On Some Poems Written during the 1930s

[The first five letters were published together as an appendix to Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo in 1934]

The Bird of Fire and Trance

These two poems are in the nature of metrical experiments. The first is a kind of compromise between the stress system and the foot measure. The stanza is of four lines, alternately of twelve and ten stresses. The second and fourth line in each stanza can be read as a ten-foot line of mixed iambics and anapaests, the first and third, though a similar system subject to replacement of a foot anywhere by a single-syllable half-foot could be applied, are still mainly readable by stresses.

The other poem is an experiment in the use of quantitative foot measures not following any existing model, but freely invented. It is a four-line stanza reading alternately

| - | - | - | - |
and | - | | - | |

It could indeed be read otherwise, in several ways, but read in the ordinary way of accentual feet it would lose all lyrical quality and the soul of its rhythm.

The Bird of Fire is the living vehicle of the gold fire of the Divine Light and the white fire of the Divine Tapas and the crimson fire of Divine Love — and everything else of the Divine Consciousness.

Shiva — The Inconscient Creator

The quantitative metre of Trance is suited only for a very brief lyrical poem. For longer poems I have sought to use it as a base
but to liberate it by the introduction of an ample number of modulations which allow a fairly free variation of the rhythm without destroying the consistency of the underlying rhythmic measure. This is achieved in *Shiva* by allowing as the main modulations (1) a paeon anywhere in place of an amphibrach, (2) the substitution of a long for a short syllable either in the first or the last syllable of an amphibrach, at will, thus substituting a bacchius or anti-bacchius (3) the substitution of a dactyl for an initial amphibrach, (4) the substitution of a long instead of short syllable in the middle of the final anapaest, both this and the ultimate syllable to be in that case stressed in reading, e.g.,

```plaintext
deathless | and lone head —
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a bacchius replacing the anapaest.

The suppression of the full value of long syllables to make them figure as metrical shorts has to be avoided in quantitative metre.

Scan:

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A face on | the cold dire | mountain peaks
Grand and still | its lines white | and austere
Match with the | unmeasured | snowy streaks
Cutting heav’en | implacable | bleak and sheer.
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The Inconscient as the source and author of all material creation is one of the main discoveries of modern psychology, but it agrees with the idea of a famous Vedic hymn. In the Upanishads, Prajna, the Master of Sushupti, is the Ishwara and therefore the original Creator out of a superconscient sleep. The idea of the poem is that this creative Inconscient also is Shiva creating here life in matter out of an apparently inconscient material trance as from above he creates all the worlds (not the material only) from a superconscient trance. The reality is a supreme Consciousness — but that is veiled by the appearance on one side of the superconscient sleep, on the other of the material Inconscience.

1 Intermediate stress.
Here the emphasis is on the latter; the superconscient is only hinted at, not indicated, — it is the Infinity out of which comes the revealing Flame.

**The Life Heavens**

Further modulations have been introduced in this poem — a greater use is made of tetrasyllabic feet such as paeons, epitrites, di-iams, double trochees, ionics and, once only, the antispast — and in a few places the foot of three long syllables (molossus) has been used, and in others a foot extending to five syllables (e.g., Dèlivèred fròm grieve).

Scan:

À life of ū intënsités wide, ūmmûne
   Floats bêhind thè earth ând hér life-fret,
À magic of rëalms masterèd bê spèll ând rûné,
   Grandîose, blissiful, colourèd, încréate.

There were two places in which at the time of writing there did not seem to me to be a satisfactory completeness and the addition of a stanza seemed to be called for — one at the end of the description of the Life Heavens, a stanza which would be a closing global description of the essence of the vital Heavens, the other (less imperatively called for) in the utterance of the Voice. There it is no doubt very condensed, but it cannot be otherwise. I thought, however, that one stanza might be added hinting rather than stating the connection between the two extremes. The connection is between the Divine suppressed in its opposites and the Divine eternal in its own unveiled and undescended nature. The idea is that the other worlds are not evolutionary but typal and each presents in a limited perfection some aspect of the Infinite, but each complete, perfectly satisfied in itself, not asking or aspiring for anything else, for self-exceeding of any kind. That aspiration, on the contrary, is self-imposed on the imperfection of Earth; the very fact of the Divine being there, but suppressed
in its phenomenal opposites, compels an effort to arrive at the unveiled Divine — by ascent, but also by a descent of the Divine Perfection for evolutionary manifestation here. That is why the Earth declares itself a deeper Power than Heaven because it holds in itself that possibility implied in the presence of the suppressed Divine here, — which does not exist in the perfection of the vital (or even the mental) Heavens.

**Jivanmukta**

Written in Alcaics. These Alcaics are not perhaps very orthodox. I have treated the close of the first two lines not as a dactyl but as a cretic and have taken the liberty in any stanza of turning this into a double trochee. In one closing line I have started the dactylic run with two short preliminary syllables and there is occasionally a dactyl or anapaest in unlawful places; the dactyls too are not all pure dactyls. The object is to bring in by modulations some variety and a more plastic form and easier run than strict orthodoxy could give. But in essence, I think, the alcaic movement remains in spite of these departures.

The basic form of this Alcaic would run,

$$
\begin{array}{c}
1, 2 \equiv | \equiv | \equiv | \equiv \\
3 \equiv | \equiv | \equiv | \equiv \\
4 \equiv | \equiv | \equiv | \equiv \\
\end{array}
$$

but with an opening to other modulations.

The subject is the Vedantic ideal of the living liberated man — *jivanmukta* — though perhaps I have given a pull towards my own ideal which the strict Vedantin would consider illegitimate.

**In Horis Aeternum**

This poem on its technical side aims at finding a halfway house between free verse and regular metrical poetry. It is an attempt to avoid the chaotic amorphousness of free verse and keep to a
regular form based on the fixed number of stresses in each line and part of a line while yet there shall be a great plasticity and variety in all the other elements of poetic rhythm, the number of syllables, the management of the feet, if any, the distribution of the stress-beats, the changing modulation of the rhythm. *In Horis Aeternum* was meant as a first essay in this kind, a very simple and elementary model. The line here is cast into three parts, the first containing two stresses, the second and third each admitting three, four such lines rhymed constituting the stanza.

*The Bird of Fire*

Your *Bird of Fire* is full of symbolic images, but if one can follow the *bhāva* behind or through them, I believe the appreciation becomes complete.

What do you mean by following the *bhāva* behind? Putting a label on the bird and keeping it dried up in your intellectual museum, for Professors to describe to their pupils — “this is the species and that’s how it is constituted, these are the bones, feathers etc. etc. and now you know all about the bird. Or would you like me to dissect it farther?”

3 December 1936

*Replies to Questions on The Bird of Fire*

Does the line

Late and slow you have come from the timeless Angel

mean that the sadhaka struggled long before the attainment?

Does the “timeless Angel” mean the transcendent?

There must be a mistake in the copy. There is a full stop at “timeless”. “Angel” begins a new sentence and is addressed to the bird. It is the Bird who went out to reach the Timeless Divine and comes late (while the Sadhak and the world have been long struggling and waiting in vain) with the gift.

Purani thinks that the “Bird of Fire” represents aspiration. Is this true?
No — the Bird is not merely aspiration.

Is the “Dancer in Time” Nataraja?
Yes.

The “flame-petalled love” you mention in one of the lines is,
I think, possible only at some level near the Supermind.

It is possible in the psychic also.

The phrase “arrives at its luminous term thy flight” means, I suppose, the complete descent into the material consciousness after breaking the barriers of mind and life.

No. It reaches the Eternal and brings back to the material world that which is beyond Mind and Life. 25 October 1933

* The Dancer is not the Time-Spirit, but the Divine in Time. 1933

* The flame means the Bird of Flame and the Bird is the symbol of an inner Power that rises from the “sacrifice” i.e. the Yoga. The last lines mean that it has the power of going beyond mind and life to that which is beyond mind and life. 2 December 1933

**Replies to Questions on Trance**

Were Trance and the Bird of Fire each composed at a single sitting and can the date be given?

The Bird of Fire was written on two consecutive days — and afterwards revised. The Trance at one sitting — it took only a few minutes. You may perhaps have the date as they were both completed on the same day and sent to you the next.
In the line —

Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown —

is the “o” assonance satisfactory, or does the ear feel the two sounds come too close or for some reason are too insistent?

It seems to me that there is a sufficient space between to prevent the assonance from being too prominent; it came like that and I kept it because the repetition and prolongation of the full “o” sound seemed to me to carry in it a certain unexpressed (and inexpressible) significance.

What exactly does “Halo-moon” signify? In line 2 there was the concrete physical moon ringed with a halo. Is the suggestion of line 10 that a glory or indefinable presence is imaged by a lunar halo — the moon as a distinct object now being swallowed up in the halo? My difficulty is that if it is “halo” simply it cannot be a “moon” as well. But possibly the compound “halo-moon” is elliptical for “moon with its surrounding halo”.

Well, it is of course the “moon with its halo”, but I wanted to give a suggestion if not of the central form being swallowed up in the halo, at least of moon and halo being one ecstatic splendour as when one is merged in ecstasy.

* * *

The last line —

Ocean self enraptured and alone —

I took as meaning “self, who art symbolised by this ocean”, since otherwise you would probably have written “self-enraptured”?

Yes, that is right.

**The Metre of Trance**

Have you yourself invented the metre of *Trance* or is it adopted from some former poet?
No. I am not aware that anyone has used this metre before. It came to me just as I finished the *Bird of Fire* and I put it down. 23 October 1933

Is it not the case that, in the metre of *Trance* (quantitative trimeter) one must either keep a rather staccato movement, pausing with almost unbroken regularity at the end of each foot, or else risk the iambic pentameter approximation by the use of an easy and fluent movement? Thus it is your very beautiful line

Mute the body aureate with light,
that would seem least out of place if inserted amidst other iambic pentameters.

Possibly — though the line does not read to my ear very well as an iambic pentameter — the movement sounds then common and rather lame. It goes better as a trochaic rhythm. It is true that there is this dilemma and the whole skill will then be in avoiding the staccato effect, but that necessitates a very light movement.

I think the principle of this metre should be to say a few very clear-cut things in a little space. At least it looks so to me at present — though a more free handling of the metre might show that the restriction was not justifiable.

I had chosen this metre — or rather it came to me and I accepted it — because it seemed to me both brief and easy, so suitable for an experiment. But I find now that it was only seemingly easy and in fact very difficult. The ease with which I wrote it only came from the fact that by a happy inspiration the right rhythm for it came into my consciousness and wrote itself out by virtue of the rhythm being there. If I had consciously experimented, I might have stumbled over the same difficulties as have come in your way.
On Some Words in *The Life Heavens*

The “last finite” is the material finite where finiteness reaches its acme (based on the atomic infinitesimal). It is this finite that on earth yearns and strives to reach the last (highest, farthest) infinity’s Unknown.

By the way in the last line “bore” does not mean “carried” but “endured”. I had written originally “through seas of light to epiphanies of love”. The epiphanies of love are above the seas of light and part of the goal reached.

1933

**Tagore and The Life Heavens**

The other day Prithwi Singh said that Tagore has said your *Life Heavens* was not poetry proper.

I am very much intrigued by Tagore’s dictum. I am always ready to admit and profit by criticism of my poetry however adverse, if it is justified — but I should like to understand it first. Why is it not poetry proper? Is it because it is not good poetry — the images, language are unpoetic or not sufficiently poetic, the rhythm harsh or flat? Or is it because it is too intellectual, dealing in ideas more than in vision and feelings? Or is it that the spiritual genre is illegitimate — spiritual subjects not proper for poetic treatment? But in that case much of Tagore’s poetry would be improper, not to speak of much of Donne (now considered a great poet), Vaughan, Crashaw etc., Francis Thompson and I do not know how many others in all climes and ages. Is it the dealing with other worlds that makes it not proper? But what then about Blake, whose work Housman declares to be the essence of poetry? I am at sea about this “poetry proper”. Did he only use this cryptic expression? Was there nothing elucidatory said which would make it intelligible? Or has Tagore by any chance thought that I was trying to convey a moral lesson or a philosophical tenet — there is nothing of the kind there, it is a frequent experience on the spiritual path that is being described
in its own proper, one might almost say, objective figures — and that is surely a method of poetry proper. Or is it that the expression is too bad or clear-cut for the soft rondures of poetry proper. I swim helplessly in conjectures.

In regard to Tagore, I understand from Prithwi Singh that his objections to *The Life Heavens* were personal rather than in principle — that is, *he himself* had no such experience and could not take them as true (for himself), so they aroused in him no emotion, while *Shiva* was just the contrary. I can’t say anything to that, as I could not say anything if somebody condemned a poem of mine root and branch because he did not like it or on good grounds — such as Cousins’ objection to the inferiority of the greater part of *In the Moonlight* to the opening stanzas. I learned a great deal from that objection; it pointed me the way I had to go towards the Future Poetry. Not that I did not know before, but it gave precision and point to my previous perception. But still I don’t quite understand Tagore’s objection. I myself do not take many things as true in poetry — e.g. Dante’s Hell etc. — of which I yet feel the emotion. It is surely part of the power of poetry to open new worlds to us as well as to give a supreme voice to our own ideas, experiences and feelings. *The Life Heavens* may not do that for its readers, but, if so, it is a fault of execution, not of principle.

4 October 1934

**On Bengali Translations of *Shiva* and *Jivanmukta***

Your translation of *Shiva* is a very beautiful poem, combining strength and elegance in the Virgilian manner. I have put one or two questions relating to the correctness of certain passages as a translation, but except for the care for exactitude it has not much importance.

Anilbaran’s translation [*of Shiva*] pleased me on another ground — he has rendered with great fidelity and, as it seemed to me, with considerable directness, precision and force the thought and spiritual substance of the poem — he has rendered,
of course in more mental terms than mine, exactly what I wanted to say. What might be called the “mysticity” of the poem, the expression of spiritual vision in half-occult, half-revealing symbols is not successfully caught, but that is a thing which may very well be untranslatable; it depends on an imponderable element which can hardly help escaping or evaporating in the process of transportation from one language to another. What he has done seems to me very well done. Questions of diction or elegance are another matter.

There remains Nishikanta’s two translations of Jivanmukta. I do not find the mātra-vṛttā one altogether satisfactory, but the other is a very good poem. But as a translation! Well, there are some errors of the sense which do not help, e.g., mahimā for splendour; splendour is light. Silence, Light, Power, Ananda, these are the four pillars of the Jivanmukta consciousness. So too the all-seeing, flame-covered eye gets transmogrified into something else; but the worst is the divine stillness surrounding the world which is not at all what I either said or meant. The lines:

Revealed it wakens when God’s stillness
Heavens the ocean of moveless Nature

express an exact spiritual experience with a visible symbol which is not a mere ornamental metaphor but corresponds to exact and concrete spiritual experience, an immense oceanic expanse of Nature-consciousness (not the world) in oneself covered with the heavens of the Divine Stillness and itself rendered calm and motionless by that over-vaulting influence. Nothing of that appears in the translation; it is a vague mental statement with an ornamental metaphor. . . .

I do not stress all that to find fault, but because it points to a difficulty which seems to me insuperable. This Jivanmukta is not merely a poem, but a transcript of a spiritual condition, one of the highest in the inner Overmind experience. To express it at all is not easy. If one writes only ideas about what it is or should be, there is failure. There must be something concrete, the form, the essential spiritual emotion of the state. The words chosen must be the right words in their proper place and each
part of the statement in its place in an inevitable whole. Verbiage, flourishes there must be none. But how can all that be turned over into another language without upsetting the apple-cart? I don’t see how it can be easily avoided. For instance in the fourth stanza, “Possesses”, “sealing”, “grasp” are words of great importance for the sense. The feeling of possession by the Ananda rapture, the pressure of the ecstatic force sealing the love so that there can never again be division between the lover and the All-Beloved, the sense of the grasp of the All-Beautiful are things more than physically concrete to the experience (“grasp” is specially used because it is a violent, abrupt, physical word — it cannot be replaced by “In the hands” or “In the hold”) and all that must have an adequate equivalent in the translation. But reading [Nishikanta’s Bengali line] I no longer know where I am, unless perhaps in a world of Vedantic abstractions where I never intended to go. So again what has [Nishikanta’s Bengali line] to do with the tremendous and beautiful experience of being ravished, thoughtless and wordless, into the “breast” of the Eternal who is the All-Beautiful, All-Beloved?

That is what I meant when I wrote yesterday about the impossibility — and also what I apprehended when I qualified my assent to Nolini’s proposal [to print Bengali translations of the poems] with a condition. 3 June 1934

These translations [of the line “Although consenting here to a mortal body”] only state what is true of everybody, not only of the jivanmukta. They have therefore no force. In the English the word “consenting” has a great force which makes the meaning of “He is the Undying” quite clear, viz. He is consciously that and his consenting to the mortal body does not diminish that consciousness — the consent being also free and quite conscious.

In Horis Aeternum and The Bird of Fire

Is The Bird of Fire more of a compromise between a quan-
titative and a purely stress scansion than *In Horis Aeternum*
(where the quantity-aspect seems to be less important than in
*The Bird of Fire*)?

In the *In Horis Aeternum* I did not follow any regular scheme of
quantities, letting them come as was needed by the rhythm. In
*The Bird of Fire* I started with the idea of a quantitative element
but abandoned it and remodelled the part of the poem in which
I had used the quantitative system.

**On a Bengali Translation of *In Horis Aeternum***

I think it is a very fine rendering.

In line 4 however I would note that there is no reference
to day as a movement of time but one to the noon, the day as
sunlit space rather than time, it is the fixed moment, as it were,
the motionless scene of noon. The eye is of course the sun itself.
I mark by the dash that I have finished with my first symbol of
the gold ball and go off to a second, quite different one.

In the last line your translation is indeed very clear and pre-
cise in meaning, but it is perhaps too precise — the “something”
twice repeated is meant to give a sense of just the opposite, an
imprecise unseizable something which is at once nothing and
all things at a time. It is found no doubt in the momentary
things and all is there but the finding is less definite than your
translation suggests. But the expression নাত্মিক বাজে ছিল যে অনন্যত্ব is
very good.

One point more. “Caught by the spirit in sense” means
“there is a spirit in sense (sense not being sense alone) that
catches the eternal out of the perishable hours in these things.”

But it is not the spirit in the body; it is the spirit in sense, why
then দেহের দেহ brings in something much too solid and it would
mean the soul in the body which is not at all my meaning — it
is a spiritual something in sight, sound, touch etc. that catches
the eternal essential in what seems to be a thing of the moment.

I may add that “moment mere” does not and cannot mean
“merely one moment” — it means “something that seems to be merely of the moment”. It is not the moment that is caught but the essence of the momentary scene, etc. or as is next said something essential and eternal (not “fixed, intense”, but slight and fugitive) in a sound, smile, etc.

1934

On a Review of Six Poems

I dare say Swaminathan is a good critic of a sort. But I cannot see what is the objection to “O marvel bird”. His “raw metaphysics” refers I suppose to expressions like the “unthinkable Above”. But he is quite out there. It is a rendering not of metaphysics whether raw or ripe, but of a concrete experience, and for my part I don’t see how else it can be expressed unless one launches into literary circumvolutions and padding for which I have no inclination. “Moment mere” is an unusual combination but there again there is nothing else which will give the sense with the necessary compactness and it seems to me to be a very good phrase. Has Swaminathan a phobia for new or unusual or bold turns of language? “Good scholars” in a language very often have. For myself, I think they are necessary to keep the language alive.

I do not quite know what he wants me to do — is it to dilute my experiences or my seeing into diffuse intellectual expression? That seems to me what he means by electric light. It can be done, but it was not my purpose in writing these poems. I wrote what came as the closest expression of the thing seen and was not at all occupied with the repercussions or absence of repercussions in the ordinary reader. I dare say the critic is right in his view of what those repercussions would be. But what does he mean by his reference to the Vedas? The Vedas are the most enigmatic book in the world and nobody has the least idea what they mean; they out-Blake Blake all together. As for the Old Testament, it expresses not mystic but religious experience which is quite another affair altogether.

I am afraid Swaminathan’s capacities for responding to mystic poetry are not very brilliant. His reference to Blake shows
that — for Blake is an acid test for critics in this matter. However these are only passing comments. I shall consider the review more at leisure hereafter and defer till then the subject of metre.

15 February 1935

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About Swaminathan, I think his chief defect as a critic must be that he has no ear or very little of an ear. The man who can approve of the dictum “Take care of the sense and the metre will take care of itself”, ignoring the fact that the metre is only the basis of the rhythm without which poetry cannot exist or who says that the true quantity of “its” and of the last syllable of “delivered” cannot be short, must have something lacking in his auditory sense. He has also totally mistaken my phrase “Read in the ordinary way” which means read in the way of the ordinary conventional iambic or trochaic metre. For instance

O
|  cean |
|  se |
|  lf |
|  en |
|  ra |
|  ptu |
|  red |
|  a |
|  lo |

If that is read as a trochaic line with a fictitious accent on “and”, the lyrical movement disappears. If it is read as it would be in ordinary speech with the natural stresses and quantities, you get the exact movement of my verse. If for example you find in prose “As he looked on the ocean’s radiant solitude, the seen passed into the unseen and he seemed to be looking on his own ocean self enraptured and alone”; the notation of the last words would be ócean sēlf ēnRAPTUREd ānd ālōne, which is just the metre of the even lines in my poem. The rhythm is at once accentual and quantitative. I quite agree that you cannot ignore the accentual basis of the English language, but what you can do is to take account of both stress accent and quantity, assuming it as a rule that a major and true accent (as opposed to minor and fictitious ones) is sufficient to transform a naturally short syllable into a long one for practical purposes. That is what I have done, and that is why the accented syllables in delivered, magic, implacable are taken as long. The result may be a success for this kind of

2 See page 239.
quantitative verse or not, but the basis must be understood before it can be judged, and Swaminathan has missed the basis altogether. I shall have to write someday an essay on the data of the problem of quantitative verse in English and the true road to the solution of the difficulty — it is badly needed. 15 February 1935

**On a Word in Nirvana**

In *Nirvana*, does “reef” mean a piece of sail or a rock?

No, it is not a sail — it is a long rock. I was thinking especially of coral reefs which sometimes subside in the sea. 31 August 1934

**On an Image in Moon of Two Hemispheres**

I am unable to get the connection between the first three lines and the next three.

Connection of syntax or sense? It is the dragon tail of the Night illumined by the moon that goes swimming through the stars and imposing on the earth the sense of a dark Infinite. 2 September 1934

**Thought the Paraclete**

*Thought the Paraclete* is a difficult poem liable to many interpretations. I would be very happy if you could give a brief analysis of the thought-structure of the poem or at least indicate the main lines of the ascent.

Well, then leave each to find out one of the many interpretations for himself. Analysis! Well, well!

There is no thought-structure in the poem; there is only a succession of vision and experience; it is a mystic poem, its unity is spiritual and concrete, not a mental and logical building. When you see a flower, do you ask the gardener to reduce the flower to its chemical components? There would then be no flower left and no beauty. The poem is not built upon intellectual definitions or philosophical theorisings; it is something seen. When you ascend
a mountain, you see the scenery and feel the delight of the ascent; you don’t sit down to make a map with names for every rock and peak or spend time studying its geological structure — that is work for the geologist, not for the traveller. Iyengar’s geological account (to make one is part of his métier as a critic and a student and writer on literature) is probably as good as any other is likely to be; but each is free to make his own according to his own idea. Reasoning and argumentation are not likely to make one account truer and invalidate the rest. A mystic poem may explain itself or a general idea may emerge from it, but it is the vision that is important or what one can get from it by intuitive feeling, not the explanation or idea; it [Thought the Paraclete] is a vision or revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes, but gives no names and no photographic descriptions of the planes crossed. I leave it there.

The “pale blue” or intuitivised aspect of the face is only at the start; when it “gleamed” it had already overpassed the Overmind phase beyond which there are only the “world-bare summits”.

How do you know there are not many world-bare summits one above the other? Where do you place the self of the last line?

18 March 1944

As thought rises in the scale, it ceases to be intellectual, becomes illumined, then intuitive, then overmental and finally disappears seeking the last Beyond. The poem does not express any philosophical thought, however, it is simply a perception of a certain movement, that is all. “Pale blue” is the colour of the higher ranges of mind up to the intuition. Above it begins to be golden with the supramental light.

14 January 1935

Thought is not the giver of Knowledge but the “mediator” between the Inconscient and the Superconscient. It compels the world born from the Inconscient to reach for a Knowledge other
than the instinctive vital or merely empirical, for the Knowledge that itself exceeds thought; it calls for that superconscient Knowledge and prepares the consciousness here to receive it. It rises itself into the higher realms and even in disappearing into the supramental and Ananda levels is transformed into something that will bring down their powers into the silent Self which its cessation leaves behind it.

Gold-red is the colour of the supramental in the physical — the poem describes Thought in the stage when it is undergoing transformation and about to ascend into the Infinite above and disappear into it. The “flame-word rune” is the Word of the higher Inspiration, Intuition, Revelation which is the highest attainment of Thought. 

29 December 1936

Rose of God

Two questions have arisen in the mind in connection with Rose of God.

(1) Does the rose of all flowers most perfectly and aptly express the divine ecstasies or has it not any symbolic allusion in the Veda or the Upanishad?

There were no roses in those times in India — roses came in with the Mahomedans from Persia. The rose is usually taken by us as the symbol of surrender, love etc. But here it is not used in that sense, but as the most intense of all flowers it is used as symbolic of the divine intensities — Bliss, Light, Love etc.

(2) Are the seven ecstasies referred to there the following: Bliss, Light, Power, Immortality, Life, Love and Grace?

No, it is not seven kinds, but seven levels of Ananda that are meant by the seven ecstasies. 

2 January 1935

Overhead Inspiration in Some Poems of the 1930s

A long time ago, you wrote to me that the Overmind has two levels — the intuitive and the gnostic. There are surely several passages in your own poetry as well as in the Upanishads and
the Gita that sustain an inspiration from the former; but has no poetry ever come from the Overmind proper which is turned towards the full supramental Gnosis? Do you remember anything either in Sanskrit or in your own work which derives from there? If not, is it possible to give some idea as to what quality of rhythm, language and substance would constitute the difference between the expression of the Overmind Intuition and the Overmind Gnosis? Those four lines I quoted to you from yourself the other day — where do they hail from?

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest?

It is really very difficult for me to say anything in this respect about my own poetry; there is too complex a working of the Consciousness for it to be possible for me to classify and define. As for the Overmind Gnosis, I cannot yet say anything — I am familiar with its workings, but they are not easily definable or describable and, as for poetry, I have not yet observed sufficiently to say whether it enters in anywhere or not. I should expect its intervention to be extremely rare even as a touch; but I refer at present all higher overmind intervention to the O.I. [Overmind Intuition] in order to avoid any risk of overstatement. In the process of overmental transformation what I have observed is that the Overmind first takes up the illumined and higher mind and intellect (thinking, perceiving and reasoning intelligence) into itself and modifies itself to suit the operation — the result is what may be called a mental Overmind — then it lifts these lower movements and the intuitive mind together into a higher reach of itself, forming there the Overmind Intuition, and then all that into the Overmind Gnosis awaiting the supramental transformation. The overmind “touch” on the Higher Mind and Illumined Mind can thus raise towards the O.I. or to the O.G. or leave it in the M.O.; but, estimating at a glance as I have to do, it is not easy to be quite precise. I may have to revise my estimates later on a little, though not perhaps very appreciably, when I am able to look at things in a more leisurely way and
fix the meeting lines which often tend to fade away, leaving an indefinable border. 3 May 1937

I mentioned your recent poems as my aid to drawing inspiration from the Overhead planes. I quoted also the famous lines from other poets which have derived from the highest levels. Jyoti begged me to type for her all the lines of this character from your poems. I have chosen the following:

1. O marvel bird with the burning wings of light and the unbarred lids that look beyond all space . . .

2. Lost the titan winging of the thought.

3. Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
   Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
   An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
   Force one with unimaginable rest?

4. My consciousness climbed like a topless hill . . .

5. He who from Time’s dull motion escapes and thrills
   Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal’s breast,
   Unrolls the form and sign of being,
   Seated above in the omniscient Silence.

6. Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast
   Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes . . .

7. A silent unnamed emptiness content
   Either to fade in the Unknowable
   Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.

8. Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,
   Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned . . .

9. I have drunk the Infinite like a giant’s wine.

10. My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight . . .

11. Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity’s face,
On Some Poems Written during the 1930s

Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature’s abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude’s kiss.

I shan’t ask you to tell me in detail the sources of all these lines — but what do you think in general of my choice? Only for one quotation I must crave the favour of your closer attention. Please do try to tell me something about it, for I like it so much that I cannot remain without knowing all that can be known: it is, of course, Number 3 here. I consider these lines the most satisfying I have ever read: poetically as well as spiritually, you have written others as great — but what I mean to say is that the whole essence of the truth of life is given by them and every cry in the being seems answered. So be kind enough to take a little trouble and give me an intimate knowledge of them. I’ll be very happy to know their sources and the sort of enthousiasmos you had when writing them. How exactly did they come into being?

The choice is excellent. I am afraid I could not tell you in detail the sources, though I suppose they all belong to the overhead inspiration. In all I simply remained silent and allowed the lines to come down shaped or shaping themselves on the way — I don’t know that I know anything else about it. All depends on the stress of the enthousiasmos, the force of the creative thrill and largeness of the wave of its Ananda, but how is that describable or definable? What is prominent in No. 3 is a certain calm, deep and intense spiritual emotion taken up by the spiritual vision that sees exactly the state or experience and gives it its exact revelatory words. It is an overmind vision and experience and condition that is given a full power of expression by the word and the rhythm — there is a success in “embodying” them or at least the sight and emotion of them which gives the lines their force.

4 May 1937
A General Comment on the Poems of the 1930s

Could you tell me what your object is in manifesting something through the form of poetry?

I am expressing spiritual truth or spiritual experience through poetry.

12 September 1934