

# **Making a Religion of Secular Spirituality from Self Experience: a Comparative Analysis on the Poetry of Aurobindo and that of Wordsworth**

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Despite infinite differences which make every man an island, there is one transcendental reality; that is spiritual reality, which makes all one.

This paper aims at examining the universality in the select poets' experience in their realization of ultimate truth. It traces unique spiritual experiences of William Wordsworth and Sri Aurobindo as dealt by them in their poetry, and analyses the features which ascertain the universality of their experience. Various spiritual elements found in the select poems are the subjects of close examination in this paper.

Schneider observes that 'Spirituality' has become a new discipline in academy for study and research and he also finds the reason for the emergence of it:

In the 1970s and 1980s a new discipline, which gradually came to be called "Spirituality" rather than "Spiritual Theology", began to emerge in academy. The reasons for the new interest are complex, cultural as well as theological, but interest centered on experience of the search for meaning, transcendence, personal integration and social transformation.

(82)

Spirituality is not just a system of belief as it is interlaced with all aspects of life aiming at social transformation. Therefore, it may also be considered as important and indispensable for the growth and future of mankind. Hence it has become a serious subject matter for research.

According to Aurobindo, spiritual evolution is the ultimate purpose of life. It is every man's birth purpose to realize the supra-mental consciousness in the course of conscious evolution. That is possible when man is in deep communion with cosmic nature and his inner reality. He should reach a point of transition from the conditioned automated pattern of existence to the state of unperturbed awareness. In fact, there is no external guidance for man to attain it, but he has to rely on his inherent aspiration and profound quest to guide his total beings in the path of spiritual evolution. One can find the similar aspiration but with unique mind set in Wordsworth's pursuit.

Jon A. Shaw's "Illustrations from the writing of Dante Alighieri and William Wordsworth" reveals how these poets became inter woven with a profound Spirituality. He says that "In Dante we will see the elaboration of religious Spirituality, while in the writings of Wordsworth a secular Spirituality emerges interwoven with nature". Caleb William's "Wordsworth celebration of Man as Nature", is another study discusses the spirituality in the poetry of William Wordsworth. According to Williams the actual subject matter of Wordsworth poetry is the internal world of man, the striving of mind and the sublime experience of the soul. According to the author, If one sets his perception right on Wordsworth's poetry, he can see a greater Spiritual reality behind all the external Natural objects. The author calls such poetry of

Wordsworth like *The Prelude* and “Tintern Abbey” as poetry of consciousness. According to the writer these poems take man to close contact with Divinity by transcending his present limitations.

This aspiration and the experiences of the aspirants in the path of spiritual evolution is recorded in Aurobindo’s poetry, especially those written in his later stage, and also in the poetry of Wordsworth. This paper explores the universal elements in the experiences of these poets beyond various differences due to various influential factors. The comparative analysis is a kind of parallel study in which analogy method is used to trace the universality in the spiritual experiences in the poetry of Aurobindo and Wordsworth. It also explores the unique features in individual poet’s approaches as well as the characteristic differences between their spiritual realizations.

On reaching the human stage in the path of evolution, Man has the responsibility to determine his freedom by means of choice of action. Action is considered as a mean to the liberation of self. It holds the key for awakening of consciousness. It can be considered from spiritual perspective that the choice of action and the state of mind in which it is done, determine the freedom of self from the chain of actions. The real freedom is freedom from the ceaseless chain of actions. Here the action refers to external action in the physical world with correspondence to incessant flow of thought in mind. Actions with orientation towards surface realities lead to disillusion of consciousness. Wordsworth and Aurobindo detached themselves from the materialistic and surface realities. Detachments from these actions which are considered by external factors hold the key for self liberation and evolution of consciousness. In the course of action, there are moments of awakening; the consciousness which is awakened at any of these moments gradually gains what Wordsworth calls ‘human wisdom’ which has the power to liberate the self from the chain of actions.

Aspiration for evolution of consciousness, and actions and thoughts disciplined by Integral yoga are the driving force in Aurobindo’s spiritual journey. Aurobindo methodized action and devised techniques to regulate functions of mind in order to evolve spiritually. His life’s mission is to orientate actions towards spiritual reality and to realize the divine potentiality within. His epic *Savitri* deals with inner actions of self, functions of thought and emotions at various state of consciousness and it also deals with the realization of supra mental consciousness in the process of evolutions. Sri Aurobindo devised effective technique called ‘Integral Yoga’ in order to elevate the consciousness at lower plane of existence to the state of supra mental realization..

Aurobindo believes that there is no guidance for soul for its evolution from external world. He exhorts the importance of shaping life according to inner consciousness, in one of his letters, he wrote; how one should shape life according to spirit:

One should organize life, not according to outer, artificial rules, but according to an organized inner consciousness. If one allows life to drift without imposing the control of a higher consciousness, life becomes inexpressive and irresolute. It is to waste one’s time in the sense that matter persists without a conscious utilization. (2)

If one focuses his attention on outer sensuous reality and believe only in its existence, his conscious remains slave to the ephemeral reality and his life will be futile. Hence the objective

of this life lies in realizing the higher consciousness to the greatest extends by listening to one's own inner voice. It can be seen how the poets taken for this study agree with each other.

Wordsworth's approach towards spiritual realization is of distinct nature. His actions lie in the plane of feeling and emotion, and his thoughts are sublimated by constant relation with nature. His poems present the phenomena of various stages of emotional development during the evolution of consciousness. Wordsworth measured and beautifully articulated passages in *Prelude* convey this subtle truth. The poet's act of being witness of worldly phenomenon indicates a kind of detachment from worldly activities due to the evolution of consciousness.

As one who hangs down-bending from the side  
Of a slow-moving boat upon the breast  
Of a still water, solacing himself  
With such discoveries as his eye can make  
Beneath him in the bottom of the deeps,  
Sees many beauteous sights-weeds, fishes, flowers,  
Grots, pebbles, roots of trees-and fancies more,  
Yet often in perplexed, and cannot part  
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,  
Mountain and clouds, from that which is indeed  
The region and the things which there abide  
In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam  
Of his own image, by a sun beam now,  
And motions that are sent he knows not whence,  
Impediments that make his task more sweet;  
Such pleasant office have we long pursued  
Incumbent over the surface of past time-

(247-64)

The poet relates himself with nature through sublime emotion and mind free from any worldly thoughts. The poet finds that the lake is the suitable object to give expression to the complexity of mind. The greatest part of mental life consists of reflections on our own ideas, some portion lingers the petty needs of ego and some other carries the material world; 'the fever of the world'. The poet experiences a power and radiance when he relates himself with nature. As a result of it, he is taken quite beyond the normal encounters of the mind. During those moments nature transfigured with a numerous qualities and reveals something beyond the power of man to understand. Wordsworth describes one such experience in *The Prelude*, during his walks round the lake of Erstwhile in the evening; "gently did my soul, / Put off her veil, and self-transmuted, stood / naked as in the presence of her God." (40-42) Thus nature helps him to articulate the interaction between the mind and external world by bridging both realities.

Similarly, Aurobindo's description of Savitri's state of oneness is an ideal example for the poet's concept of 'oneness'. Savitri, in her non-dual awareness state, sees and feels the oneself presence in all. After her transcendental experience, she finds transformation in her outlook. She sees in other people around her the same self presents in her. She loses her fragmented identity and confluences in 'shared-identity'.

She was the single self of all these selves,  
She was in them and they were all in her.

This first was an immense identity  
In which her own identity was lost;  
What seemed herself was an image of the whole, (557)

Savitri feels immense oneness with all living being, even with plants and the other 'sub-conscious life'. Her identity excludes nothing it embraces ordinary plants to supreme divine. The whole cosmos flowered in her:

She was a subconscious life of tree and flower,  
The outbreak of the honied buds of spring;  
She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,  
She was the red heart of the passion-flower,  
The dream-white of lotus in its pool.  
Out of subconscious life she climbed to mind,  
She was thought and passion of the world's heart  
She was the godhead hid in the heart of man, (557)

This concept is reflected in short poems also. For instance, the poem "Silence" describes the poet's subtle experience of expanding consciousness or enlargement of awareness very effectively. Here the poet observes the great power bequeathed to soul on attaining the state of oneness.

Vast and immobile, formless and marvelous,  
Higher than heaven, wider than universe  
In a pure glory of being,  
In a bright stillness of self-seeing,  
Communing with a boundless voiceless and intimate  
Make the knowledge too high for thought,  
Thy joy too deep for emotion (C.P. 567)

It is not the state of dissolution of self because the self is there to feel the stillness and experience the formlessness. According to the poet, this state is higher than heaven, because even heaven is only a mental conception of sublime state. Once conscious transcends mind it can cherish really sublime and authentic bliss, which cannot be imagined by mind. Aurobindo describes another state of soul in 'Beyond the Silence' where the self feels itself one with the divine:

One with the eternal, live in infinity,  
Drowned in absolute, found in the God head,  
Swam of the supreme and space less  
Ether wandering winged through the universe,  
Spirit immortal. (C.P. p.568)

Similarly, the idea of 'oneness' and realization of 'cosmic consciousness' are described in a style unique to Wordsworth in his poetry. Wordsworth's Poetry takes Spirituality to new heights of consciousness. According to him, whenever there is a communication between nature and the poet, he does not remain as a witness. He becomes one with the nature and feels a deep sense of gratitude for the 'bliss', he gets from its communion. The oneness of the poet is a kind of emotional oneness. It is different from that of Sri Aurobindo's state. As the poet is conscious of his physical realm, he feels the 'presence that disturbs' him. He feels that his senses becoming sublime by the divine touch. The 'oneness', that Wordsworth feels, is not a

purely at mental state as in the case of other poets. The 'oneness' Wordsworth feels is felt at the realm of emotion and mind.

Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey" presents the elevated consciousness and its inexplicable sublime experience so exquisitely. It depicts the poet's aspiration to 'grow beyond' the present state and feel the act of supreme power everywhere. He transcends reasons to gain the supreme knowledge of realizing the oneness of self present everywhere.

[...] And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (95-104)

This mystical experience helps the poet to understand the transitory nature of worldly life and aspires to realize the transcendental consciousness. The poet can see the one spirit, the cosmic consciousness, presents in all things.

[...] the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things. (43- 50)

There are many similarities in the experiences of Sri Aurobindo and Wordsworth. Both of them experience the mystical state of 'oneness' and 'cosmic consciousness' in their path towards spiritual realization. Both of them become witnesses on reaching this sublime state. They realize themselves as all pervaded self. Thus it can be inferred from the analysis that Aurobindo and Wordsworth have different perceptions of action that leads to the realization of self. Indeed, there are differences in the perceptions and approaches towards the ultimate reality but ultimate aim of these poets is the same. These poets operate themselves from different realms of activity plane, but the objective of their effort is to realize the same transcendental ultimate reality.

It is found from the investigation that there are many universal features observed in the spiritual experience of Sri Aurobindo and Wordsworth. It is observed that the experience of spiritual quest, realization of transcendental consciousness, characteristics of spiritual experiences, and aspiration for spiritual evolution are same and they are natural, spontaneous, and authentic in all the spiritual poets. On the other hand, there are also some differences in the approaches and interpretations of spiritual reality. These differences are only in forms, may be due to the nature and limitations of the language of individual poet and the influence of various philosophical concepts and belief systems that influenced them. But still spiritual reality surmounts all these differences and transcends all these limitations.

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