I. The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo: The Mantra of The Real A.K.Ramakoshaam Sri Aurobindo has been a spiritual force not only in India but also wherever the thirst for spiritual quest is felt. He defines poetry as "The Mantra of the Real". Essentially a visionary and a spiritualist, Sri Aurobindo was fully alive to the mantric value of words and used them as vehicles to bridge the gap between the unuttered and uttered, thereby directing us into the path of realization of the Truth. Sound is the rhythmic vibration capable of stirring a corresponding rhythm in the personality or the inner self of the listener. A perceived spectacle may fade off by the passing of time, but an effect of an appealing harmony will never wear off. Thus to go down to the ordinary level, anything heard is retained for ever and the ancient scriptures of India are known as Srutis which mean not only what is heard but also whatever sound that is rhythmically uttered. "Sound, according to Vedkiyaanjaan, is the first evolved property of material substance; it precedes from and has the power both to create and destroy" (Sri Aurobindo 27:233). Thus a sound is not merely a noise but an articulated rhythm that tries to capture and tune itself to the eternal rhythm of the universal law of existence. Modern linguists have studied in great depth the relationship of mind and sound. The sound in poetry may not be the same as that of music. But poetry can produce 'a many – stringed' harmony and make a sound carry the creation on the wings of the word and set afloat vivid suggestions of form and colour. Sri Aurobindo in his The Future Poetry says: The word is a sound expression of idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the words-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea.... It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible "God sat there he Light, and there was Light". It is creation by word (507). The cosmogonic concept of these world created out of the word is found in the Western as well as the spiritual and religious scriptures of India. In the Holy Bible the genesis of the world is traced to Logos. It was the word that initiated the creative process. "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God" (Saint John, 1:1). Similarly in Indian accounts of the origin of the universe, creation is described as proceeding from Divine desti-urge expressing itself in the raw utterance of the sacred phoneme OM. The word of man is the sound expression of his thought. Each sound produces a form in the invisible world and OM is the primal sound inherent in life–breath. Every time we breathe we say 'Soham', 'So' when we inhale and 'ham' when we exhale, meaning "He and I" instilling into oneself the conviction of unity. During deep sleep, when senses, the brain and mind are dormant and defunctionalised, "the He and the I" are not cognised as separate; the 'So' (He) and the 'ham' (I) indicating the merger of the external into one Truth (Sadya Sai Baba 83). Once so a disciple The Mother Wrote, "OM is the signature of the Lord" (Mona Sarkar 2). Man employs words not only as the vehicle on which his thoughts ride, but also takes them as a part of his thinking. The work that we use in our word charged with magic and powers that transforms our entire being. The power of words is emphasized by Jesus Christ when he pronounced, "By thy words thou shall be justified and by thy words thou shall be condemned"(Saint Matthew, XII, 37), and "Death and Life are in the power of the tongue. (The Holy Bible The proverbs, VIII, 21). Abercrombie in The Idea of Great Poetry, explains that by means of the 'magical phone', the 'incantatory word', the poet seeks to recreate, and not merely describe the state of mind in which he finds himself. By doing so, there occurs a vigorous vital transference of the state of mind from one person to another- from the poet to the reader. "This is the perfection that language attains as Mantra or inspired utterance – a harmony of music and meaning, of image and emotion, of instinctive and intuitive perception", argues Gokak in The Poetic Approach to Language (177). Mantra is a syllable, a sound, a word or set of words born in deep state of meditation by great sages. The Random House Dictionary defines Mantra as 'a word of formula to be recited or sung'. A Mantra is not, however, a mere collection of words but it is meant to be something repeated over and over again. First of all Mantra is a combination of sacred syllables, which, when articulated in the proper manner create certain vibrations and have a definite effect on the listener. "All words are spiritual" says Walt Whitman, "nothing is more spiritual than words" (I.A.Richards 24). To Sri Aurobindo the living word carries a great spiritual truth. Since words are the medium employed in poetry when he defines poetry as 'the Mantra of The Real'. Poetry is the incarnation of great spiritual vision. The poet employs the word which holds the highest intensities of rhythm, style and thought. Sri Aurobindo lays more stress on the right value of the word than on the thought-value. The essential power of the poetic word is to make one see. To differentiate between the ordinary prose speech and the poetic utterance, Sri Aurobindo in his The Future Poetry, takes at random one passage from Dryden: When he'er the sun doun sink so much case In him alone, it was natural to please (271) And so from Wordsworth: The waves besides them danced; but they Out-did the sparkling waves in glee: A poet could not but be gay In such a jocund company (273). Bringing out the difference between the two passages Sri Aurobindo observes: " The first is in the manner of teree prose statement but made just poetical by a certain life and vividness and rhythmic suggestion teaching though not deeply some emotional centre of response just sufficient to make it a thought left and not merely presented to the conception"(271–272). In the other "... from the beginning a thing is seen and lived within us and awakening a satisfied soul response. It has the native action of the seeing word,..."(273). "... the word of the poet sees and presents in its body and image ... the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object". (273). The final peak of poetic realisation can be reached only when the poet is able to sing out to us: in words, "the Mantra of the Real". The word Mantra has no adequate English equivalent. The English words 'incantation', or 'magic' come very close to the Indian word Mantra. From ancient times the Western critics have looked upon poetry as a kind of incantation or magic. They also believed that the highest reach of poetry, is attainable only when its words acquire an irresistible haunting power over the listener's or reader's mind. While referring to the conception of the poet Plato says, "The poet was a possessed creature, not using languages in the way that normal human beings do, but speaking in a divinely inspired frenzy" (Dutchen 6). The poet's activity, according to this conception is to cast a spell or magical effect upon the reader through the word he utters. And this may be taken to be equivalent to his uttering an incantation or Mantra, specially when he sings as if possessed by some 'power divine'. The effect of the Mantric poetic utterance is in can on the reader or listener a kind of spell or charm. When the power of this charm reaches its acme, "everything is forgotten and only the vibrant fusion of the human and divine souls becomes effectively real..."(Prasad 144). Mantric subject and mantric rangoon unlimited. To quote again from The Future Poetry, "To arrive at the mantra he (poet) may start from the colour of the rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the wonderful or evil action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its more hidden movements" (35). This means that the poet who utters the Mantra must be able to penetrate the very soul of the thing or image or word and beautifully reveal the very 'inmost reality of things'. This is something like Plato's 'possessed' or 'frenzied', 'disposeffer' or Abercrombie's creators of incantation' or 'enchantment' level. When the poet enters the Mantra at the highest his self ceases to exist. The personality of the seer-poet is lost in the 'eternity of vision'. Commenting on this aspect of the Mantra Gokak says in his Sri Aurobindo-Seer and Poet: "The disappearance of the seer in his vision is more significant than the negative capability, the annihilation of the poet's identity which Keats describes in one of his letters or the 'depersonalisation', that T.S.Eliot speaks of "(110). In poetry the arrangement of words and its music the combination of sounds affect our physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. "All sounds", says Yeats, "evoke indefinite and yet precise emotions" (I.A.Richards 45). Great art directs our emotion and the activities arising from our instincts into higher or more desirable channels and brings together the emotions of grief and joy into one group. In Sri Aurobindo's Urvasie taken from his Collected Poems, the immortal Urvasie loves the mortal Purawuss. She finds a great sea change coming over her: Familiar things grow strange to her and mists of mortal vision envelope her eyes. She hides in her bower the rapturous love for a gracious human presence. Though everything around her is still the same, everything is her has changed. There was a happy trouble in her woo And movements; her felicitous ladies dropped With a harder, and all her daily acts Were as a statue imitating life. Not single – hearted like the sweet Gods (108) In the poem Love and Death taken from the Collected Poems Rara plays with his young bride Priyamvada. To her all the world is filled with his embrace. To them everything is joy. When Rara comes back to his white bosomed girl, she, all fresh and new, rises to him, and he plunges into her charm. The pleasant emotion of Rara when he finds the sweet physical beauty of Priyamvada is expressed by the poet: Her eyes like deep and infinite wells Lured his attracted soul, and her touch thrilled Not lightly, though so light; the joy prolonged And Sweetness of the lingering of her lips Was everytime a nectar of surprise (232). In Sri Aurobindo's 'sonnets 'a general breath of the mantra seems to blow almost everywhere'. It is the rhythm that makes a gradation in overhead poetry. When the reader's consciousness in poetry is gripped by the unknown spiritual realities,... not only the meaning but the very words and their combined vibrations seem to leap from entranced God-inhabited heights; the Divine and the Eternal find their own speech, large, luminous , fathomless- the meaning becomes visioned and felt as though man were no longer mental merely but poised on a level behind mind (Sethna 366). This type of poetry, Sri Aurobindo calls "Overhead" poetry. We can come across such poetry in Wordsworth, Shelly, Francis Thompson, Hopkins and others, but it is Sri Aurobindo who has proved continually ' a channel of its peculiar intensity'. " A secret though has quietted', the poet's though and sense. All things which have been created by the mind pass into emptiness and 'mute magnificence'" My life is a silence grasped by timeless hands; The world is drowsed in an immortal gaze; Naked my spirit from its vestures stands; I am alone with my own self for space (Collected Poems 142) The soul's desire to stand alone from all the mundane pulls and pressures is evoked in the phrase 'Naked my spirit from its vestures stands'. The poet had discovered his 'deep deathless being', With an 'immortal'a' seeing' his deathless being becomes 'A God-Spectator of the human scene'. It is perturbed neither by pain and sorrow nor by danger and fear. Age is unable to leave its scar on its eternal nature: No pain and sorrow of the heart and flesh Can tread that pure and voiceless sanctuary. Danger and fear, Fate's hounds, dipping their leash, Bend Body and nerve– the timeless spirit is free (Collected Poems 144) The silent abode of the timeless spirit which is free from all the dire and danger, pain and pressure of the world is evoked by the Poet in the 'voiceless sanctuary'. Sri Aurobindo employs even mathematical terms to create spiritual awareness in the reader. God, the dramatist of the death and of birth, the sculpter of the living shapes of earth, the 'world artist' who reveals in forms and colours is an adept in a thousand mysteries: A mathematician mind that never ears, Thou has played with theorems, numbers, measures, cubes, Passed cells, electrons, molecules through Thy tubes World-forces for Thy science's mistresses (Collected Poems 145). In the above sonnet Sri Aurobindo has used mathematical and scientific terms to describe matters of the spirit. God is the greatest mathematician, one who plays with number, molecules and electrons. Mathematics is a precise science demanding absolute clarity in its explanation. Whatever appears to be lines and cross lines merely scribbled may gain a meaning and order. On closer analysis after all the artist alone knows the significant meaning of the lines and strokes and colour and the blanks he has used. God is the greatest artist who faultlessly plays His games of theorems, number, cubes and molecules in order to bewilder His creations. The lines of Sri Aurobindo's poems must be read in a slow full voice in order get their true rhythmic and mantric value. If we read in this way, his Savitri gives out vibrations of each stage of consciousness. And as The Mother says, "Each verse of Savitri is like a revealed Mantra,... the words are expressed and arranged in such a way that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to the origin of sound, which is OM" (Sarkar 25). Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri opens with the line 'It was the hour before the Gods awake If we read the above line like a mantra "The elongated purely vowel sound of four (ear) goes on resounding and collecting at the same moment your awareness to concentrate upon the silence and stillness which is in such an hour before the Gods awake"(Gupta 118). We are physically held up with awe that is present in silence. The word 'hour' with its semantic and sound values easily leads us to the apprehension of the deeper meaning of the phrase 'before the Gods awake'. To a sensitive reader it may give meaning at the physical, psychic, spiritual, individual, cosmic and transcendental levels. In stressing the need for bringing closer the Time and the Timeless and removing of the apparent dividing element the poet asserts that we man. Re–wed the closed finite's lonely consonant With the open vowels of infinity, A hyphen must connected Matter and Mind, The narrow infinus of the ascending soul (Savitri 35) Here the word 'consonant', 'vowels', and 'hyphen' are merely philological term gaining a greater connotation in the implied conquation. A lonely consonant cannot stand itself. The vowels are open class sounds which makes the consonants gain meaning and sound firm. The finite individual is a lonely consonant who could gain a significant meaning only when combined with open vowels of infinity. An individual consonant is nothing, it is lonely. When it joins with the vowel it gains certain strength to stand by itself. The solitary soul of man feels lonely and scared until it establishes a contact with the infinite soul of the Universe. The apparently disparate matter and mind must be connected by a hypen and the 'hypen' may stand for the aspiting nature of the individual supported by the compassion of God. "The narrow infinus' a geographical term is used to describe how the individual could be connected by a negligibly narrow path to the Divine. The infinus is only a thin tract of land connecting a small area to a large space of earth and their word gains poetical currency by its use here. Similarly words which are branded as musical terms find a very easy expression in the poems of Sri Aurobindo. Various person form a whole and in this connection the poet says: The oneness was not tied to monotone (Savitri 324). Here 'monotone' may be a single note that demands a particular attention. To bring home point that 'oneness' consisted of many the poet, uses the expression that the "Oneness was not tied to monotone', because each individual inexpressibly contributes to the whole. Continuing the same imagery from music the poet talks about the unfilled existence of the various spiritual powers to blend and merge in an orderly fashion and rhythm. 'The whole' is called A grand orchestra of spiritual Powers, A diapason of soul interchange Harmonised a oneness deep, Immeasurable (Savitri 325) The words 'monotone', 'orchestra', 'diapason', and 'harmonised' very beautifully conjure up before our mind's eye the spiritual harmony or the force that binds together the spiritual powers. The word 'orchestra' means a number of musical instruments contributing both individually and collectively to the birth of a harmony. Each is essential by itself and each gains prominence only because it is one among the many and merely a part contribution to the whole. Its independent identity is still there but its independence is not exclusive but inclusive. That is why the poet says 'A diapason of soul interchange / Harmonised a oneness deep'. These musical phrases gain a kind of mantric power to present a visual effect when used by a great master to describe the unknown world of the infinite. These terms brought together both by their conventional association as well as contextual polish and power gain cosmic quality and acquire a thrilling harmony or a sweetness which linger in the mind longer than we expect. What T.S.Eliot says about the beginning and the end of every word, every phrase and every poem rightly applies to the mantric value of words in the poems of Sri Aurobindo. Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning Every poem and epitaph (T.S.Eliot 221) Sri Aurobindo has mastered both Sanskrit and Latin, considered to be the language of the spirit. But, in his poetry, he has avoided both these classical languages and established that even the English language could be used as a vehicle of expression with a mantric value. He has divined the English language by making it a medium for the lofty utterance of the spirit. He has refined and recharged the English language and breathed into it the greatness and power of the so called languages of religion and God namely, Latin in the West and Sanskrit in the East.

REFERENCES Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo,Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Sri Aurobindo Ashram trust, 1972., Vol.27. _____. Collected Poems. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1972. _____. Savitri. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1972. _____. The Future Poetry. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972. Abercrombie, Lascelles. The Idea of Great Poetry. London :Martin Secker, 1925. Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Sadhana–The Inward Path. Prasanthinilayam : Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications, 1982. Dutchen, David.Critical Approaches To Literature India :Longman, 1959. Eliot, T.S.Collected Poems 1909-1962.London :Faber and Faber Limited, 1963. Gokak V.K.Sri Aurobindo- Seer and Poet. New Delhi : Abhinav Publications,1973. Gupta, Rameshwar. Eternity in Words-Sri Aurobindo's Savitri. Bombay : Chetan Prakashan,1963. Iyengar, K.S.Srinivasa, Sri Aurobindo—a biography and a history ,.Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1985. Prasad, S.K. The Literary Criticism of Sri Aurobindo Patna :Bharathi Bhawan Publishers and Distributors, 1974. Richards, I.A. The Meaning of Meaning. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953. Sarkar, Mona.Seven Mother: Harmonies of Light.Pondicherry :Sri Aurobindo Ashrama,1978. Sethna,K.D.Sri Aurobindo- The Poet.Pondicherry:Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1970. The Holy Bible Dr.A.K.Ramakoshaam Head of the Dept. of English T.S.Narayanasamy College of Arts & Science Navalur, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India The Indian Review of World Literature in English, Vol. 2 No.1 – January, 2006 ( ) 3 6 F G I J K T F I a Z a o