Psychic, Mystic and Spiritual Poetry

Inspiration from the Illumined Mind
and from the Psychic

Your question — “What distinguishes, in manner and quality, a pure inspiration from the illumined mind from that which has the psychic for its origin?” — reads like a poser in an examination paper. Even if I could give a satisfactory definition, Euclideanly rigid, I don’t know that it would be of much use or would really help you to distinguish between the two kinds: these things have to be felt and perceived by experience. I would prefer to give examples. I suppose it would not be easy to find a more perfect example of psychic inspiration in English literature than Shelley’s well-known lines,

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not, —
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

— you will find there the true rhythm, expression and substance of poetry full of the psychic influence. For full examples of the poetry which comes from the illumined mind purely and simply and that in which the psychic and the spiritual illumination meet together, one has to go to poetry that tries to express a spiritual experience. You have yourself written things which can illustrate the difference. The lines

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite
will do very well as an instance of the pure illumination, for here what would otherwise be a description of a spiritual heart-experience, psychic therefore in its origin, is lifted up to a quite different spiritual level and expressed with the vision and language sufficiently characteristic of a spiritual-mental illumination. In another passage there is this illumination but it is captured and dominated by the inner heart and by the psychic thrill, a certain utterance of the yearning and push of psychic love for the Divine incarnate.

If Thou desierest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow!
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate.
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.

July 1931

Psychic and Overhead Inspiration

There is too the psychic source of inspiration which can give a beautiful spiritual poetry. The psychic has two aspects — there is the soul principle itself which contains all soul possibilities and there is our psychic personality which represents whatever soul-power is developed from life to life or put forward for action in our present life-formation. The psychic being usually expresses itself through its instruments, mental, vital and physical; it tries to put as much of its own stamp on them as possible. But it can seldom put on them the full psychic stamp — unless it comes fully out from its rather secluded and overshadowed position and takes into its hands the direct government of the nature. It can then receive and express all spiritual realisations in its own way and manner. For the tone of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes, — it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception,
an intimate language. The expression “sweetness and light” can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful authority, strength and space.

20 October 1936

To get the psychic being to emerge is not easy, though it is a very necessary thing for sadhana and when it does it is not certain that it will switch on to the above-head planes at once. But obviously anyone who could psychicise his poetry would get a unique place among the poets. 20 October 1936

I don’t suppose the emergence of the psychic would interfere at all with the inspiration from above. It would be more likely to help it by making the connection with these planes more direct and conscious. . . . The direct psychic touch is not frequent in poetry. It breaks in sometimes — more often there is only a tinge here and there. 20 October 1936

Psychic and Esoteric Poetry

These poems are quite new in manner — simple and precise and penetrating. What you describe is the psychic fire, *agni pāvaka*, which burns in the deeper heart and from there is lighted in the mind, the vital and the physical body. In the mind Agni creates a light of intuitive perception and discrimination which sees at once what is the true vision or idea and the wrong vision or idea, the true feeling and the wrong feeling, the true movement and the wrong movement. In the vital he is kindled as a fire of right emotion and a kind of intuitive feeling, a sort of tact which makes for the right impulse, the right action, the right sense of things and reaction to things. In the body he initiates a similar

1 *Certain poems in Bengali by Dilip Kumar Roy: Agni Disha, Agni Bedan, etc.* — *Ed.*
but still more automatic correct response to the things of physical life, sensation, bodily experience. Usually it is the psychic light in the mind that is first lit of the three, but not always — for sometimes it is the psycho-vital flame that takes precedence.

In ordinary life also there is no doubt an action of the psychic — without it man would be only a thinking and planning animal. But its action there is very much veiled, needing always the mental or vital to express it, usually mixed and not dominant, not unerring therefore; it does often the right thing in the wrong way, is moved by the right feeling but errrs as to the application, person, place, circumstance. The psychic, except in a few extraordinary natures, does not get its full chance in the outer consciousness; it needs some kind of Yoga or sadhana to come by its own and it is as it emerges more and more “in front” that it gets clear of the mixture. That is to say, its presence becomes directly felt, not only behind and supporting, but filling the frontal consciousness and no longer dependent on or dominated by its instruments — mind, vital and body, but dominating them and moulding them into luminosity and teaching them their own true action.

It is not easy to say whether the poems are esoteric; for these words “esoteric” and “exoteric” are rather ill-defined in their significance. One understands the distinction between exoteric and esoteric religion — that is to say, on one side, creed, dogma, mental faith, religious worship and ceremony, religious and moral practice and discipline, on the other an inner seeking piercing beyond the creed and dogma and ceremony or finding their hidden meaning, living deeply within in spiritual and mystic experience. But how shall we define an esoteric poetry? Perhaps what deals in an occult way with the occult may be called esoteric — e.g., the *Bird of Fire*, *Trance*, etc. *The Two Moons*² is, it is obvious, desperately esoteric. But I don’t know whether an intimate spiritual experience simply and limpidly told without veil or recondite image can be called esoteric — for the word usually brings the sense of something kept back

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² *Now called Moon of Two Hemispheres. — Ed.*
from the ordinary eye, hidden, occult. Is *Nirvana* for instance an esoteric poem? There is no veil or symbol there — it tries to state the experience as precisely and overtly as possible. The experience of the psychic fire and psychic discrimination is an intimate spiritual experience, but it is direct and simple like all psychic things. The poem which expresses it may easily be something deeply inward, esoteric in that sense, but simple, unveiled and clear, not esoteric in the more usual sense. I rather think, however, the term “esoteric poem” is a misnomer and some other phraseology would be more accurate.  

30 April 1935

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I don’t think your poetry is more “esoteric” than in the earlier poems — for esoteric means something that only the initiated in the mysteries can understand; to be concerned with spiritual aspiration does not make a poem esoteric, such poems can be perfectly well understood by those who are not mystics or Yogis. Yours are certainly not more esoteric or Yogic than Nishikanta’s with his frequent incursions into the occult and if Tagore could be knocked over by the *Rajahansa* poem, that shows that Yogic poetry can be appreciated by him and by others. I take it that it is a transition to a new style of writing that meets with so much opposition and these are only excuses for the refusal of the mind to appreciate what is new. On the other hand those who have not the prejudice have not the difficulty. With time the obstacle will disappear.  

24 July 1936

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Mystic Poetry

Mystic poetry does not mean anything exactly or apparently; it means things suggestively and reconditely, — things that are not known and classified by the intellect.

What you are asking is to reduce what is behind to intellectual terms, which is to make it something quite different from itself.  

3 December 1936
Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning, much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract. The nature of the intellect is abstraction; spirituality and mysticism deal with the concrete by their very nature. 8 December 1936

The difficulty most people feel is that they expect an intellectual meaning quite clear on the surface and through that they get at the bhāva of the deeper significance (if there is any) — but in mystic poetry, often though not always, one has to catch the bhāva of the deeper significance directly through the figures and by that arrive at the form of the intellectual meaning or else share in the inner vision, whichever may be the thing to be conveyed by the poem.

Mystic poetry can be written from any plane, provided the writer gets an inspiration from the inner consciousness whether mind, vital or subtle physical. 20 October 1936

The Aim of the Mystic Poet

There are truths and there are transcriptions of truths; the transcriptions may be accurate or may be free and imaginative. The truth behind a poetic creation is there on some plane or other, supraphysical generally — and from there the suggestion of the image too originally comes; even the whole transcription itself can be contributed from there, but ordinarily it is the mind’s faculty of imagination which gives it form and body. Poetic imagination is very usually satisfied with beauty of idea and image only and the aesthetic pleasure of it, but there is something behind it which supplies the Truth in its images, and to get the transcription also direct from that something or somewhere behind should be the aim of mystic or spiritual poetry. When Shelley made the spirits of Nature speak, he was using his imagination, but there was something behind in him which felt and knew and believed in the truth of the thing he was expressing —
he felt that there were forms more real than living man behind the veil. But his method of presentation was intellectual and imaginative, so one misses the full life in these impalpable figures. To get a more intimate and spiritually concrete presentation should be the aim of the mystic poet. 16 November 1933

Symbolism and Allegory

There is a considerable difference between symbolism and allegory; they are not at all the same thing. Allegory comes in when a quality or other abstract thing is personalised and the allegory proper should be something carefully stylised and deliberately sterilised of the full aspect of embodied life, so that the essential meaning or idea may come out with sufficient precision and force of clarity. One can find this method in the old mystery plays and it is a kind of art that has its value. Allegory is an intellectual form; one is not expected to believe in the personalisation of the abstract quality, it is only an artistic device. When in an allegory as in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* the personalisation, the embodiment takes first place and absorbs the major part of the mind’s interest, the true style and principle of this art have been abandoned. The allegorical purpose here becomes a submerged strain and is really of secondary importance, our search for it a by-play of the mind; we read for the beauty and interest of the figures and movements presented to us, not for this submerged significance. An allegory must be intellectually precise and clear in its representative figures as well as in their basis, however much adorned with imagery and personal expression; otherwise it misses its purpose. A symbol expresses on the contrary not the play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images — the more these images have a living truth of their own which corresponds intimately to the living truth they symbolise, suggests the very vibration of the experience itself, the greater becomes the art of the symbolic
expression. When the symbol is a representative sign or figure and nothing more, then the symbolic approaches nearer to an intellectual method, though even then it is not the same thing as allegory. In mystic poetry the symbol ought to be as much as possible the natural body of the inner truth or vision, itself an intimate part of the experience.

16 – 18 November 1933

Lord, what an incorrigible mentaliser and allegorist you are! If the bird were either consciousness or the psychic or light, it would be an allegory and all the mystic beauty would be gone. A living symbol and a mental allegorical symbol are not the same thing. You can’t put a label on the Bird of Marvel any more than on the Bird of Fire or any other of the fauna or flora or population of the mystic kingdoms. They can be described, but to label them destroys their life and makes them only stuffed specimens in an allegorical museum. Mystic symbols are living things, not abstractions. Why insist on killing them? Jyoti has described the Bird and told you all that is necessary about him — the rest you have to feel and live inside, not dissect and put the fragments into neatly arranged drawers.

8 August 1936

Symbolic Poetry and Mystic Poetry

I suppose the poem you sent me might be described as the poetic rendering of a symbolic vision — it is not a mystic poem. A poem can no doubt be symbolic and mystic at the same time. For instance Nishikanta’s English poem of the vision of the Lion-flame and the Deer-flame, beauty and power, was symbolic and mystic at once. It is when the thing seen is spiritually lived and has an independent vivid reality of its own which exceeds any conceptual significance it may have on the surface that it is mystic. Symbols may be of various kinds; there are those that are concealing images capable of intellectual interpretation but still different from either symbolic or allegorical figures — and there are those that have a more intimate life of their own and are not conceptual so much as occultly vital in their significance; there
are still others that need a psychic or spiritual or at least an inner and intuitive insight to identify oneself fully with their meaning. In a poem which uses conceptual symbols the mind is more active and the reader wants to know what it means to the mind; but as minds differ, the poet may attach one meaning to it and the reader may find another, if the image used is at all an enigmatic one, not mentally clear and precise. In the more deeply symbolist — still more in the mystic — poem the mind is submerged in the vividness of the reality and any mental explanation falls far short of what is felt and lived in the deeper vital or psychic response. This is what Housman in his book tries to explain with regard to Blake’s poetry, though he seems to me to miss altogether the real nature of the response. It is not the mere sensation to which what he calls pure poetry appeals but to a deeper inner life or life-soul within us which has profounder depths than the thinking mind and responds with a certain kind of soul-excitement or ecstasy — the physical vibrations on which he lays stress are merely a very outward result of this sudden stir within the occult folds of the being. Mystic poetry can strike still deeper — it can stir the inmost and subtlest recesses of the life-soul and the secret inner mind at the same time; it can even, if it is of the right kind, go beyond these also to the pure inmost psyche.

Some Mystic Symbols

If you expect matter of fact verisimilitude from N. or a scientific ornithologically accurate swan, you are knocking at the wrong door. But I don’t see exactly the point of your objection. The lake [in a poem] is not a lake but a symbol; the swan is not a swan but a symbol. You can’t expect the lake merely to ripple and do nothing else or the swan simply to swim and eat and do nothing else. It is as much a symbol as the Bird of Fire or the Bird of the Vedic poet who faced the guardians of the Soma and brought the Soma to Indra (or was it to a Rishi? I have forgotten) — perhaps carrying a pot or several pots in his claws and beak!! for I don’t know how else he could have done it. How is he to use his symbol if you do not make allowances
for a miraculous Swan? If the swan does nothing but what an ordinary swan does, it ceases to be a symbol and becomes only a metaphor. The animals of these symbols belong not to earth but to Wonderland.

13 March 1936

The objection that stars do not get नत stands only if the poem describes objective phenomena or aims at using purely objective images. But if the vision behind the poem is subjective, the objection holds no longer. The mystic subjective vision admits a consciousness in physical things and gives them a subtle physical life which is not that of the material existence. If a consciousness is felt in the stars and if that consciousness expresses itself in subtle physical images to the vision of the poet, there can be no impossibility of a star being नत आपनहारा — such expressions attribute a mystical life to the stars and can appropriately express this in mystic images. I agree with you about the fineness of the line.

27 May 1936

Surely the image of a “last star of the night” is not so difficult to understand. It is not a physical star obviously. It is a light in the night and the night is not physical. There is no variation.

Star is a light in the night, I suppose — night is the night of ignorance here, very evidently — so a star is an illumination of the ignorance which is very different from the illumination of dawn and must disappear in the dawn. That is common sense, it seems to me. I am not aware that I have set up “deer” as a symbol of beauty. It was Nishikanta who did so in his fable of the deer and the lion. Every poet can use symbols in his own way, he is not bound by any fixed mathematics of symbolism.

26 January 1937

A symbol must always convey a sense of reality to the feeling (not the intellect), but here (if it has the meaning I give it) it is obviously only a metaphorical figure for a ray of Light, Consciousness etc.

29 December 1936
Some Problems in Writing Mystic Poetry

This is the real stumbling-block of mystic poetry and specially mystic poetry of this kind. The mystic feels real and present, even ever-present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. He uses words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To him, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and he can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to him an image but a fact. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. I hold that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends on how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but of something of its beauty, its light or its power.

The theory which discourages the poet from thinking or at
least from thinking for the sake of the thought proceeds from an extreme romanticist temper; it reaches its acme on one side in the question of the surrealist, “Why do you want poetry to mean anything?” and on the other in Housman’s exaltation of pure poetry which he describes paradoxically as a sort of sublime nonsense which does not appeal at all to the mental intelligence but knocks at the solar plexus and awakes a vital and physical rather than intellectual sensation and response. It is of course not that really but a vividness of imagination and feeling which disregards the mind’s positive view of things and its logical sequences; the centre or centres it knocks at are not the brain-mind, not even the poetic intelligence but the subtle physical, the nervous, the vital or the psychic centre. The poem he quotes from Blake is certainly not nonsense, but it has no positive and exact meaning for the intellect or the surface mind; it expresses certain things that are true and real, not nonsense but a deeper sense which we feel powerfully with a great stirring of some inner emotion, but any attempt at exact intellectual statement of them sterilises their sense and spoils their appeal. This is not the method of the highest spiritual poetry. Its expression aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience; it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

It may be noted that the greater romantic poets did not shun thought; they thought abundantly, almost endlessly. They have their characteristic view of life, something that one might call their philosophy, their world-view, and they express it. Keats was the most romantic of poets, but he could write “To philosophise I dare not yet”; he did not write “I am too much of a poet to philosophise.” To philosophise he regarded evidently as mounting on the admiral’s flag-ship and flying an almost royal banner.
Spiritual philosophic poetry is different; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience it uses without scruple, not admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. That need not be an introduction of technical jargon, that is to say, I suppose, special and artificial language, expressing in this case only abstract ideas and generalities without any living truth or reality in them. Such jargon cannot make good literature, much less good poetry. But there is a “poeticism” which establishes a sanitary cordon against words and ideas which it considers as prosaic but which properly used can strengthen poetry and extend its range. That limitation I do not admit as legitimate.

I am justifying a poet’s right to think as well as to see and feel, his right to “dare to philosophise”. I agree with the modernists in their revolt against the romanticist’s insistence on emotionalism and his objection to thinking and philosophical reflection in poetry. But the modernist went too far in his revolt. In trying to avoid what I may call poeticism he ceased to be poetic; wishing to escape from rhetorical writing, rhetorical pretension to greatness and beauty of style, he threw out true poetic greatness and beauty, turned from a deliberately poetic style to a colloquial tone and even to very flat writing; especially he turned away from poetic rhythm to a prose or half-prose rhythm or to no rhythm at all. Also he has weighed too much on thought and has lost the habit of intuitive sight; by turning emotion out of its intimate chamber in the house of Poetry, he has had to bring in to relieve the dryness of much of his thought, too much exaggeration of the lower vital and sensational reactions untransformed or else transformed only by exaggeration. Nevertheless he has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straightforwardness and directness of style.
Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. This rule aims at a certain kind of intellectual elegance which comes into poetry when the poetic intelligence and the call for a refined and classical taste begin to predominate. It regards poetry as a cultural entertainment and amusement of the highly civilised mind; it interests by a faultless art of words, a constant and ingenious invention, a sustained novelty of ideas, incidents, word and phrase. An unfailing variety or the outward appearance of it is one of the elegances of this art. But all poetry is not of this kind; its rule does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions; so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer; he mentioned especially that there is nothing objectionable in the close repetition of the same word in the Homeric way of writing. In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating himself. He has stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in his narrative, e.g. the line,

doupēsen de pesōn arabēse de teuche' ep' autōi.
“Down with a thud he fell and his armour clangoured upon him.”

He does not hesitate also to repeat the bulk of a line with a variation at the end, e.g.

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr.

And again the

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn aīxasa.

“Down from the peaks of Olympus he came, wrath vexing his heart-strings” and again, “Down from the peaks of Olympus she came impetuously darting.” He begins another line elsewhere with the same word and a similar action and with the same nature of a human movement physical and psychological in a scene of Nature, here a man’s silent sorrow listening to the roar of the ocean:
bē d’akeōn para thina poluphloisboio thalassēs
“Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean.”

In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example the constant repetition of the word Ritam, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses āvoritī, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the mot juste, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in a lone long passage provided each is the right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected. 19 March 1946
Repetition of Images in Mystic Poetry

What she writes has a living beauty in it. But this constant repetition of the same images has been there since the beginning. It is perhaps inevitable in a restricted mystic vision; for you find it in the Veda and the Vaishnava poets and everywhere almost. To be more various one must get a wide consciousness where all is possible.

17 February 1937

Mystic Poetry and Spiritual Poetry

I do not remember the context of the passage you quote from The Future Poetry, but I suppose I meant to contrast the veiled utterance of what is usually called mystic poetry with the luminous and assured clarity of the fully expressed spiritual experience. I did not mean to contrast it with the mental clarity which is aimed at usually by poetry in which the intelligence or thinking mind is consulted at each step. The concreteness of intellectual imaged description is one thing and spiritual concreteness is another. “Two birds, companions, seated on one tree, but one eats the fruit, the other eats not but watches his fellow” — that has an illumining spiritual clarity and concreteness to one who has had the experience, but mentally and intellectually it might mean anything or nothing. Poetry uttered with the spiritual clarity may be compared to sunlight — poetry uttered with the mystic clarity to moonlight. But it was not my intention to deny beauty, power or value to the moonlight. Note that I have distinguished between two kinds of mysticism, one in which the realisation or experience is vague, though inspiringly vague, the other in which the experience is revelatory and intimate, but the utterance it finds is veiled by the image, not thoroughly revealed by it. I do not know to which Tagore’s recent poetry belongs, I have not read it.

1 “... mysticism in its unfavourable or lesser sense comes when either we glimpse but do not intimately realise the now secret things of the spirit or, realising, yet cannot find their direct language, their intrinsic way of utterance, and have to use obscurely luminous hints or a thick drapery of symbol, when we have the revelation, but not the inspiration, the sight but not the word.” — Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, volume 26 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 213–14.
The latter kind of poetry (where there is the intimate experience) can be of great power and value — witness Blake. Revelation is greater than inspiration — it brings the direct knowledge and seeing, inspiration gives the expression, but the two are not always equal. There is even an inspiration without revelation, when one gets the word but the thing remains behind the veil; the transcribing consciousness expresses something with power, like a medium, of which it has not itself the direct sight or the living possession. It is better to get the sight of the thing itself than merely express it by an inspiration which comes from behind the veil, but this kind of poetry too has often a great light and power in it. The highest inspiration brings the intrinsic word, the spiritual mantra; but even where the inspiration is less than that, has a certain vagueness or fluidity of outline, you cannot say of such mystic poetry that it has no inspiration, not the inspired word at all. Where there is no inspiration, there can be no poetry.

10 June 1936

Spiritual Poetry

The spiritual vision must never be intellectual, philosophical or abstract, it must always give the sense of something vivid, living and concrete, a thing of vibrant beauty or a thing of power. An abstract spiritual poetry is possible but that is not Amal’s manner. The poetry of spiritual vision as distinct from that of spiritual thought abounds in images, unavoidably because that is the straight way to avoid abstractness; but these images must be felt as very real and concrete things, otherwise they become like the images used by the philosophic poets, decorative to the thought rather than realities of the inner vision and experience.

28 May 1937

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Spiritual imagery is perfectly free. Occult imagery usually fixes itself to a system of symbols, otherwise it can’t be understood even by the initiates. But spiritual imagery is usually simple and clear.

26 January 1937
Use of “High Light” Words in Spiritual Poetry

A. E.’s remarks about “immensity” etc. are very interesting to me; for these are the very words, with others like them, that are constantly recurring at short intervals in my poetry when I express, not spiritual thought, but spiritual experience. I knew perfectly well that this recurrence would be objected to as bad technique or an inadmissible technique; but this seems to me a reasoning from the conventions of a past order which cannot apply to a new poetry dealing with spiritual things. A new art of words written from a new consciousness demands a new technique. A. E. himself admits that this rule makes a great difficulty because these “high light” words are few in the English language. This solution may do well enough for him, because the realisations which they represent are in him mental realisations or intuitions occurring on the summits of the consciousness, rare “high lights” over the low tones of the ordinary natural or occult experience (ordinary, of course, to him, not to the average man), and so his solution does not violate the truth of his vision, does not misrepresent the balance or harmony of its natural tones. But what of one who lives in an atmosphere full of these high lights — in a consciousness in which the finite, not only the occult but even the earthly finite is bathed in the sense of the eternal, the illimitable and infinite, the immensities or intimacies of the timeless. To follow A. E.’s rule might well mean to falsify this atmosphere, to substitute a merely aesthetic fabrication for a true seeing and experience. Truth first — a technique expressive of the truth in the forms of beauty has to be found, if it does not exist. It is no use arguing from the spiritual inadequacy of the English language; the inadequacy does not exist and, even if it did, the language will have to be made adequate. It has been plastic enough in the past to succeed in expressing all that it was asked to express, however new; it must now be urged to a new progress. In fact, the power is there and has only to be brought out more fully to serve the full occult, mystic, spiritual purpose.

5 February 1932
Spiritual Poetry in India

But what a change in India. Once religious or spiritual poetry held the first place (Tukaram, Mirabai, Tulsidas, Surdas, the Tamil Alwars and Shaiva poets, and a number of others) — and now spiritual poetry is not poetry, altogether! But luckily things are सच्चे and the movability may bring back an older and sounder feeling.