

MICROCOSMOGRAPHIA POETICA: TENETS OF POESY

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K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar gives tenets of poetry in his seminal work *Microcosmographia Poetica* (1978). *Microcosmographia Poetica* is a critical testament on Aurobindonian lines about the name and nature of Poetry.

In its content, *Microcosmographia Poetica* is a reverie in search of the roots of poesy and to explore the nature of the *Sahitya Purusha*-how great poetry is written with words, what is poetry and how some writers desecrate the poetry writing tradition. Iyengar says, Poetry is neither a copy nor a xerox affair nor a leisure-class exercise. It is not a superior amusement, nor supreme fiction; neither politics, nor social engineering, nor surrogate religion, but poetry is *Sadhana* and it must be approached as *Yoga*:

Poetry means looking at the face of Truth
behind the golden cover.

.....
yet not words alone, their sounds and fury
but silences also speak.

.....
Poetry thus uses sounds and silences,
realizing waves of meaning.

(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 15)

Such poetry helps in the evolution of a new man who is free from the chaos of contraries and is the God-Man of Tomorrow. To quote from the text:

This new man will be times transform his world.

.....
with the self-illuminates soul.

.....
The future poet will indite the Epic
of the soul's high sovereignty.

.....
And the Word, crashing through space-time constraints,
will then reign as Power and Grace.

.....
 That will be plenary Truth and Delight:
 verily, *Rasa vai sah!*

(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 32)

After the *Mahasamadhi* of Sri Aurobindo, Iyengar prefers to distill his experiences with the Mother Mirra into his verse. Some of these verses expand the horizon of Spiritual Poetry that is developed by Sri Aurobindo. Iyengar learns a lot from Sri Aurobindo, the mystic poet, and philosopher who gives a spiritual dimension to Indian English Poetry. Sri Aurobindo is largely Upanishadic in his writings but it is hardly responsive to the modern mind. Iyengar takes upon himself the task of attuning Spiritual Poetry and making it relevant to modern consciousness. Aurobindo develops Spiritual Poetry frequently termed as *mantric* poetry. As a poet he provides with a blueprint of his type in his epoch-making book entitled the *Future Poetry*. The poetry which Aurobindo develops is a poetry delineating the super-conscious states of the human mind, which he designates as Overmind. With this form of poetry, he wants to transform human consciousness by bringing out the elements of Spirit, Life, Truth, Beauty, and Delight.

Iyengar anticipates the concept of the Future Poetry in a little different way from Aurobindo. According to Iyengar, the Future Poetry embodies the freedom of spirit, love in its expression, and glory in its content. It imparts true delight to its readers. All these aspects are the gift of a soul. With this concept, he adds a new dimension to future poetry. With the Future Poetry there is the origin of a new consciousness in man. To quote from the text:

A breakthrough beyond mortal man must be
 Evolution's next decree

.....
 These emergent "overhead" faculties
 may seize quintessence itself.

.....
 A like telescopic vision perceives
 the diverse "overhead" planes.

.....
 The new aesthesis must forge the *rasa*,
bhoga and *Bliss* of Brahman.

.....
 But awaken preordained Supermind,
 the new order's ordainer!

.....
 All things, all manner of things, will then change,
 and *mantra* grow native here.

(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 31)

The new and awakened poet possesses a telescopic vision and perceives different overhead faculties. He gives a new aesthetic of (*rasa*) delight, *bhoga* (enjoyment) and bliss, where the poetic soul and the reader's soul unite. The re-born spirit of the poet has a Supermind.

In short, we can say there is an origin of a transformed Earth and an awakened spirit of the poet transforms the world and fills it with an ardent light. The re-born spirit of the

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poet creates a unique work of a fresh improvisation. The poet’s work reflects his self-illuminated soul. The poet crafts epic poetry, which is a poetry of a higher mind. In the end, of by his creative work, there is a delight everywhere.

The Future Poetry is a fusion of mind and heart. It leaves an everlasting impact on human beings who oscillate pitiably on the thorns of life. The Future Poetry expresses the innermost truth and acts as a balm to the bleeding soul of mankind. It transcends intellectual and sensational experiences. The poet says that the Future Poetry speaks the language of an intuitive mind, its vision, its imagination, emotions and feelings which ultimately gives knowledge.

Aurobindo, defines poetry in terms of *mantra*. He defines *mantra* as a “divine rhythmic word infused with divine energy”. We can say that *mantra* is not an ordinary word, but it’s an outflow and direct expression of the divine consciousness. Along with the poet’s soul, Aurobindo lays emphasis on the listener’s soul too, which according to him, embodies intelligence, imagination, and emotion.

Sri Aurobindo indicates that the poetry of the future will embody a harmony of five ingredients: Spirit, Life, Truth, Beauty, and Delight. Obviously, Iyengar begins from the point where Sri Aurobindo leaves off. Both of them define poetry as a *mantra* but with a difference. The five ingredients of Aurobindo’s poetic theory form the core of Iyengar’s poetic art as well. He calls these elements as five fires of poetic inspiration. While for Aurobindo poetry “embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration”, and for Iyengar, “it is divine efflorescence.” As he writes in his *Microcosmographia Poetica* the great soul of poetry enlightens human consciousness, alleviates, uplifts and mingles the soul with divine efflorescence. He says:

poetry is the divine efflorescence.

.....

(*Microcomographia Poetica* 13)

As for the definition of poetry, Iyengar regards it as the breath of a great soul. That is, for him, poetry is a self-expressive power of a spirit, where the soul utters a rhythmic word. Poetry represents the uniqueness of a poet’s soul. It gives a poet a unique blend of imagination, aspiration, and vision.

As for the ingredients of poetry, Aurobindo emphasizes five eternal elements: Spirit, Life, Truth, Beauty, and Delight. On his part, Iyengar accepts these elements as the essential principles of his poetic art. Iyengar coined it as the “five fires” of poetic inspiration.

The first important element of Iyengar’s poetic art, is Spirit. He outbursts that poetry is the voice of a great soul. By great souls he means, the soul of great poets like Valmiki, Ilango, Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, and Goethe. To quote from the text:

Erupting somewhere some moment of time-
now for all and forever.

.....

Valmiki’s heart of compassion welled up
and filled his epic spaces.

.....

Ilango knew the grace that is Woman
her purity and power.

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.....
Blind Homer saw more deeply and truly
than the rival combatants.

.....
Aeschylus found fate was an open book
and he read god's ways and men's.

Dante and Milton sketched their triple worlds
having contained them within.

.....
Cervantes scoured the heroics of his time
for the ludicrous sublime.

.....
Dostoevsky saw devils in disguise
and conjured them into life.

.....
Flaubert found beneath the show of romance
not the bang, but the whimper

.....
Goethe was sleuth and recording angel
dredging the Walpurgis Night

.....
(Microcosmographia Poetica_13)

And still, this spirit is continued today. Iyengar also mentions the role played by the divine spirits which go on to inspire and inform the poet's mind.

The second important element of Iyengar's poetic consciousness is Life itself. In Aurobindo's opinion Life is not concerned with the surface reality but it focuses on the reality behind the appearances. Following his master, Iyengar too lays emphasis on the deeper life of the spirit. It is this deeper life which forms the core of Iyengar's poetic consciousness. In the moment of inspiration poetic creation opens the floodgates of the inner life and reveals the contours of the hidden reality of the human mind as well as the natural world. He says:

in poetry there is hidden the clue
to life's barbed-wired labyrinth.

.....
As vision, imagination, delight,
it soars above the humdrum.

.....
It throws open the floodgates of knowledge
and all obstruction ceases.

.....
Revealing the inner man and Nature.

.....
(Microcosmographia Poetica_19-20)

According to Iyengar with the help of the linguistic medium poetry reveals the inner truth of a human and its natural realms. It reflects the real inner psyche of man in its grip of various

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labyrinth wires of his own thoughts and where *Prakriti* dances with its unique variety and is governed by divine law.

Like Sri Aurobindo's, the third important element of Iyengar's poetic art is Truth. For Sri Aurobindo, truth is not simply the truth of the material world but the truth of the Infinite. Likewise, for Iyengar truth is not the face value of things or the external world but the truth of the spirit or the hidden reality. To quote from *Microcosmographia Poetica*:

There's a veiled Truth that denies appearance,
and that's the poet quarry.

.....
Awaking from coma of Ignorance
he revives at dawn of Truth.

.....
He plunges into the dark
in search of the hidden light.

.....
Admire the rubble and dark lies exposed
the solitary jewel.

.....
(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 16-17)

In Iyengar's opinion poetry must look at the face of truth, not only the golden cover but also look behind from where words, sounds and silences too reflect a hidden truth. For him to quest for truth is not an ordinary exercise but a complex process which is initiated by the awakening of a soul. This awakening eventually produces the glimpses of truth. When the poetic truth is exposed then there is "incandescent light".

The fourth important element of Iyengar's conception of poetry is Beauty which is central to every kind of artistic endeavour. For Aurobindo, beauty is the concentrated form of delight. That is to say, it is a sustained state of delight which eventually goes on to produce an experience of delight. As for Iyengar, beauty does not mean the beauty of the surfaces or the external objects. It is essentially the experience of the human soul or the inner world. According to him, it comes in existence when elements like freedom, love, glory, and delight are united together and ultimately produces a state of exalted joy or *anand*. To quote from Iyengar:

when the two ends of existence join
consciousness and bliss are one.

.....
(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 27)

Iyengar feels that this poetic process involves the meeting of two ends of existence the human and the natural. This state of union eventually goes on to produce a feeling of bliss or exalted joy which ultimately takes the form of beauty.

The fifth element of Iyengar's conception of poetry is Delight. In Sri Aurobindo's concept, delight is the soul of existence that is not to deny that delight is the joy of existence. For Iyengar too Delight is "an exalted form of joy" and it is produced by the rhythm of human existence and the vibrations of psychic life. As he writes:

Through the dance-beats and dichotomies flows
the Delight of Existence.

.....
(*Microcomographia Poetica* 16)

When the poet competently confronts “the chaos of contraries”, and finds an equation, he experiences a feeling which produces a delight. The Poet, according to Iyengar, in the moment of extreme delight finds his consciousness in a state in which thoughts, words as well as music merge to produce an exalted joy. When from ignorance and his own self counsel poet revives truth then he to experiences a sense of delight.

Coming to the conception of a poet, Aurobindo defines a poet as an artist, a seer and a creator, a *rishi*, a master and a singer of truth. Interestingly, for Aurobindo a poet possesses a dual personality, in as much as he has to play a double role, the role of an ordinary man as well as extra-ordinary personality. As an ordinary man, he is absorbed in mere living, who thinks, feels and acts. As an extraordinary man, he is the seer of things the supernormal man, the super soul or delightful soul in touch with the impersonal and eternal fountains of joy and beauty.

For Iyengar too, a poet is a multidimensional personality. He is a *rishi*, who devotes his lifetime in search of the reality behind appearances. As a *sadhak*, he plunges deeper and deeper to awaken him from the coma of ignorance. For him, a poet is a seeker of truth. He looks behind the golden covers of life to trace the underneath truth. He is a man with visionary powers, and by this, he penetrates not only the world of present but also of past and future existence. He is a *muni* in as much as he reflects over the reality and he expresses it in the language of poetry. He is guided by a light within.

The poet’s awakened spirit has a supermind which adds a new life and a new order. Awakened to the realities of the world, he realizes his intense imaginative power and gives it a verbal shape by his unique experiences. As he writes in *Microcosmographia Poetica*:

Kavi is thus doubled with the *Rishi*,
the poet-singer with the Seer.

.....
...the poet holds his own counsel.

.....
Awakening from coma of Ignorance
he revives at dawn of Truth

.....
The poet’s *sadhana* is this heady leap
and ultimate surrender.

.....
He confronts the chaos of contraries
and ordains an equation.

.....
poet is that’s rare paraclete
tunnels a passage to God.

(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 14-16-17-18-20)

As for the verbal power, the selection of a word is a defining element in Aurobindo’s poetic realm. For him, the poetic word is a vehicle of a spirit, the chosen medium of a soul’s self-expression. On other hand, Iyengar defines a poetic

word not only in terms of music but magic too. For him, the poetic word has immense charming power. Iyengar believes that with the help of magical words the legendary characters of Savitri and Sakuntala can be made so graphic as one can visualize them as figures of flesh and blood. He says:

What's a 'character' in poem or play:
 Savitri, Sakuntala?

.....
 A spray out of heaving infinity
 made real by magic of words.

.....
 For all Vyasa's expansive recital
 what can we make of Karna?

.....
 How much do the storm-scenes in Shakespeare's play
 reveal the real King Lear?

.....
 " words are no islands, nor islands islands:
 they've life beyond space and time.

.....
 (*Microcomographia Poetica* 15 & 20 &24)

For Iyengar, a poetic word is an eternity beyond time and place. With the power of the poetic word "spiritual glow", is alive and it reflects the depth and truth of the eternal soul.

Another salient feature in Sri Aurobindo's poetic realm is Poetic speech. The poetic speech is also an instrument of inspiration. To quote from the *Future Poetry*:

The poetic speech is "the more purely intuitive inspired or revelatory utterance.

(Aurobindo 1953:390)

Aurobindo thinks that poetic speech has extraordinary power. . The greatest poet as Shakespeare has the highest intensity of intuitive and inspired speech. Thus, a poetic speech illumines intuitive intensity of life's spirit and its carries feelings, thoughts and intelligence.

Iyengar is also keen to emphasize the role of poetic speech in the composition of poetry. He expresses his thoughts on the significance of language. For him, poetic language is a compound of several elements. He conceives it not only a compulsive overgrowth of sounds and transmission of growing experiences but also as an instrument of memory, exchange of thoughts and the expression of an impulsive life with a deeper communion.

Language according to Iyengar is not only a toy but a rarest tool. It dwells up, from the depth of collective consciousness which has brighter as well as darker spots. He cites the example of Prospero and Caliban from the *The Tempest*. Caliban speaks throbbing words to describe his island's charm at the same time he abuses his own teacher Prospero. To quote from the text:

Language this rarest tool and toy still
 a temptation for abuse,

.....
 With the power of speech Caliban cursed

his own teacher Prospero

.....
Didn't Caliban himself speak throbbing words
describing his island's charms?
.....

(*Microcosmographia Poetica* 10-11)

Thus, words used in language have immense power. The components of language are words and with their power, they can fabricate pseudo- truth and make the worse seem better.

Iyengar the poetic process is a little different. He defines the poetic process in terms of a mechanical process. In this process the mind first struck off with thoughts then there is a regeneration of an idea. The idea then struggles for its existence with the brain and thereafter there is some ignition. Mind gives weaves to next step which acts like combustion engine from where the energy of expression evokes. The poetic march is triggered by feelings, gestures, sound, and senses which erupt from collective consciousness. With the power of language poetry, gains its form. In the end, poetry gives an aesthetic delight which is always and forever.

Iyengar goes on to develop and expand his master's ideas of poetry in his book *Microcosmographia Poetica*. Iyengar agrees to the ideas of his master on future poetry, rather he goes on to develop and expand his master's spiritual conception of poetic art, its themes, its scope as well as its techniques.

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