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**JOURNEY TOWARDS IMPERSONAL GOD IN SRI AUROBINDO'S POEM
THE PILGRIM OF THE NIGHT**

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo's sonnet *The Pilgrim of the Night*, deals with the journey of a divinity believer, and soul to reach the Impersonal God, overcoming the hurdles, darkness of the life. The poem, is a perfect Shakespearean sonnet. According to Sri Aurobindo, original source, vital source and consciousness are the three major elements required in poetry. In the poem *The Pilgrim of the Night*, Aurobindo presents the life from the dark abysms to the highest peak. Based on the ultimate truth, God is impersonal and on the relative note, God is personal. Sri Aurobindo focused on the concept of Impersonal God. The poem focuses on the pilgrim of the poet's soul, compared to the darkness of the night, overcoming the hurdles in worldly life, to reach the Supreme Power. The poet has used night as a symbol to express his ideas. The article of study focuses on the concept of impersonal God, and journey of the poet towards the Impersonal God in the sonnet, *The Pilgrim of the Night*.

Keywords: Impersonal God, Night, Journey, Hurdles, Supreme Light

Introduction

According to Cambridge Learner's Dictionary, soul is the "part of a person that is not their body, which some people believe continues to exist after they die" (683). Rumi, 13th century Persian Poet, believed poetry, and music as a path to experience and reach God. In his words, "the soul has been given its own ears to hear things the mind does not understand" (Rumi), soul has the power to communicate with the Supreme Being. Sri Aurobindo's sonnet *The Pilgrim of the Night*, is about the journey of a divinity believer, and soul to reach the Impersonal God, overcoming the hurdles, darkness of the life. The article of study focuses on

the journey of the poet towards the Impersonal God, *The Pilgrim of the Night*.

A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written with iambic pentameter. Sonnet was invented by the Francesco Petrarch, an Italian Poet. This form contains fourteen lines divided into octave, (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines), with rhyming scheme, abba abba and cde cde or cdc dca, in octave and sestet, respectively. It is named after Petrarch as Petrarchan sonnet. Later, Shakespeare invented another form of sonnet, called as Shakespearean sonnet written in iambic pentameter and rhyming scheme abab cdcd efef gg. It is divided into three quatrains with four lines each and a final couplet, a two line stanza. *The Pilgrim of the Night*, by Sri

Aurobindo written on July 26,1938 and revised on March 18,1944, is a perfect Shakespearean sonnet, written in iambic pentameter structured as quatrains and couplet, with rhyming scheme abab cdcd efef gg. It deals with the hurdles faced by a Human Soul to reach the Supreme Soul, and its entire journey. This journey is towards the unmanifested impersonal God, in the quatrains and finally gives a solution in the couplet.

Brief Note on Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo, an Indian philosopher, poet, journalist, spiritual leader, poet, born on August 15, 1872, at Kolkata, advanced the idea of divine life on earth. He developed a spiritual method called integral yoga. The primary goal of his teachings is focused on self and soul consciousness. Originally named as Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose, studied at King's College Cambridge, and was exposed to various languages such as Latin, Spanish, Greek, and French. He returned to India, passed Civil Service Examination but refused to work under British Province. He then worked at Baroda State College, and during this period he learnt Sanskrit, Epics and Upanishads. He was in charge of the nationalists during the partition of Bengal (1905–1922). Later, he rose to the position of editor at *Vande Mataram*, a nationalist Bengali journal. He fled to Pondicherry after imprisonment. It is at Pondicherry; he devoted his teachings for integral yoga. His mission was to spiritually alter human existence. He launched *Anyra*, the monthly journal. He concentrated on the divine purpose of humanity, the racial harmony, the spirit, and the importance of Indian civilization and culture in his journal. These articles were later mentioned by him in the *Life Divine*. According to Sri Aurobindo, original source, vital source and consciousness are the three major elements required in poetry. In the poem *The Pilgrim of the Night*, Aurobindo presents the life from the dark abysses to the highest peak. In the sonnet, the poet treads his spiritual journey and the height of consciousness that he touches, explores and experiences. He ventures into the profound chambers of the deliverance and encounters God's visionary light there. Indian Philosophy is based on two concepts, Personal God and Impersonal God. Sri Aurobindo focused on the concept of Impersonal God.

Personal and Impersonal God

Based on the ultimate truth, God is impersonal and on the relative note, God is personal. When the supreme power is experienced as an unmanifest in the universe, could be observed and experienced. The concept of an Impersonal God is explained in the article, *Personal and Impersonal God*, as:

It is the divine energy which is nirguna (without any attributes), nirvishesh (without any special distinctions) and nirakaar (without any form). Distinct from, the individual soul, the self; it is the Supersoul which is seated in the hearts of all living beings. Though dwelling in the body, this imperishable Supreme Self neither acts or gets entangled. It is called Brahman, the Absolute. It is the impersonal God. (Singal)

Personal God is experienced as manifestation of a being, Lord, Ishwara. The concept of personal God is based on the relation to God as a person, one who bestows compassion on devotee. Personal God is explained in the article, *Personal and Impersonal God*, as:

And as personal God, He is the Lord who has descended here on earth for establishment of the primacy of righteousness. He is the personification of inexhaustible energy, unbounded love, unlimited compassion and infinite knowledge. Brahman and Ishwara, thus, are not two different realities, but two aspects of the same Supreme Entity. (Singal)

Journey towards Impersonal God in Sri Aurobindo's *The Pilgrim of the Night*

The title of the poem *The Pilgrim of the Night*, is about the pilgrimage of a divinised soul towards the Supreme, impersonal God. According to the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary, a pilgrim is "someone who travels to a place that is important in their religion" (537). The poem focuses on the pilgrim of the poet's soul, compared to the darkness of the night, overcoming the hurdles in worldly life, to reach the Supreme Power. The poet has used night as a symbol to express his ideas. He refers his soul's journey as the journey of the night in the

poem. The poem begins with his assignation with the night. He has made an appointment with night, in the depressed and a bad situation, mentioned as abyss in the poem, "I made an assignation with the night" (*Sri Aurobindo Collected Poems- The Complete Poetical Works*, 132). Night is a symbol of darkness, used widely in literature to intensify the feel of horror and to be feared. The prevailing darkness refers to poet's sins and misfortunes he has faced in his life. He does indeed have faith that he will confront the darkness since he continues to carry God's light in him. Night is also a time, where all celestial objects are visible in the sky. This makes him to gain confidence experiencing the power of cosmos on him, highlighting the concept of impersonal God. Night is personified as a woman in the poem, with whom the poet arranges for a meeting. A woman with a dark and dangerous heart, refers to the seduction, the poet hails in. Though it is seductive and never leads to the path of the Supreme energy, he is searching for, he realizes, the unmanifested one, wouldn't depart him. In 1 Thessalonians 5:5, as per *The King James Version of the Holy Bible*, it is mentioned that people belong to the day light and not of the darkness, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (682). Night is refereed as a dangerous heart. He is ready to woo the dark and dangerous night but isn't afraid, because he feels the unmanifested energy is guiding him.

It is observed in the poem *The Pilgrm of the Night*, through the line, "I left the glory of the illumined mind/And the calm raptures of the divine soul" (*Sri Aurobindo Collected Poems- The Complete Poetical Works*, 132), that the sonnet deviates from the previous mentioned hope and strength. The poet points out that God has given enough wealth in the form of health and relations in life, but still the heart yearns for fulfillment in the form of material wealth. This blurs the soul's vision and makes one to travel to far away from the real destination of spiritual wealth. This idea is also supported, with the article *Material Wealth Vs Spiritual Wealth*, where "Material comforts not leads to moral growth, Increase of material comforts it may be generally laid down does not in any way what so ever conduce

to moral growth" (Kumar). Material wealth will not lead a soul towards moral growth, as mentioned by Aurobindo in the poem. He has lost his path towards illumined mind, the bright light, in search of the material wealth, the darkness, i.e. the night.

The soul in search of the divine light, is referred as divinised soul in the poem. The poet describes the soul's happiness as "calm rapture", (*Sri Aurobindo Collected Poems - The Complete Poetical Works*, 132). According to Merriam Webster, "rapture is a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to knowledge of divine things" .As per certain millenarian teaching, rapture is to transport the believer, at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, from Earth to heaven. The poet describes this experience as a happy journey, through the "dim and blind" (*Sri Aurobindo Collected Poems- The Complete Poetical Works*, 132), referring the hurdles on worldly life. In the next line, "To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll" (*The Pilgrim of the Night*, line 8), the poet is affirmed and certain on the diminishing ignorance, once he reaches the divine.

The poet's journey towards the unmanifest is never ending. The path to immortal life, is lost years ago. At present the poet hears no voice of the Supreme beings. This situation makes it difficult for him, to reach the destination. A volta is a turn in a sonnet, that serves as an answer to the question in discussion in the sonnet. In the couplet, "And yet I know my footprints' track shall be/A pathway towards Immortality" (*Sri Aurobindo Collected Poems -The Complete Poetical Works*, 132), the poet regains his affirmation. He is certain in reaching the Impersonal God through his journey. According to him, the hurdles in the path are to renounce him from his sins and to understand the real rapture of life. The path will lead him to immortality, the infinite power, the Impersonal God. Immortality is defined in the article Internet Encyclopedia Philosophy as, "Immortality is the definite continuation of a person's existence, even after death...Immortality implies a never-ending existence, regardless of whether or not the body dies" (Andrade). Similarly, Sri Aurobindo implies that, though his mortal body dies in the worldly life, his soul's journey towards the Impersonal God, will

continue. He finally affirms that his track will lead towards the immortal being.

Conclusion

The poem *The Pilgrim of the Night* keenly presents the thirst of the poet to reach the Impersonal God, through the worldly pathway. According to the book *The Untethered Soul*, "The Spiritual Journey is one of the constant transformation. In order to grow, you must give up the struggle to remain the same, and learn to embrace change at all times" (Singer). Similarly, Sri Aurobindo, will venture his path in darkness, referred as Night, in the poem, which serves as a pathway to reach the Impersonal God, until he finds the Supreme Light.

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