Every social group has had its high profile ideology, which changed periodically with the evolving modes of transformation. The epic is perhaps one of the oldest forms of literary compositions. Almost all the developed civilisations of the past had an epic around which centred the various phases of its cultural and literary evolution. They were either stories created out of the imaginative reservoir of generations transferred orally from generation to generation improved at different stages, or the record of some great event, flavoured with interludes of tales of passion and adventure or again the allegorical representations of philosophical or moral ideas.

The epics delineate this picture effectively through the plot, the heroic elements displayed, the grand style of its narration, the extra terrestrial backdrop with supernatural interference and seriousness of its tone. As the themes of the epics were of objective nature with its encyclopaedic scope and its cyclic structure, these stories in their resolution recapitulate the life of the individual and the race. Epics were not the forte of every poet or inspired talent seeking expression through versification. They were the powerful output of generations spread in time each correcting, defining and redefining life situations. Both the primary and the secondary epics unfold highly charged expositions of human drama acted out on the stage of a timeless world. Being quite different from the commonplace
occurrences these characters engage themselves in actions mental and physical
that corresponds to universal human situations.

Though Aristotle rated tragedy higher than the epic, at the time when
Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* it was generally believed that the epic poem was the
highest form of literary composition. And by epics the immediate reference was
to the classical narratives that provided the model and pattern to Europe for
centuries. Homer and Virgil stood as the towering figures, their epics acting as the
inspiring works as well as supplying the basic form of narrative. Milton modelled
on Homer through Virgil, the Italian writers and Spenser.

Spenser was fascinated by the technique of the Italian epic, which
influenced him considerably. Virgil's epic was an attempt to create for Rome what
Homer had done for Greece, to celebrate her history, prophesy her future and
create characters who could embody the national spirit of his nation. Virgil
improved upon the epic he inherited, in that his style has wistfulness and his
portrayal of heroism and triumph is more balanced with the sacrifices involved for
it, characteristics we miss in Homer. Thus constant imitation of the Homeric epic
resulted in the consistency of characterization and narrative methods in general
from Virgil to Spenser. By the time of the classical epics the form assumed more
meaning and purpose that the war of the Iliad and the long journey of the
Odyssey became the two great epic subjects; both of them were familiar symbols
for human life. The seventeenth century poets who handled biblical material in a
classical pattern effected the transformation of the classical into the Christian epic.
Milton adheres to the classical pattern of the epic, moulding his epic within framework of the accepted norms. The conventional features of an epic like a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject in an elevated style where the activities of a heroic or quasi divine figure, whose action determine the fate of a tribe, nation or a race, the invocation of the muse, the plunge in media res, the roll call and council of leaders, the narrative recapitulation of events preceding the point at which the poem began, war and preliminary verbal combat, the prophetic unfolding of future history, the setting of the poem may be on a world wide or even larger scale, the action involving superhuman deeds, as well as the participation of the great gods and the supernatural elements or forces in this action, the ceremonial style distanced from the ordinary speech, the use of the extended simile, inclusion of wide range of stories and vast references etc reveal themselves in _Paradise Lost_ and to a great degree in _Savitri_.

The narrative maintains coherence from beginning to the end. The filling in by the reader of the gaps untouched in the narration is made possible only if such a connection is maintained. The events in the story are turned into a plot by the modus of presentation. As the function of the narration is to emphasise or de-emphasise, to interpret or leave to the inference of the reader etc the mode of the narration assumes significance proportionate to the mission of the epic. Hence the structural making of the poems are in tune with the traditional forms, or at least sharing with the species in general. It provides the poets the freedom of painting in a canvas, which by itself introduces the spirit of the work to the reader, asserting that the poems are not simply to be dismissed off after a light reading.
The depiction of the two poems as epics par excellence is based firmly on the classical epic features which they adhere to; yet they improve upon it wherever they seem. The epic dimensions attained by the poems can be realised by a proper study of the elements in it that make them great epics. When Milton decided to take the Genesis legend as his material he was selecting the most proper and apt theme that could give his epic a tremendous edge over the other possible topics and assure its success as a universally acceptable work, as the primary questions discussed had relevance to man in general and not just parochial or regional significance. He could build on the strong foundation of a traditional belief and emotional prepossessions. *Paradise lost* would not be the poetic achievement it is, if it had not been inspired by Milton's own passionate religious vision.  

Milton selected the story of the creation and fall as the subject material of his epic after much care and study. The theme of *the Iliad* that pivots on the wrath of Achilles and the reclamation of Helen as well as the restoration of Greek pride speaks of the valour and heroism of a race. *The Odyssey* where the theme of journeying homeward is related, and *the Aeneid* where the quest and founding of a great city is described, move around tales of collective significance, i.e. happenings related to a culture. The epic theme matures by the time of Dante, his *Divine Comedy* being the quest of the human soul seeking the highest form of wisdom that leads to bliss. Spenser's *Faire Queen* embodies the quest theme where the knights represent the public and private virtues.  

Milton takes the scope and application of the theme further to higher and sublime heights, by relating a theme of universal significance where the principal
characters and happenings cover the entire fabric of creation, fall and redemption of the race. One must think of it as rather as a core of meaning and responsiveness waiting to be touched in each member of Milton’s audience, a core out of which flowered the great popular themes of Christian liberty, Christian warfare and the second Adam dying to redeem the first.⁵

And the theme could provide a wider canvas which naturally had the range to convey more than the might of the physic and the splendour of the material universe it could provide an equation that would directly encompass within its framework the entire story of creation. It could also provide a bridge to the other realms of existence and play beyond the time and space dimension giving a comprehensive vision of creation at large. This then elevates the epic to heights from where the poet could conveniently glance across the entire paraphernalia stretching across from beginning to the end.

The dramatis personae presented through the poem: God, the Son, the good Angels, Satan, and other rebel Angels Adam and Eve, offer to function in such a way that what may seem to be liabilities are converted to assets, since the whole poem assumes the character of an archetypal myth of the nature and destiny of man seen against the cosmic background and such a theme suited Milton’s religious and poetic imagination.⁶ It is then this flexibility in the theme selected by him that enabled Milton to reflect life at its diverse experiences like sadness, faith, hope and the optimistic vigour reflected by the matured acceptance of the will of God. The created universe speaks of the power, providence, and protection of the Divine. But the presence of evil into its
perfection, connect the world to the other dimensions like hell. These are symbolic as well as realistic in nature. Man is free to choose from the two.

And the abstract becomes alive through speech, action and imagery and through the network of parallels and contrasts, on all levels like God and Satan, love and hate, order and anarchy, reason and passion, upward and downward movement good and evil and so on. As in renaissance art generally, classical myth is a storehouse of symbols of beauty power and horror beyond the limits of the human and actual, and in *Paradise Lost* these are naturally most abundant in the pictures of Heaven and Hell.\(^7\) It is then through the extraordinary energy and magnificence that he gives to the treatment of the theme and the application of its unique vision, to the problems of life that the epic attains its purpose and that the poet manages to reveal himself and his ideas regarding socio-religious cultural- and literary needs of the day. Thus the selection of a theme that can encompass within its range the entirety of the human experiences and yet function with a definite mode of objectivity elevates the epic higher than the other literary forms.

Aurobindo enriches the legend of Sathyavan and Savitri taken from *the Mahabharata*. He has managed to transfer a local legend into a psychological fact full of significance for the human evolution.\(^8\) Incidentally both the poets took the seed for their respective epics from the scriptural literature of their respective religions. This they conveniently modified to suit to their vision by turning it into a rich episode full of significance for the human soul and its destiny. The legend serves as a symbol or as an image that the poet creates which as a sign language
enables him to convey his vision through it effectively. It is the faculty of this vision, the power of seeing the truth of one's experience or even some supra-intellectual truth embodied as a symbol that gives the poet his special expressive power.

Through the Savitri legend the poet relates in very powerful terms, the problem of man's imperfection and the deep desire that burns within him to attain that perfection, the problem of his mortality and his longing for immortality which can be solved only by spiritual efforts. As in the case of Adam and his progeny who are destined to suffer the punishment till one who is capable to offer himself in sacrifice, this problem of man cannot be solved only by the highest effort of man without the aide of the Divine. It can be solved only if the supreme Divine can be persuaded to descend on earth and take up the burden of man. Man has to work out a destiny on this earth as per the Divine design and wisdom. Savitri thus exposes the conditions of the problem in the clearest manner and reveals to mankind the order of things as it is to be understood.

Like the Adam and Eve tale, this legend acts as a symbol relating the eternal drama of the individual's struggle against the dark forces of ignorance and his hope for a panacea that would put an end to this complex riddle of existence. It reflects the eternal quest of man journeying through time like the Knight in search of the Holy Grail. It is this that Aswapathy signifies who through the vast journey through various worlds unravels the mystery of the cosmic riddle "He traveled in his mute and single strength / Bearing the burden of the worlds desire."
Like the happenings in *Paradise Lost* where the characters are of cosmic relevance even the ordinary incidents in *Savitri* get endowed with cosmic significance. There is nothing that is not conscious, even the seasons are not a mere mechanical succession of external changes but conscious operations in the cosmic body.¹¹

The epic of Milton covers the cosmos as its backdrop transcending time and space barriers. The poet had planned the poem on the scale of a vast epic, attempting a complete interpretation encompassing objectively everything vitally important to relate the story of man. In Aurobindo’s own words:

> It has been planned not on the scale of Lycidas or Comus or some brief narrative poem, but of the larger epical narrative, almost a minor, a very minor Ramayana; it aims not at the minimum but an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation.¹²

And hence like the Biblical legend applied by Milton it is an experience which is not of the common kind and it is very far from what the general mind perceives or understands. The themes of the two epics thus stand vindicated in their role as ideal subjects for heroic narrative of this magnitude.

Both Aurobindo and Milton opted finally to go in for a popular legend that had already registered its significance through mass recognition and universal applicability with reference to its subject matter. Thus the Adam and Eve legend was as old as the *Old Testament* and the myth that spoke of the creation of man was quite popular both as a religious text and as an attempt in anthropological
explanation. This story of the beginning, whether credible or not had made its indelible mark in the mind of generations and when Milton built his vision on it he was just doing it the Shakespearean way, relating his ideas through a tale that had already proved to be palatable to their beliefs and sentiments. And this is exactly what we find in Aurobindo. We have a story borrowed from the *Mahabharata*, a legend that was already very popular with the Indian mind for generations. It was this that he took as his medium though like Milton he chiseled it, polished and gave it a finish to suit to framework of his epic.

Epics are poems of quest where the poet underlines the basic nature of man to move and keep moving in the search of some ideal either materially or spiritually. The journeying theme of *the Odyssey* is greatly augmented and widened in scope in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where it becomes a quest. And the quest revolves round a loss, which ultimately is restored after much trials and tribulations.

The theme of loss is a basic component of the epics in general. The classical epics do sing of this loss and the consequent attempts of the sufferers to restore or regain the object of loss. The *Iliad* speaks of the loss of Helen accompanied by the loss of nationalistic pride. *The Aeneid* delineates the loss of a nation, family and infact all such valued possessions of Aeneas who towards the end restores all this though in different means. Yet the poem all along proposes the theme of loss and the diverse human responses to it, which in some instances are of extreme nature as in the case of Dido queen of Carthage who sacrifices herself at the height of her loss. Milton through his epic sings of a loss and the
possibility of its restoration. As proclaimed in the very outset the poem has loss as one of its preoccupying themes. The song is about the man's disobedience that brought "Death into the world and all our woe / With loss of Eden till one greater Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful seat."  

The loss here is both physical and spiritual. It is the rupture of the original design of the creator, which gets foiled because of the interruption of Satan. The physical loss is not limited to that of a terrestrial and environmental nature alone or the physiological well being of the first humans with the possibility of immortality. It is the loss of a physical haven of bliss where the constituent elements have the power to contribute to positive evolvement of human nature to that of the Divine. The very basis of immortality as explained here is due to the succour and the nutrition provided by the elements of Eden. It is again the loss of a world where effort and toil leads to enjoyment rather than exhaustion.

The bliss to exist within the proximity of the Divine presence, to be able to communicate with the almighty and have correspondence with heavenly beings are but factors that elevate the spirit privileges that man lost on demotion from Heaven. Adam and Eve on being intimated of their punishment and imminent deportation from Eden are conscious of the intensity of the loss that they are to encounter in the days ahead. And it is this sense of loss that drives them to the penitent mood that is acknowledged by the Divine, leading to the promise of restoring them to their lost glory. Between these oppositions of losses and gain which are only an abstract recognition of what the epic has achieved and created,
the richness of the poetry depends on the ease with which it can move from one sphere to another.

The Indian epics also do reflect the concept of loss as a major theme. *The Mahabharata* is about the loss of the kingdom and the right to possess it by the Pandavas princess and the consequent attempts by them to regain it which they do towards the end. *The Ramayana* tells the story of the loss of Sita and Rama's strenuous efforts to locate her and regain her. *The Chilappadikaram* is the tale of the loss of the husband of Kannaki first due to Madhavi a dancer and then to death. The epics weave their actions and movements around these losses and through the attempts to retrieve the loss.

The very story of *Savitri* is about a loss. It tells the death of Sathyavan and Savitri's dedicated efforts to retrieve him from the world of eternal darkness to that of light. Thus the pivotal point around which the actions of the plot revolve is that of loss. It is at the height of this loss when she clasps closely the lifeless form of Sathyavan 'her husband's corps on her forsaken breast' that a sudden change comes over her and the veil is torn and 'the thinker is no more' only the spirit sees. "Savitri undergoes this change and attains the true glory of self-realisation at the moment of loss and the consequent suffering. As in the case of Kannaki in *Chilappadikaram*, here too loss and the subsequent grief, intensifies the sufferings within that suddenly explode to transform the very nature and faculties of the individual.

The idea that the epic deals with loss and its restoration is suggested further in the boon that Savitri asks of death. And she realises for him "kingdom
and power and friends and greatness lost,“17 as well as the sight that his father had lost long ago. Aurobindo’s Savitri also speaks of a loss that man has encountered, the loss of ‘immortality’ which is to be restored by Savitri. The poem shifts in its mood from that of subtle realizations to that of loss and again back to the heightened sense of attainment. It is ‘the hidden kingdoms of beatitude’18 that are lost and that lie within waiting to be revealed. It is this finding or realisation that is the essence of the epic. Aurobindo in Savitri speaks in the language of living symbolism, and the basic idea expressed is that the highest truth is concealed by the mind which acts as a barrier. The realisation of this fundamental truth is attained by breaking the obstruction of the mind and ascending beyond.

The loss here is occasioned by the negative powers “the red-wolves”19 that are constantly roaming through the desolate ways of the evolving world. They fall suddenly upon the being and are persistent, destructive, and cruel are the unscrupulous powers of the lower darkness. The loss then is this involution of the light into the inner darkness of the inconscient. The human being has to aspire for his true self with sufficient force and persistence. It is only then that the higher self would descend on him like a sea. It is this state that Savitri attains by which she manages to defeat death and secure eternal life. It is the attainment of this state that confers on Aswapathy the power to reach the abode of the Supreme Creatrix. The poem thus ends in a note of restoration of the true nature of man—his Divine self. Both epics have loss as a predominant feature and it is to be noted that both occidental and oriental epics do share this feature. But in Milton and
Aurobindo this loss transcends the material plane and speaks of the loss on the higher plane.

The element of conflict is a predominant factor that plays a pivotal role in epics. It may be seen that at times it acts a secondary theme in the flow of the plot, and decides the course of the story. The conflict can be of a physical nature, intellectual or spiritual that may alter itself in the course of the development of the plot. The factors of struggle, war or an adamant resistance are different expressions of this conflict that display the opposing forces in the mode of their collision. In Beowulf we have the hero who fights monsters. The connection of epic with heroic ages where the warrior lord of a pastoral society is the shepherd of his people in peace and in war achieves glory by a life of action. Conflict on the physical plane calls for physical fortitude and strength of might, which asserts itself through individual combats or massive struggles represented through wars.

Homer was depicting human life in the light of the values of the culture that prevailed during his age. There is a gradual shift in the importance given to intellectual prowess by the time of the composition of the Odyssey. The pattern of heroic action does not seem to turn upon mere physical strength and striking power, but rather in being cunning and wily. In the Odyssey the theme shifts from violence and brute force to the intelligent use of the intellect and reason. It is as if that the forces of war and peace should be ultimately brought under the control of order and peace through the exercise of reason and help of the gods.

In the epic by Virgil the hero Aeneas does not enter into war for any personal motive, but as part of his effort to fulfill his mission. Hence it is found
that Virgil gives up the Homeric concept of might and physical prowess as an aspect of the epic hero and is substituted by moral and spiritual strength in the conduct of life. It is this concept that is idealized by Milton in his epic.

In the epic tradition fortitude had been accepted as a conventional heroic norm, which is served as the normal standard for comparing or evaluating heroes of different cultures or nations. The epic tradition that he inherited offered him a wide range of heroic ethos physical, fortitude, prudence, love, leadership piety, and magnanimity. But the renaissance ethics rejected this ideal and substituted in its place moral and spiritual heroism. And when Milton decided to write an epic he decided to relate "... the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom."

This was in contradiction to the heroic ethos so far held as the archetype. The martial prowess proven through wars and insistent struggle against antithetical forces was deemed as the normal subject suited to be sung through the lines of the heroic song. This was more or less the practice all throughout the medieval world and the ancient compositions of the east. By Milton's time there was a gradual shift in the values and consequently there was a revision of ethos in consonance with the changing social and political values. The qualities and virtues of the ideal man shifted from the man of might to the man of virtues and refinement. Yet the epics with the concept of higher heroism still stuck to the martial code as delineated in the classical epics.

Milton reacted to the changing phase of his age but retained the martial code of the classical epic in the narrative structure of his poem. As the heroism of
physical and spiritual dimensions are at variance, he implants the lower form of heroism in Satan and his minions while the higher form of spiritual heroism expressed through the conduct of Christ and to a lesser extent through Adam. This reveals that "Milton is not very much in love with martial heroism. He feels that glorification of daring adventures, heroic exploits and hair-breadth escapes are a remnant of the past; it is antiquated." 26

Milton’s dislike for the physical fortitude and physical struggle is obvious when he portrays the evil and negative characters like Satan as stereotypes of the traditional ideals of brutal strength and enormity of physical prowess. The western epic takes a totally different turn in Milton the emphasis moving from the external to the internal. The central stage shifts from the oceans and plains of war to the hearts of Adam and Eve, from the limited dimension of terrestrial conflict to the immensity of the cosmic stage where time and events lose their three dimensional limitations. Thus Milton infuses loftier forms of heroic virtues into the epic convention thereby devising a technique of his own. But then the conflict assumes different dimensions in the poem. There are the political, social, economic, racial, generic and likewise multidimensional conflicts of the world reflected through the epic. With this the conflict of the sexes, that of knowledge and evolutionary variances add to give it a wholesome representation of the earthly cast in its totality. It is such conflicts that brood on different lines of expression that give impetus to the process of development.

It is this change that brought a transition in the structure of the epic from its traditional form to the modern flexibility liberating it from the rigidity of the
dictated patterns and practices. The renaissance epic poets had this problem before them, the incompatibility of the heroic form with the heroic virtues,\textsuperscript{27} which Milton was to solve through his epic. Similar is the treatment meted out to the passions like love, hate, sex and other delicate expressions which the traditional epics delineate with all their intensity. Milton stresses the nobility and refinement of their expression for the ultimate victory. This is vindicated at the end of the poem. Adam is left triumphant in the depth of his suffering, while Satan is a helpless figure in the height of his triumph. Thus there is conflict in Milton's epic in keeping with the general characteristics of a heroic narrative but this is dealt on a higher plane and is of a loftier nature than mere vindication of physical prowess through war and feats of physical prowess.

The Indian tradition in the perception and delineation of conflict that Aurobindo inherited had matured to a level of maturity free from mere base human expressions. In \textit{the Ramayana} and \textit{the Mahabharata} we have conflict studied with an academic seriousness and objectivity. The epics tell the tales of conflict on all fronts of life and the response of the human being both individually and collectively to it as a universal phenomenon. The very portrayal of the three levels or dimensions of creation—Swarga, Patala, and Bhootala [Heaven, Hell and Earth]—by itself portray the latent conflicting nature of creation. \textit{The Ramayana} delineates this on the physical intellectual and spiritual levels but always upholding the cause of that based on Dharma or righteousness. Ravana with ten heads and a complementary nature of physical appearance, with other assuras who like his brother Kumbhakarna etc add to the enormity of physical
valour and the corresponding level of fortitude that it projects. The description of the battle and the various subplots involved clearly give of a thrust to the physical might of conflict.

And thus it is the physical and military might of the two battling forces that is elaborately delineated thus highlighting its importance. But the poet takes pain to prove that ultimately all this disappears to give way to Dharma and the observance of a virtuous life. The epic Ramayana like the Mahabharata centralises on a war. Hence the poems begin with incidents that prepare the plot to the conflict while the second half relates the consequences of the conflict. Yet in both the epics, we have a clear orchestration of the superiority of intelligence, reason, Dharma and that of moral and spiritual virtues. But even these powers are shown to be the result of the severe austerities and noble deeds. “. . . Is there / Among endeavors yielding golden fruit / A higher one than tapas?”

The superiority of spiritual power is emphasized over the might of physical prowess. The triumphant protagonists in both the epics win through all the cunning and intrigues of the antagonists through the power of righteousness.

Even the gods cannot hope to win
In fierce battles, through might alone
Unless right helps them
Keep this truth firmly in your mind.29

Rama tries to persuade Ravana to return Seetha and thus avoid a war. Krishna tries to convince the Kauravas by himself and using the good offices of the seniors of the court, to return the kingdom of the Pandavas to them. Thus
there is an attempt to resolve the conflict in the epics through peaceful manner and violent methods are resorted to only after the exhaustion of all the peaceful means. This mature approach is the result of an evolved society that has attained a refinement through its cultural advancement. The *Bhagawat Gita* systematically explains the necessity and inevitability of addressing the conflicts that life has to face, with the detachment and dedication of a saint. Thus the resolution of the conflicts on all levels displayed in these two epics has in them the unquestionable triumph of Dharma or the sense of righteousness.

Aurobindo in his epic delineates the conflict that man has to encounter on different dimensions. There is Aswapathy who is disturbed by man’s state of suffering occasioned by the latent ignorance in him, there is Savitri with a struggling mind caught in the conflict of love and death, then there is the God of Death who in doing his duty runs into direct conflict with the essential nature of man—immortality. Apart from all this Aurobindo clearly paints the picture of creation where there are conflicting factors constantly vying with each other to establish its sway. The polarities of opposing natures like light and darkness, negative and positive knowledge and ignorance constantly operate, and it is in their conflict that nature assumes her personality. Aurobindo realizes that all such conflicts ultimately lead to the divine “all blundered and straggled towards the one divine.”

He constantly speaks of two ladders, one of the descent of the absolute into the nescience and the other of ascent from nescience to the supreme, far from eternity being in opposition to time movement, the grand vision of Savitri.
brings eternity in moments of time.\textsuperscript{31} Aurobindo, while describing the spirit of man struggling in this world apparently without success, penetrates beyond the conflicting appearances and sees the deeper significance of the struggle and says that it is part of the mortal's search for immortality. In Aurobindo we have a highly evolved perceptive balance in handling of conflicts which we might observe is the natural continuity of that in the earlier Indian epics. And the conflicting situations are solved through the wise application of the higher mind and not the physical or lower levels of behavioural manifestation.

Man is conferred with an instinct to translate the essence of the diverse experiences that he comes across in his life into a binding law, into pattern forms, that determine his course as living units. The natural law of conduct proceeds from a conflict to an equilibrium of forces, impulsions and desires: the higher ethical law proceeds by the development of the mental and moral nature towards a fixed internal standard or else a self formed ideal of absolute qualities-justice, righteousness, love, right reason, right power, beauty, light.\textsuperscript{32} And it is this resolution that we find in Savitri. The conflict thus gives way to a state of peace and a state of the absolute qualities, wherein Adam and Eve, Sathyavan, and Savitri walk into peace and blissfulness.

Both the epics are poems of conflict and are poems of peace at the same time. They highlight the conflict deep within the individual and the conflict that is latent in the creation between the symmetrical forces of good and evil. The great chain that exists in creation, the hierarchy is violated in two ways: Eve disrupts the order by defying her natural superiors, Adam and God, and by obeying her
inferiors, the snake and the tree whom she worships as a pagan. And they become conveyers of peace in the sense that in both poems the cause of the conflict is identified and a way out from the inner and outer strife is detailed, which is fundamentally based on the spiritual recognition of one's true nature.

The characters assume an epic dimension in that they equal in their potential with any hero of the epic tradition. In strength and character, as well as expression of their will they are on par with the mightiest, towering across the tales that the poem conveys. Adam with the element of passivity and purity, with the weakness amounting to idolatry arising out of his fondness for his woman still creates the tragic picture of the traditional hero, who is sinned against more than sinning. Inspite of his failure to display an iron fist and control his wife to a point of total obedience, for which even she finds fault with him, he radiates a lovableness and uprightness which are scarcely found in the epic clan of heroes.

The hero is of universal importance, in that he is the parent of mankind in general. His doings both negative and positive have their bearing on the race as a whole. It is this that decides the fate and course of the human story. Through Adam with Eve both superhuman ideal figures maintain the general requisite qualities expected of the epic hero, their fall consequent of their sinning assume the character of an archetypal myth of the nature and destiny of man seen against his cosmic background. They are pure in character, impeccable in spirit quite unassuming in their innocence, and yet it is the fortitude with which they face their punishment that raise them to the epic heights.
Here man is the central link in the scale of nature. He is also the spatial
centre of the cosmos and at the dramatic centre of action. The subject thus
discussed is of utmost importance as Milton’s preoccupation is with the Christian
theme and his commitment is to sing the true Christian heroism rather than the
war-like subjects usually deemed the proper concern of epic and romance. And
within this design, the characters of *Paradise Lost* stand as archetypes as they
include within themselves all other epic characters. Adam represents himself and
all his sons just as Eve stand for her daughters. And Adam was the perfect choice
to denote as the archetype of the universal male for “Adam the goodliest man of
men since born / His sons, the fairest of her daughters Eve.”

As Satan and his band of followers typify the old epic heroism with the
stress given to physical fortitude and material display of valour, Christ Adam and
Eve in *Paradise Lost* signify the new hero ready to involve and struggle with the
idea of spiritual warfare. The great temptation to which the epic hero is subjected
to, which he overcomes with his will power and dedication to his mission is
repeated here also. Though Adam and Eve fall prey initially to the tempter they
emerge strong and powerful characters towards the end of the epic who walk out
of the epic with confidence and decisiveness. It is this metamorphosis that gives
them the epic stature and the poem its unique potential force.

Satan is a superhuman version of the heroes of classical epics, but their
virtues are in him perverted as well as magnified; he is in total contrast with the
true heroism of Milton’s two protagonists, the heavenly and sinless Son and the
guilty and illuminated Adam. In pure villainy that is complete in its nature, in
the absolute perseverance of evil, developed into a philosophy of life, we have no
caracter in world literature who assumes such tragic potentialities. The
discussions that the fallen angels have and the efforts they put in lead them
nowhere but to a realization of their own spiritual decay. Yet we have Satan
who stand a colossal figure amidst his fabulous and losses. Adam and Eve
representing the ideal couple in a harmonious binding, with the intruder Satan
capable to work evil of unimaginable magnitude, and a passive Heaven
witnessing the flow of the happenings, together provide the setting, within which
the epic is created. This then serves the framework for an epic and provides the
space to express the vision of the poet within the vast range of poetic flexibility.
The characters in Milton’s poem are shaped on an epic proportion, larger than
life and living out a cause that serves the whole of mankind. They speak and
endure for mankind and shape the destiny of future generations.

This exactly is what happens in Aurobindo’s Savitri where the protagonists
play out their roles, which affect the destiny of mankind and alter it. The
characterization of Savitri has been on an epic scale for the poem was planned by
Aurobindo on the scale of the longer epical narrative almost a minor, though a
very minor Ramayana; it aims not at a minimum but an exhaustive exposition of
the world-vision or world interpretation. As the poet had designed the epic to fit
into the garb of a universal theme the prominent characters assume the
propensity of his vision that enfoils the destiny of man on many fronts, like
spiritual mental, and vital planes of being. Hence the depiction of the characters
are undertaken to express the character, meaning, world-vision and expression of
spiritual experience.
Aswapathy and Savitri the principal characters are from the royal family and they act for the benefit of the mankind as a whole. The issue at stake is not of local or regional significance but that which has bearing on the universe as such and here we have a great event to inspire. It is a prophetic reading of the world history and the promise of its fulfillment. Aswapathy in the epic is not a king who is childless; he is a representative of the human race trying to fulfill the inmost aspiration of the human being by bringing down to the earth a kind of perfection in life. Aswapathy transcends the limited role of a king and is a representative of the human race and as representative of the human race he delves deep into the true self that is in man.

Savitri the most importance character of the epic who lends the epic her name acts as the symbol. She is the Madonna, the saviour, and the divine that is present in man but is not realised. She is the hope that mankind nurtures deep within and will one day recognise as its latent nature. Sathyavan on the other hand stands as the representative of the helpless man who caught in the cobwebs of time and ignorance is a victim of a merciless destiny. He falls prey to the cruel play of fate and yet moves in the ignorance of an imminent death. It is from this darkness that he is restored to immortality and bliss.

Life is the adventure of the spirit into the unknown and Death the fall into inconscience. And the solution to the problems of life can be found in the integral vision that is reflected through the character of Aswapathy and Savitri. Sri Aurobindo says it is no use denying that man is in quest of an all round harmony of perfection. If that quest is a fact there must be in the unknown depths
of the Divine the secret of an all-round fulfillment. Human life should become the manifestation of this fulfillment and perfection. It is this that Aurobindo has presented through his epic. As V. Chandrasekharan points out:

Sri Aurobindo has presented . . . an organic body of thought and knowledge concerning man and the universe which has the character of a perfectly natural and inevitable synthesis of all that is valuable in the various main lines of intellectual seeking and vision, of aspiration and discipline, of upward effort and aim, of the Ancient and the Modern world of the West and the East.42

And as observed by Sri Aurobindo the illumined mind does not work primarily by thought, but by vision.43 It is only normal that his characters share this heightened sense of his vision, as they bring out the profound ideas to life in the full depth of the epic amplitude. As man and man's purpose in the world is the theme of all epics the poetical manner of the epics is tuned to suit the greatness of their substance. The style and verse in which they have been written have always a noble epic quality, a lucid classical simplicity and directness rich in expression but stripped of superfluous ornaments, a swift vigorous flexible and fluid verse constantly sure of the epic cadence.44

It is this that Aurobindo reflects through Savitri, where his epic joins with the spirit of Paradise Lost. Both the poems project the characters on an epic scale, where they cease to be individuals but representatives of the race. The canvas of the two epics is as wide as the cosmos and it takes into account worlds
of being that are connected with humanity, which are not perceived by it because of its limitations of ignorance.

Milton reveals the epic fall and yet this is done with utmost care, as he is conscious of the stipulations of the religio-spiritual mandates of his day, forcing him to adhere to a specific path. The epic climb of the human soul really gains an epic grandeur in the vision of the master and endows this earth with a tremendous significance.\textsuperscript{45}

The language used by Milton is significantly important particularly when it comes from a person who believed that it is the key to the ordering and understanding of the world. In his language the Old Testament and the classics in their prophetic and lyrical quality influenced him. The change, which he effected in his language to keep up with the evolving times, was intentional as made clear through his preface to \textit{Paradise Lost}. The note of poetic liberty displayed through the poem reveals Milton's preoccupation with the linguistic experiment through which he was attempting to invent a new mode of poetic expression for the English muse. This is obvious, for "Adam in the poem is the discoverer of a new language which not only identifies for himself the position within the world but initiates his quest for self identity."\textsuperscript{46}

It is language that introduces and familiarises him to everything from God to the plants around. Though critics have pointed out his obsession with the language and its use "he exhibits a feeling for words rather than a capacity for feeling through words."\textsuperscript{47} Through such use of the language Milton is able to hide himself from the contemporary reality. The monumental static language belongs
to the past than to the present and the future. The images look forward into the advance of the poem as well as backwards into the literary past; when Eve is compared to Circe and Pandora. Her transgression is anticipated and partially defined. The overtones create a sense of design. The past and the future become simultaneously present. The sense of tradition underlines the sense of history and the interconnections of reality are matched and made actual by the unitive force of the language.48

If it is this unity that binds the whole fabric of the epic into a oneness in Milton, in the blank verse of Aurobindo it is possible to draw a dividing line between the artist and the poet. The ancient Indian scriptures are pervaded by an ever-present awareness of a living infinity, an illimitable oneness deploying itself in myriad modes, remaining not only transcendental and static but throwing itself out in a cosmic dance.49 It is this mode that is applied in Savitri by the poet where Aurobindo brings the accent and vibration of the mantra. And by a pattern proper to a mere intellectual and abstract poetry which makes reason and taste the supreme arbiters, the poem aims at a harmonised poetic intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in the language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration. Savitri adopts the iambic five-foot line of English blank verse as the apt and plastic for harmonies likes those of the Vedas and the Upanishads.50 Aurobindo like Milton hews a new path in the language modulation of the epic wherein the spirit and ethos of his theme as well as its content find a new life and meaning both in sense and expression.
Aurobindo saw pure poetry as mantra which comes from the overmind inspiration. The language and the contents are but expression of the consciousness bearing the overmind accent. In his words

Its characteristics are a language that says infinitely more than the mere sense of the words seem to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the infinite and disappears into the infinite and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents, or indications and values of the thing it speaks of, but its value and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind them all.\(^{51}\)

According to Aurobindo, Milton "has some of the largeness and rhythm of the higher Mind, but his substance is except at certain heights-mental, mentally grand and noble."\(^{52}\)

All epic poems are potentially allegorical in so far as their journeys and battles signify.\(^{53}\) Milton had before him the purely allegorical narrative of Spenser, which was a blend of the Christian theme in a classical treatment. The allegorical setting of the poem enabled Spenser to handle the subject with a flexibility that the structural device of the classical mode offered. The Christian concepts with the rigid definitions clearly demarcating the fixed role of God, man and Satan, or in other words heaven, earth and hell offered little room for flexible treatment as in the classical epics. The Gods of the Olympian heights with their changing ways and shifting stances in their attitude were more or less fallible and more realistic in their approximation to human behaviour.
They could represent both the realistic side of life as well as the allegorical shades of interpretative significance at one touch. Milton very intelligently utilises the Biblical material in a classical way generously applying its myth legends and references, all in the same allegorical light as symbols and representations of a higher truth, and at the same sees to that his poem does not steep into the a pure allegorical mode. This can be perceived in his treatment of the purely allegorical presentation of sin and death. Milton's Sin and Death although so dramatically presented and given so close a relation to Satan are nevertheless dismissed when they have served their allegorical turn. No decorative dance accompanies Adam and Eve from the garden.  

Every poem or for that matter literary work is the product of an age. Whatever be the objectiveness of its content and the universality of its theme, the poet expresses this in the vocabulary and imagery available to him as well as that which is palatable to his audience, the reading public of his age. Hence the poem indirectly gets tied up to the parameters of his timeframe losing partly in its significance to the succeeding generation. Each period in the history of a culture is distinguished by a set of cultural attitudes that vary from those that precede and succeed it. A literary text that was well received at its first appearance and has remained significant was able to satisfy the 'horizon of expectations' which was brought to it by contemporary readers. Milton's epic succeeded in creating a new mode of sublime poetry that could 'provoke wonder and elevation in its readers'. We may allegorize the epic themes in terms of our own lives, but if we take Milton's point of view we may say that our lives are nothing more than
shadowy allegories of his story. Though the narrator follows with the aid of diverse literary techniques shifting the scene of action in a filmatic process through entirely different locations, the poets never cease to hold all of its threads simultaneously, to apprehend all of its places and all of its movements capable of establishing a multitude of telescopic happenings amongst them. And through the idea of retrospection and anticipation, a perfectly clear temporal existence and an unambiguous relationship between past, present and future is established. This is also managed through the very frequency of interpolation and the integration of multilevel experiences into the synchronized wholeness of a unified interconnected mega event. The particulars from the minute to the detailed embroil themselves and yet emerge in the end to give a holistic effect.

In order to present the vast design of the Divine overview of history from the point of creation to the apocalypse, which is beyond human perceptive a simultaneous vision of past, present and future is to be presented. This is done by the disruption of the narrative order in the epic, which begins in the middle, backtracks to what occurs immediately before the middle, and then to the beginning of time itself, before projecting itself forward to the end of the world. The mode of entering into the colossal world of the epic by stepping through the middle of the action and through some means of narration taking a retrospective view of all that has happened in the light of which the rest gradually unfolds, known as the opening media res. is a common feature with almost all the major epics.
This technique gives compactness to the action, and enables a more realistic touch to bring the time and place factors within the comprehensibility of the readers’ imaginative understanding. Homer utilises this in his epics and Virgil makes Aeneas tell his hosts the events of the earlier part of his journey. The beginning in media res., followed by an expository return to the earlier period of time, was observed by Homer who in the eighth line of the Iliad depicts the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles and goes back almost ten days to reveal the cause of it in 140 lines.

Paradise Lost displays the same mode of narration, for the poem opens at a stage where the action has progressed considerably. The war in heaven fought, Satan and his crew already fallen and the creation of man effected, it is here that the poem begins and the entire past is related through the conversation between the angels and Adam. The central point around which the narrative structure pivots determines the conflict on the physical, psychological and moral level. And most models of narrative structure start by assuming a previous state of rest or equilibrium or normality, which is disturbed by an outside force of some kind. These may concern social conflicts ritual taboos or man’s struggles to come to terms with his physical environment. When the poem begins at the middle point of the story, it is initiated by this force and allows for the gradual resumption of normality or the establishment of a new equilibrium. Narrative order is disrupted in this epic which begins in the middle, backtracks to what occurs immediately before the middle, and then to the beginning of time itself, before projecting itself forward to the end of the world.
Aurobindo's *Savitri* begins on the day Savitri is to lose Sathyavan, the day of his death. The story prior to this is related through a series of superb narration where the pivotal events as Aswapathy's tapas, the birth of Savitri and her marriage to Sathyavan have already taken place, but reveal themselves, assuming a dynamic movement through the whirling flash back. We have a similar mode of entry into the Indian epics, where the narrative commences from a very advanced stage of the story. In *the Mahabharata* we have the entire story told years after its happening by a seer to the grandson of Arjuna, the hero of the epic. *The Ramayana* is in the form of an extended song composed by Valmiki the seer poet who emerges as a character towards the end of the poem. The generative sequence in actions is maintained through the effective application of the retrospective vision very efficiently managed. This adds to the compactness of the otherwise spread time, place factor giving it the semblance of sticking to a unity. Both the epics thus begin at a crucial stage where a critical happening has already rocked the course of the story.

The note of epic is its objectivity. And this objectivity is attained through the impersonality of the narrative technique. The poet does not interfere with the movement of his characters and leaves them to an exclusive freedom so that the development of their story is totally dependent on the mode of their nature and behavioural pattern. The poet may through casual comments project his opinions or perspective but it does not in any way control or regulate the personality of the characters even to the slightest degree. Poetry acquires the authority like the authority of science, on the vision of nature as an impersonal order. Milton's
epic which was trying to project the ‘great designs in God’s providential plan in history’ had established a norm for the English mode of the sublime poetry, through which he intended to provoke wonder and elevation in his audience. Throughout the poem he maintains the apocalyptic perspective yet the simultaneity of the text exists at all levels dramatic, structural, doctrinal, moral, historical, psychological. It is to be noted that during Milton’s time the most influential epic was the Aeneid. It was Virgil who brought in a concern between the epic, history and national destiny. And Milton extends this involvement to comprise the spiritual history, yet refrains from a conspicuous association of his nation and the epic matter, objectifying it to represent from a universal platform.

This is but looked and seen from the Christian lines and hence Milton had to effect certain changes in the concept of the hero and the sort of victory that he should reap towards the end of the epic. The concept of the epic hero undergoes a modification here and he ceases to be the warrior as in the Iliad, Odyssey, or Aeneid. His triumphs are not that of marital trophies or that highlights his physical valour. But this is perhaps a point where the innovative genius of the poet asserts itself to formulate a new epic experience. That inner struggle with evil is what Milton aims to bring out of silence into epic expression. This is effected through objectivity and an impartiality with which the poet sings of man’s disobedience and his fall. It is with the same objectivity that he is able to perceive through the eyes of Satan “an astonishingly candid and exact self-knowledge and this insight into the motives of his own revolt enables him to judge rightly of the weakest points in Adam’s and Eve’s defenses.” It is here that the poet is able to look at
values and judge them impassively. It is this objectivity that enables Homer to take an ambivalent attitude suggesting that while honour has its value it also carries with it its defects.67

Objectivity, detachment, and distance contribute in a positive way as they form important components of creativity. Creativity in the mind of the poet is directly related to the advance of other faculties like intellect, emotion, and perception as well as physical, social, aesthetic and creative growth. And as epics are in most cases development of legends or primary rituals from the reservoir of collective human memory an aesthetic understanding is possible through the education of those senses upon which consciousness and ultimately the intelligence and judgement of the human individual are based.68 It is here that both the poets succeed as their epics influence and directly have a bearing to all the six components of growth discussed here.

Aurobindo displays this objectivity, by demystifying the mystic, which is again a matter of the intensity of the artist's inspiration, the availability and use of original material and the kinds of inventiveness brought into play of all which determines the final shape of his work. His vision revealed through The Life Divine finds expression in orchestral cadence of Savitri whose range extends from mystical experience to a generalised sketching of the beauty of nature. It is this uniqueness of his symbolic imagination and the maturity of his creative insight that gives the poem objectivity.

Thus Aurobindo through his great creative power blends poetry and philosophy together and binds it on higher level into a happy combination,
bringing to birth, visions of the truth of things. The synthetical and assimilative Indian genius meets in the English tongue a multiplicity and pliancy of temper-tone which give that genius all the more chance of taking hold of his tongue for living self expression.\(^6\) As opined by Velury Chandrasekharan

Sri Aurobindo has been called a poet-philosopher. A poet-philosopher is usually a risky combination. For the poet works through his aesthetic perception, through his sensibility, feeling and sympathy, and the philosopher through his faculty of thought-mind, intellect, analytical ability and speculative imagination.\(^7\)

It is this combination that created Savitri. Sri Aurobindo himself had said he had been first and foremost a poet and a politician and only later he became a yogi.\(^8\) It is this transition and the detached observative capability that it confers, that is reflected in the epic.

Man feels the need for perfection and aspires for it by those powers and capacities within him. As such the aspiration to attain the highest state of consciousness forms the core of Aurobindo’s philosophy and the inspiration behind all his creative work. It is this vision that as a poet he pursues in the poem with the diligence of a scientist. Vision to him is the characteristic power of the poet, as it is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytical observation the natural genius of the scientist.\(^9\)

Aswapathy is the symbol of the human race, a symbol of humanity, the representative of mankind and he is making an effort to embody the higher values of life so as to find out what is the goal of man.\(^10\) Sri Aurobindo does not
believe that man is the peak of creation but is firm in his conviction that final fruition of all human progress is self-transcending to supermanhood. The vision of supermanhood sums up and brings to a focus the loftiest ideals which have been inspiring mankind throughout the ages. It is the vision of the rich out-flowering of the Divine in man.74

And it is this that is treated very deftly through the epic. Aurobindo pursues the subject of his study with utmost intelligence and impartiality thereby giving it the spirit of an epic. The true person is not an isolated entity his individuality is universal: for he individualises the universe. It is at the same time divinely emergent in a spiritual air of transcendental infinity, like a high cloud-surpassing summit: for he individualises the divine transcendence. His endeavour is to discover the reality and significance of human existence in this material existence as well as the human fate or the Divine future that awaits man. The epic as literary form enables to absorb the enormity of the subject and this can be possible when the subject with all its seriousness and immense elasticity is explored and properly utilised. Aurobindo like Milton takes a step in this direction leaving their characters to develop for themselves to determine the course of their fate.

An epic in the heroic pattern demands the presence and involvement of supernatural agencies who react and interact with the earthly beings to give a multidimensional effect to the settings of the narrative. And hence in Paradise Lost it naturally requires that God and the Son should be speaking characters and such anthropomorphism may seem to make the poem more fundamental than it
is. And the dividing attributes of deity, justice and mercy, between God and the Son have the effect at times of making God seem harsh, especially as god’s utterance is reverently kept plain and bare while the Son speaks throughout in the tone and rhythm of love. God is here both the personal God and also partly the absolute and the first cause. The divine reason is moral law, which the right of man can apprehend.

God is absolute uncreated infinite and unknowable. And Milton never tries to limit the unlimitable, but gives expression to the perception of the almighty in very powerful and potent words that do cover the attributes of the divine both its qualitative and functional greatness.

Thee father first they sung, Omnipotent,
Immutable, immortal, infinite,
Eternal king! The author of all Being,
Fountain of light, thy self invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit’st
Throne’d inaccessible.

It is this God who with his Son who initiates, maintains and supervises the created universe. The Holy Son existed before the creation of the universe. Milton does not ascribe to Him a co-eternal or a co-equal position with the God. The holy Son is the creator of this world but plays a secondary role to that of God as he acquiesces the superiority of the supreme Father through the words, “Father eternal, thine is to decree, / Mine both in heaven and earth to do thy will.”
Christ who is the incarnation of the Son is the savior of mankind. The angels, who are constantly in some kind of activity, working out the design of the divine, are totally glued to the execution of the Divine will. The interaction of the Earth, Heaven and Hell thus form the essential backdrop of the poem, where man becomes just an instrument of the forces operating beyond his control. These forces decide and dictate the movement of his existence though Milton ardently believed in the role of free will with regard to the fate of human life. The course of his life is planned in hell where the first impulse of his sin takes birth in the brains of Satan while his postlapsarian existence is deemed in the divine assembly in heaven. Epics both oriental and occidental share this feature. The course of The Iliad and The Odyssey as well as The Aeneid is destined not just by the human actors of the earthly drama but are controlled by the intervening superhuman agencies and in many cases are decided by the scheming and intriguing acts of the gods.

Savitri tells the tale of the victory of man over forces that were till then beyond his control. It is the story of the triumph of man over the limitations imposed by a destiny presided over by supernatural agencies that operate under the dictates of the higher will. We have the eternal triangle God, Man and Evil conspicuously projected in the full glare of its conflict.

The conflict is direct as Savitri courageously takes on death and questions his supremacy over the created world. She rejects his justifications and asserts the right of man to eternity and an immortal existence. Then there is the advent of Narada the divine seer who arrives from the celestial world to timely instruct and
offer the foreknowledge of Sathyavan's death. It is this timely warning and information from a higher plane that enables Savitri to become alert and observe the ritualistic acts that finally culminate in her spiritual and moral victory over death. The very opening lines of the epic suggestively evoke the relevance of dimensions of existence, higher to that of man and its bearing on human plane. "It was the hour before the Gods awake."\textsuperscript{79}

Even the Gods, the universal powers were not set into functioning at the very time referred to as the primordial state where the unformed state of the universe exists only in the dream of some great God waiting to be materialized to reality. "The path of the divine event"\textsuperscript{80} which is the coming of the dawn, is a symbol of the ultimate transformation with which the poem concludes. And even this is seen as something Divine, not of the commonplace physical transition. Dawn is the awakening of man to his divine possibility with a flash, with a light that is unmistakable, convincing, and capable of evoking in him an aspiration, which can lead him to fulfill the first version of the dawn.\textsuperscript{81} The poem is thus an explanation of the different levels of being and hence there is the shift from one dimension to the other.

Aswapathy who is the representative of the evolving man prays to the Divine for an emanation to be sent down on earth so that man's problem would be solved. The Supreme Mother obliges and thus Savitri the avatar of the Divine Mother is born. The thoughts and associations that bind it with the otherworldly, constantly attempting to transcend the mundane and the physical thus control the poem. The very ideal of the poem is to transfer one to the knowledge of the
Divine in him as well as to point at the dark force that constantly pulls him down. Both Aswapathy and Savitri meet the mighty Mother the Supreme Creatrix and take their cue from Her. It is to be noted that man-God relationship is direct in these two epics. The story is spread through the dimensions of Heaven, Hell and Earth through the different phases of interaction between man and the possible forces that decide his existence.

Satan who exalted sat, by merit raised to that bad eminence, \(^{52} \) assumes a very important role in Paradise Lost. One would agree with Abercrombie that if Paradise Lost exists for any one figure that is Satan, just as The Iliad exists for Achilles, and The Odyssey for Odysseus. And that it is in the figure of Satan that the imperishable significance of Paradise Lost is centred; his vast unyielding agony symbolizes the profound antimony of modern consciousness.

This role is in keeping with the epic format where the intervention and interaction of the superhuman have a definite part to play, in explaining the factors that shape the course of man, in very detailed terms. Satan maintains the balance of the universe and its activities by offering simultaneity in motives and designs, quite against that of God. The epic is then the narration of the predicament of man who caught in between the two polarities of God and Devil, between good and bad in his swaying movements hits through a course that culminates in his destiny.

Though there is the absence of a personified negative force of the magnitude of Satan in Savitri, we have the forces that operate with the same intensity and are "haters of light, intolerant of peace."\(^ {53} \) They imitate the Divine
presence in the heart while shutting its doors to the divine completely. And like Satan whose pleasure is to undo the good that God confers on man, these forces intervene in the passages of light from above and ‘wherever the gods act they intervene’ and proclaim eternal laws as falsehood. ‘The giant sons of darkness sit and plan’ sit under the shadow of creative death the tragic drama that may come to be enacted on the dimension of the human drama. Aswapathy comes to know the truth that this aspect of creation is equally important as that of goodness, for “none can reach Heaven who has not passed through Hell.”

The presence of supernatural agencies in the two epics thus relate the different angles of the human struggle as well as keep the balance of the forces, that operate in the existence of man placed in an environment friendly as well as hostile to his interests. It also justifies the use of such a convention in epics. In the epics of Homer, it would seem that the forces of war and might should ultimately be brought under the control of order and peace through the exercise of reason and the help of the gods. The crisis in the two epics are seen to be solved by such intervention though the nature of the crisis and the mode of Divine intervention differ from the classical pattern.

The major casts in Milton’s epic are from the three plains of existence as referred to by the scriptures, Heaven, Earth, and Hell. They represent the entirety of the creative spectrum. “Milton’s delight,” declares Dr. Johnson:

Was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his faculty out upon discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel and delighted to
form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiments and action to superior beings, to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.\footnote{87}

And with the backstage of the action representative of this three-dimensional universe, Milton fulfills the classical requisite of supernatural involvement in its fullest sense. This is done with utmost care and deftness that one is not led to dispute the veracity of such a possibility. It is here that the dexterity and imaginative skill of the poet merges into the insight and vision of the mystic to give it the artistic merit as well as the elevated sublimity of its genre.

Aurobindo presents the interaction of the different plains, though the method applied is different and is more in line with the spirit of the poem. We have in the epic references to the beings of different dimensions from the Supreme Creatrix to the minor energy forms on lower levels, from the positive forces to the negative forces and the gross representations of nature to the subtler ones. The highest force of Heaven represented through the great Mother and other celestial beings is contrasted against the Patalaloka and its obstinate adamant master Death, while the entire action unfolds itself on the earth. Thus the three dimensional representation with cross currents of decisive interaction between them, functions as an epic characteristic as in Milton.

To Milton poetry was not just a handmaiden of pleasure. It was a very serious preoccupation, which suits the temperament of the inspired scholar. In other words to be a poet one has to study the best in the literature of the past and the present, and at the same time possess the experience of human life. Besides
knowledge and experience, one must have a spotless character and firm faith in the Divine power to inspire him to sing. It is perhaps this concept of poetry that lead him to conceive a poem of the magnitude of *Paradise Lost* and execute it in a manner unattempted in the history of English literature till then. One of the fundamental principles of Renaissance and Neo-classical criticism was that different literary styles were appropriate to different literary forms. Milton therefore had to write *Paradise Lost*, an epic on a sublime theme, in grand style. To elevate his language and to enrich it Milton exploited all the resources of language. Milton in conformity with the practice of the ancient poets, like Homer and Virgil infused a great many Latinisms, as well as Graecisms, and sometimes Hebraisms into the language of his poem. He makes a careful choice of words and uses the right word to express his meaning effectively. And where he fails to find the right word in English he uses Anglo Saxon archaisms or Latin vocabulary.

The application of monosyllables, proper names, and Latinisms, Anglo Saxon words etc confers a stronger sense of grandeur or remoteness and, as Tillyard opines, gives Milton that isolation which is essential to great art. It is exactly the very same measures that give the sublime aloofness to the style of Aurobindo. Here it is the use of Indo-Anglian terms and diction liberally borrowed from the Indian mode of thinking and expression that is richly clad and influenced by the Vedic and Upanishadic terms and settings. The language attains its sublimity and perspicuousness through the elevation of thought and appropriate mode of heightened expression as it comprises a principal dimension.
of epic poetry. Both Milton and Aurobindo share the trait to go for the condensed style or packed line.

The use of blank verse for a heroic poem was a signal innovation and Milton’s handling of it added, not a new province but a new world to English versification. It is this innovative spirit that is visible to a great extent in Sri Aurobindo and the words of K. D. Sethna would go a long way to prove it when he says Sri Aurobindo has to his credit a bulk of excellent blank verse—a statement possible about poets we can count on our fingers. And again “he has solved once for all the problem of quantity in English blank verse—a feat which gives the language ‘a brave new world’ of poetic effects, a revelation of strange rhythm- moulds of the inspired consciousness.” Like Homer and Virgil, Milton uses the epic simile in Paradise Lost for illustration, embellishment, and relief. Yet in Milton the simile assumes a proleptic function and as Christopher Ricks points out “it may first seem that a particular simile has no special point to make- but again and again we find that it anticipates a later development of the fable.” In Aurobindo though sustained similes of such immensity are absent, there are ample instances where the simile works to a proleptic function. The very opening canto with the symbol dawn brings us to the crisis of the story though in its depiction the entire canto is very close to the extended simile.

Douglas Bush comments that the language and style of Paradise Lost are unique in English poetry in their combined simplicity and sublimity.

And in this he echoed the Bible both its phrases and ideas, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin poetry ... suggested ways of attaining
elevation magnificence, and force: . . . And Milton continually blends the general with the particular, the sensory with the moral and religious, so that his generalized style is both substantially and powerfully and complexly suggestive. Style and rhythm go along with imagination in creating the Miltonic world.  

If these are the tools in the making of his grand style a similar wave of factors are clearly perceivable in Aurobindo's epic as well as in the making of it.

If Milton was inspired by The Bible which is the basic text of his faith, in Aurobindo we see that the inspiration came from The Vedas and The Upanishads the basic texts of his faith. There are innumerable instances in Savitri where Aurobindo like Milton takes his audience through the diverse experiences of his voluminous scholarship. And about the rhythm and style of his epic the words of K. D. Sethna would serve the perfect assessment.

Sri Aurobindo has a more profound tone; the language is charged with suggestions that go below the thought-meaning; the tragedy of a luminous soul enduring the darkness of earth, taking upon itself the heartbreak that is mortal existence, finds voice in the very rhythm of that ancient heartbreak.

Just as Paradise Lost has not one style but several, which at the simplest level of discrimination reveals an infernal style, a celestial style and styles for Paradise before and after the fall. Savitri reflects a variety of styles. The slowly breaking suspense at the start, the sudden speeding up, the strange mixture of calm widening and intense penetrating, the grave and ample revealing movement, the tremendous tranced poise, all these become a profound sensation.
to the soul when the words ring forth in the spaces of the consciousness. The stresses, quantities, vowel adjustments, consonant combinations become instruments in the hands of an overhead inspiration to create in us a rhythm of being, an emotional vibration, and a soul-stir that echo the self experience of a divine plane.95

Perusing the patterns of the epic tradition in the west we find there is a gradual shift in the concepts of heroism and values, which is directly related to the growth and development of western civilisation. The stages can be outlined as physical, mental and spiritual, or in other words martial, intellectual and moral. This change or gradual transition can be noticed in every aspect of the epic be it the theme, characterization, imagery, or the diction applied. Such a transition takes place due to the absorption and assimilation of higher values and loftier ideals that emerge as civilisation develops. This progression starts the line of intellectual heroism in the European epic tradition.96

Virgil redirected the secondary epic into its crucial concern with history and national destiny, while Milton extended it to comprise spiritual history. It is this application of the epic that we find blossoming into its fullest expression in Aurobindo. An instinct of the true source of the magnificence that is poetic expression appears to have compelled both the English poet and the Indian to conjure up an atmosphere of the divine and the superhuman around the highest moments. A sense of the mysterious Divine is always reflected through great poetry. Adam and Aswapathy are not the victorious prosperous warrior heroes of the traditional epics. They do not signify material opulence and prosperity. But
then it has to be remembered that Milton revised the rules of heroic poetry. Milton considered the spiritual warfare of the Christian hero as of more significance than the marital prowess of the classical hero.

In *The Iliad* the dominant pattern is that of physical valour and it is the world of action and passion that is glorified. *The Odyssey* presents a different set of virtues and superior set of values as the deciding factors. Thus between these two epics itself we note that a gradual progression takes place. This shift to a higher degree of perception is more conspicuous in *the Aeneid* and the epic by Dante. The concept of the heroic has changed and the hero’s nature also undergoes a radical change. Aeneas finds pleasure in submitting himself to the will of the gods, and not in the assertion of his will. Dante in his epic deals with the life of man after his death in Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven which gives the poet a vast canvas to deal with the entirety of his life in terms of Christian theology and spirituality. The theme being that the postlapsarian man can only reach Heaven by the mercy of the almighty through the intercession of His Son.

Milton, who claimed that Spenser had influenced him, paints the world of his epic in such a manner presenting not merely the Christian virtues but those virtues that appealed to him as right and natural in the light of the humanistic viewpoint that was the prevalent ideology of his day. He drew from Plato and Aristotle from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* from the renaissance epics of Dante and Tasso thus bringing all the knowledge philosophy, religion and history into the ambit of his epic. Thus his individual inspiration using the great epic tradition before him moulded an epic that was to stand as the perfect product in its genre.
George Sainstsbury rightly opines that his subjects may attract or repel; but in sublimity of thought and majesty of expression, both sustained at almost superhuman pitch, he has no superior in English.  

Deviating from the conventional practice of looking at the physical aspect of man-woman relationship as just something to be treated lightly in the light of conventional morality or brushing it aside as not so important to be treated seriously in an epic, we have here two poets who discern the true nature of its significance, significant enough to be an epic theme. Though we have erotic treatment on this level in the Mahabharata celebrating the sensuous adventures of Krishna, the western epics have kept of from even recognising the theme as worthy of serious treatment.

Love that leads to the higher states of one's being, which purifies the body of its desires, love that is enjoyed naturally without the stain of guilt and fear is upheld by the two poets. Such erotic expression does not conflict with the spiritual ascent of the individual but on the other hand accelerates its progress as it is the material that opens the spiritual. And it is the body that leads to the spirit, which the seer poets acknowledged, and portrays through their characters. It is this realisation that prompted the seer poets who were religiously oriented in the true sense of the term and whose lives were given to the practice of high moral principles, to delineate in an uncontrolled spree of poetic overflow the erotic pleasures of their characters.

In Milton the pure story element is absent and he deals with the mystery of the individual will in eternal opposition with the Divine Will. Aurobindo breaks off
from the conventional pattern of telling a story and like Milton applies a legend to explore the riddle of man and man's purpose in this world. It seems that after Milton an epic dealing entirely with a story is not possible for the rationalism with which the modern age began has been pushing man more and more towards a greater and greater subjective trend.98

In Savitri we find the properly evolved form of the epic reaching its transcendental phase where it elevates itself from earthly concerns to relate to the higher realms of the mind and self. This ameliorative progress then from the external to the internal, from the expression of the gross to that of the subtle, and from the story of the world to that of the individual, from the vasts of the seas, battlefields, and abyss to the interiors of the subjective mind of the individual, is reached in Savitri. It is to be noted that the epic muse takes this shift of interiorisation of subject and its treatment from Dante and moves to Milton to fulfill itself in Aurobindo.

The epic as a literary form reaches its heights with Paradise Lost. Milton very deftly handles the norms of the classical epic and moulds it to a subtle perfection that we miss in the early epics. In him the epic muse attains the grandeur and sublimity that failed to manifest in the epics of Homer or Virgil. This is partly due to the fact that the roots of Paradise Lost are widespread and complex and vast amounts of erudition have been spent in its making. The encyclopedic qualities of Paradise Lost, with its comprehensiveness as an aesthetic virtue and its purpose to assist man to act rightly and responsively offer a vision within the defined parameters of an epic. It is this unique quality that we
find in Aurobindo though presented in a method and mode that is different and yet similar in its effects. The importance of the Vedic and the ancient mystic revelations in Aurobindo's epic is of course self-evident and the scriptures are used creatively and this instantly points to the relation of the Bible to Milton's epic. If the real source of *Paradise Lost* is western civilisation the source of *Savitri* is the Indian civilisation with the two poems reflecting and radiating the essence or the core of the respective cultures.

The presentation of a genre, as a structuring device like an epic, a lyric or a novel have assumed radical changes due to the interaction of English writing with literature of various countries and due to the expression of the artistic sensibilities of different cultures in English itself. These different modes of expression have altered the very conception of the narrative structure of the literary form. Once writing in English becomes a general practice established by a series of such attempts regularly, then it adapts itself to the traditional methods of formulating the imaginative arts. The two epics stick to the definition of a literary epic in their structure and pattern though at certain points they do differ but within the broadest sense a unity of form and purpose is clearly visible.

Within the form of the epic they display a unity fundamental to the structure and nature of the heroic narrative that binds the vision with the form. And this is done by adhering to the basic features of the literary epic transcending the hurdles of cultural and literary diversities. Through their poems they give continuity to the epic spirit, which reveals itself free of religious and linguistic barriers and the differences of the vision which they portray through the narrative.
And through its respect for the given facts of nature and human life, which it crystallizes into generic type-scenes and verbal formulae; hence its pattern, beauty and authority. 

The perception of cross-cultural literatures has given explicit confirmation to the perception that genres cannot be described by essential characteristics but by an interweaving of features, a family resemblance which denies the possibility of either essentialism or limitation. Hence applying the norms of a literary form to two masterpieces from two different cultures would naturally fail to produce the expected synchronization. Yet we have here two poets divided by a sea of time and culture who strike similar tone and spirit in their creativity.
NOTES


3 Ibid.


5 B. Rajan, Paradise Lost, Bk. I & II (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964) 16.


7 Ibid.


9 Ibid. 33.


12 Ibid. 35.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid. Bk. II, Canto. iii.

19 Ibid. Canto. viii.


40 Ibid. 10.


43 Murari M. Bhattacharya, Man—A multiple Personality (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society) (n.d) 73.


48 B. Rajan, Paradise Lost, Bk. I & II (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964) 17.


50 Ibid. 108.


52 Ibid. 57.


56 Ibid. 61.


62 Ibid. 75.


64 Ibid. 71.


80 Ibid.


84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.


90 Ibid.


