for his influence in Indian independence movement in leading the people. He was one of the most influential leaders and a matchless spiritual reformer instilling his true visions on human progress and spiritual evolution. His major argument is that divine Brahman manifests as empirical reality through divine play.

He is known for revolutionizing the human thought and had an inexplicable influence on the people of the world. As a poet, he is bestowed with a poetic awareness that is undoubtedly committed to reaching consciousness spiritually. He had mastery on several poetic modes but he invented a writing style of his own that would go hand in hand with his supreme spiritual thought.

One can observe that mysticism is an inseparable part in his poems. Aurobindo's philosophy seems to be a modernized version of the concept called 'Taittiriya Upanishad.' He opines that man should exceed the conscious level through the medium of Yoga. This mode is not confined to mere saints but to all humans. Total dedication and one's internal surrender may help a person reach this stage.

Sri Aurobindo's attempt in composing a poem in 20th century which had mystical elements could very well be considered a courageous one. Such optimism would be agreed upon since it is considered quite tough to compose a poetic work having epic nature during the period where the minds of the modern authors got fragmented. Every reader of Sri Aurobindo's poems with a reasonable comprehension and critical analysis and ability to probe the meanings in poetry would claim that his poems had been successful in his endeavor. It was possible for Aurobindo to make this happen with the divine help and guidance in a poem like 'Savitri'. A notable point here is that despite being a modern man having highly scientific influence, he was able to notice this supreme quest against the milieu of the theory of evolution.

Mentioning about the greatness of 'Savitri', Srinivasa Iyengar says, "Savitri has been read as poetry, as poetized philosophy, as symbolistic and mystic poetry, as an example of the overload inspiration at work over prolonged jets of utterance." (Sri Aurobindo: A biography and a history 690.)

Talking about the mystic elements in the epic poem 'Savitri', Varma mentions that,

“Savitri is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth’s darkness and struggle, to the highest realms of supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence and metaphorical brilliance... *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man’s mind towards the Absolute. (Verma KD, 2000)

Mystical Quest:

The very first stage in connection with mystical quest is ‘the awakening of one’s own self.’ This can never be felt and experienced by ordinary people in their lives. This mystical element is clearly represented by Aswapathi, the human father of Savitri. He believes that human beings possess a weak mind and he scolds people who are not running after higher aspirations.

While talking about the nature of people, Aswapathi feels that the average human beings lead their whole life in dealing with their routines where they never think of their higher standards and realities. However, a few people, dejected with their present ordinary and routine life, have big dreams and feels strong to achieve. The strong desire born out of inner depths of one’s high aspirations and strong will is the cult point in any mystical quest which one can call as ‘the awakening of the self.’ Aswapathi blames people as

“Absorbed in the present act, the fleeting days,

None thought to look beyond the hour’s gains

.....

It knew itself a creature of the mud;

It asked no larger law, no loftier aim;

It had no inward look, no upward gaze. (Savithri: 145-149)

‘The purgation of the senses and the self’ can be named as the next phase in the life of a person with deep desire for quest. Disintegration and dissolution of the ego may very well be the focal point in purification process. One can observe this process happening with Aswapathi in the poem ‘Savitri’. He was capable of breaking the cocoon of egoistic behavior.

To attain mystical experience, one should be able to go through this stage. Hence, it is considered a primary requirement of achieving mystical experience. Sri Aurobindo's description of Aswapati denotes his transformation as follows.

“Then the small bodily ego thins and falls;
No more insisting on its separate self,
Losing the punctilio of its separate birth,
It leaves us one with Nature and with God.” (Savitri -47)

Francis Thompson and Mystical elements in his poetry

Francis Thompson was born in 1859 who was known to be mystic. He entered medical school at a tender age of 18 but only to leave pursuing his talent as a writer when he was 26. Most of his poetry was written during the earlier part of his writing career between 1888-1897. He was one of the poets who was influenced by unsavoury biographical details of his life. His addiction to opium and his miserable days in London are visible in the poems penned from him.

Francis Thompson belonged to a fervent Roman Catholic who experienced a tortured life. After quitting his studies in order to be a priest, and a physician, he had a crisis of financial hard times. The Hound of Heaven' is a poem which has 'the pursuit of a sinner by a loving God' as its theme. The poem, written in a lofty and dignified manner, expresses the deep feelings of the author.

A reader's sympathetic perspective of Thompson's poems confirms two things- the verse intertwined with much of his autobiographical elements and the great authenticity of his vision. Thompson's vision which he gained through an inexplicable amount of pain and suffering is very human in its continuous awareness of the fallen state of man devoid from the kingdom of God. Though Thompson fails many times in engaging our hearts, many of his poems are wonderful descriptions of the soul's longing for the state of basic joy and innocence. The strong catholic faith and the artistic delight in him were the two strong convictions of the great poet which helped him achieve the supremacy in the field of mystical elements.

A mystic poet who has the hazy fancy nature cannot go far. Thompson's clarity over his expressions and ideas connected to mysticism was matchless. In his opinion, a poet should have a clarity and logical sense to resume of his teaching. He went too far to have a crystal clear clarity on important characteristics of mysticism by finding poetic expressions of mystical truths. As a great poet having the exquisite skills to include wonderful expressions in his poems, Thompson will prefer to appeal to the mind rather than heart.

The mysticism in his poems is viewed to have two diligent forms- immanent and transcendental. The first one is known in his attitude to nature and the material universe. He takes a different view of the natural world since he doesn't owe everything to his religious background. This connects him to the general order of mystics who tend to choose immanent type of religious experience.

In this poem 'The Hound of Heaven', the speaker escapes from God in order to lead a life full of pleasures. One can sense the autobiographical elements between the speaker of the poem and the author. The speaker, despite his awareness of God loving him and treating him like the apple of his eye, runs away thinking that surrendering to God is like giving up worldly pleasures. The speaker roams from place to place to escape from his pursuer none other than God. He requests with dawn to be short so that he could hide in the darkness. He also pleads evening to cover him from his pursuer. Nevertheless, God pursues him despite all his attempts to keep himself away from God. The speaker's guess was wrong with children cheering him. However, he hears the voice of his pursuer. The happiness he wanted to experience in the things of the world has avoided the speaker. God gives the reason for taking speaker in his direction. It was not envisioned to hurt him but to help him take the correct path. The speaker misunderstood the shade of the extended hand of God as the gloom that puts him in darkness.

Conclusion:

The significance of human life was understood by these poets through mystical experience. They were not only rich in experience of mystic sense, but also showed the path to achieve it. Their mystical thought, despite its complex nature, very well illuminates the world destroying ignorance and fanaticism. It can also improve the level of tolerance in an individual who in turn can opt for a peaceful and mutual co-existence. Thus, these poets wish for a world union through divine consciousness.

The importance given to yoga and meditation in today's world speaks volumes of the impact of the seeds sprinkled by Sri Aurobindo's on the minds of the readers. If one can transcend beyond one's own limits bidding farewell to ego through mystic route. The same might be the case with Francis Thompson too. With the true experience from his real life, he speaks about the importance of God pursues.

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