CHAPTER - VI
SAVITRI – ITS SYMBOLISM, VERSE, STYLE AND DICTION

Symbolism

Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri is a great philosophical poem replete with symbols and the symbolism of Savitri makes us understand Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Vision of Reality: Commonly, a symbol is something that stands for something else. According to Sri Aurobindo, “a symbol express a living truth or inward vision belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images.: The legendary characters, savitri, Satyavan, Aswapathy, Dyumatsena and yama are the principal symbols of the epic. The recurrent symbolic images are the night, the sun and the fire.

Savitri is the main symbol, the Sun-Word directly associated with Surya, the Sun, “the light which is the father of all things; the Wisdom – Luminous who is the bringerout into manifest existence.” Savitri is the active power that descends as a ray into us and lifts us towards the great splendour of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo uses the symbol of Light through Savitri at all levels. 'Light' in Savitri is a power by itself, it is Surya Savitri, the creator, Pushan, the Fosterer and Bhaga Savitri, the Enjoyer. Like the Surya Savitri of the Vedas who is said to be the Enjoyer, standing between the infinite and created worlds within and without and upholding the things which are to be manifested yet and a creator who sends felicity and dismisses all evils, Savitri too is a Creator as well as the Enjoyer of things created and works between two extremes of night and day. Like Aditi who is the Supreme or Infinite Consciousness, mother of the gods, Savitri stands for pure consciousness of Infinite existence and remains eternally present in the three levels of Consciousness. Transcendent, Savitri stands above the world and links the creation to the Supreme. Universal, she creates the earthly creatures and also supports and sustains their lives. Individual she is the nature, prakriti, of the individual phenomenon, she possesses, in the form of a seed, the essence of the Cosmic and Supercosmic Truth. Like the vedic god Savitru, a golden deity who illumines air, heaven, earth and conveys to the departed
soul where the righteous dwell, Savitri too brings Immortality, Truth, Power, Bliss and Goodness to men. She not only stimulates our intellect but also makes us see and experience the bliss of the Supreme that creates the universe. So, Savitri the girl – wife is also the symbol of Light’s incarnation in our hearts and the leader of our soul’s to the Abode of the Absolute.

Satyavan is one who is the seeker of Truth, Truth being God-knowledge. He is the soul carrying the Divine Truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of Death and Ignorance and his Death becomes the symbol of earth’s creation.

Aswapathy is the combination of two worlds “Aswa” (horse) and “Pati” (Lord). A horse means the “Life-energy” in the vedic sense of term. Etymologically, Aswapathy, therefore would mean the Lord of Life - energy who has controlled his mental and vital energy and liberated himself from ignorance. Like the Horse of the worlds. Aswapathy is eternal and immortal and takes birth as a mortal being to list humanity to divinity. One of the most striking images in Savitri is also ‘a ladder’. The king-sage Aswapathy travelling up and down the world-stair forms a vital portion of the epic. The countless rungs of this ladder are the numerous occult worlds that are not visible to the naked eye. It had neither beginning nor end, and it appeared to stretch “from matter’s plinth and viewless base. This image of the ladder is also a symbol of hope for man, just as it shows the fall of life from the supreme. Later on, we realise that Savitri herself is born as a ladder to join earth and heaven.

Dyumatsena, ‘Lord of Shining Hosts’ is the symbol of ‘Divine Mind’. He is said to be blind because he does not have the Divine Light; that is, the knowledge of God. Naturally, he has to lose his kingdom of bliss. Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, is the divine mind, here fallen blind losing his celestial kingdom of glory.

Yama means ‘Death’ that separates us from the Knowledge Power, Bliss and Peace of the Divine. Yama says veda, is “the binder”, “the
restrainer" which is the feature of lower nature. 'Death' thus means the power of ignorance which stands for the complete oblivion of the existence of God.

The recurrent symbolic images, the night, the dawn, the sun and the fire have a direct affinity with the Vedas. The night is portrayed as a goddess who stands for the premordial inconscience. A dawn stands for eternal life. In Savitri, She is the goddess Usha who perpetually descends to earth in order to awaken the Light of Consciousness from the Darkness of the Inconscience. She is "a message from the unknown immortal light". The dawn that symbolises the earth's evolutionary rise, signifies Savitri's descent from Superconscience into human consciousness. In Savitri the 'Sun' stands for the Superconscient Divine who has not overtly evolved himself on earth as yet. The fire symbolises divine force in the cosmos which resembles the mystic fire of the Vedas, that rebuilds all things in the Matter and purify them to raise up the soul struggling in nature from obscurity to Light, from the strife and the suffering to Love and Joy, from the heat and the labour to the Peace and the Bliss. The Sun and its energy Fire – Surya and Agni - recur in the yoga of Aswapathy and Savitri. At the end of the journey, Aswapathy is vouch-safed the recognition of the presence of the Divine Mother who seems to him as a combination of Surya and Agni. Savitri is referred as Agni, the active energy of the Divine consuming the whole of Yama.

The symbolic images of the night, the dawn, the sun and the fire are interrelated. The night of the inconscience precedes the dawn of illumination which gives a message that the invisible sun of knowledge will descend to earth consciousness. The energy of this sun is called fire which creates and sustains the universe. Savitri is said to be the daughter of this Sun and hence she embodies the divine knowledge and will.

The Third Part of Savitri speaks of the symbol worlds of Eternal Night, Double Twilight and Everlasting Day. "The Eternal Night" symbolises our despair in the face of death and ignorance. 'The Twilight' is a symbol of hope, of the "blind joy" that grips a person when he feels that an auspicious change is going to occur. The imprisoned splendour bursts out as the Everlasting
Day when victory over Death is achieved. A new life based on Superconscient Force and Light begins its adventure upon the earth which has been Inconscient Matter till now.

Thus Sri Aurobindo makes use of symbols that do not constrict the vision. These symbols gather a world of growing significances in their far-flung net.

Verse

Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is a long epic poem written in blank verse. He did not like to imitate Miltonic Blank Verse with its massed paragraphs. He wished to charge his blank verse line with a single concentration of power:

“Savitri ... is a blank verse without enjambment (except rarely) – each line a thing by itself and arranged in paragraphs of one, two, three, four, five lines (rarely a longer series), in an attempt to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement, so far as that is a possibility in English.”

Sri Aurobindo uses blank verse which has its own distinctive quality which is generally equated with mantric poetry. Each verse of Savitri is like a mantra. The Mother says that in Savitri, "the words are used and arranged in such a fashion that the sound of the rhythm itself takes you to the original sound of the rhythm om" Poetic words and poetic rhythms are the chief characteristics of mantra.

Savitri thus comprises the lines of end-stopped iambic pentameter which have purposive variation and modulation. It also employs assonance and internal rhymes which heighten the subtle effects of its rhythm. Infact, as one reads Savitri at a stretch, one learns to respond to its unique reverberations of mantric music.
**Style**

Style is the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse. It can be analysed in terms of its diction, sentence, structure and syntax and its rhetorical aims and devices. The level of style must be appropriate to the speaker, the occasion and the dignity of its literary genre.

*Savitri* is a narrative poem: so the poet adopts the narrative style to introduce a character and to present a situation. The narrative style consists of brief lines “with familiar words”. It has no involved sentences. Sometimes it employs a metaphor, which transforms it in great poetry. For instance, in the following passage savitri introduces herself to Satyavan.

Musing she answered: “I am Savitri,  
Princess of Madra. Who art thou? What name  
Musical on earth expresses thee to men?  
What trunk of kings watered by fortunate streams  
Has flowered atlast upon one happy branch?....

The first three lines narrate the name and parentage of Savitri. But the metaphor of tree used in the last two lines enhances the effect of the simple narration and makes it a piece of great poetic genius.

When Sri Aurobindo wants to present a situation, he adopts what is called the straightforward narration. He arranges words in such a way as its rhythm itself creates a proper atmosphere to convey the situation. For example, take the narration of Satyavan’s death:

There was no cry of birds, no voice of beasts.  
A terror and an anguish filled the world,  
As if annihilation’s mystery  
Had taken a sensible form..  
She knew that visible death was standing there  
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.

The passage creates an atmosphere of awful silence. There is no noise of animals or birds. The world is then filled with terror because of presence of death. This silence and terror of the atmosphere help Savitri realise that Satyavan has passed away.
A lyrical style, which is a brief expression of mind or state of feeling is employed to describe the changing seasons. There is a description of spring in the following passage:

Then spring, an ardent lover, leaped through leaves,
And caught the earth – bride in his eager clasp;
His advent was fire of irised hues,
His arms were a circle of the arrival of joy.¹⁴⁰

Like the romantic poets, Sri Aurobindo personifies spring as a lover and earth as a beloved. Spring embraces earth which yields divine pleasure.

Aswapathys’s colloquy with the Divine Mother and Savitri’s dialogue with Death exhibit the dramatic style. They are of course long but not uninspiring; for they are punctuated by questions and exclamations which make them animated. Some of these dialogues are fine pieces of good poetry.

Expository style, which is described as rhetorical poetic manner by Sri Aurobindo, is used to explain the facts of the higher and lower consciousness.

All there was soul or made of sheer soul-stuff:
A sky of soul covered a deep soul ground.
All here are known by a spiritual sense;
Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one
Seized on all things by moved identity...¹⁴¹

The description of the heavens of the ideal illustrates what is known as illuminating style:

What here is in the bud has blossomed there
There is the secrecy of the House of Flame,
The blaze of Godlike thought and golden bliss
The rapt idealism of heavenly sense;¹⁴²

Obviously, there are numerous allusion to English poets in Savitri. Like T.S. Eliot, he uses the technique of allusions deliberately. Allusions help him evolve in English a poetic diction which can convey his spiritual experiences authentically. Professor V.K. Gokak is of the opinion that literary allusions in
Savitri, which are not less than 130, enrich even the aesthetic significance of the poem.\textsuperscript{143}

The allusive is only one of many kinds of style of which Sri Aurobindo is a master. In Savitri there are allusions to the work of twenty English poets, four English prose-writers, a Latin poet and a Sanskrit poet – twenty six writers in all.

The allusions tend to concentrate in a canto which strives to be a large and universal utterance, not the expression of a remote or recondite experience. The following lines remind us of Wordsworth's *Ode On The Intimations of Immortality* in the depiction of the disappearance of the dawn from earth:

\begin{quote}
The rarity and wonder lived no more  
There was the common light of earthly day.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

The phrase "The common light of earthly day" alludes to Wordsworth's line: "And fades into the light of common day."

*Savitri* illustrates not only different types of styles but also possesses poetic qualities of great poets. It has the Homeric note of simplicity and depth:

\begin{quote}
But Narad answered not; silent he sat,  
Knowing that words are vain and fate is lord.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

There is a Virgilian touch of poignancy and dignity:

\begin{quote}
His words were theirs who live unforced to grieve  
And help by calm the swaying wheels of life.\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

The description of Love is typically Dantesque:

\begin{quote}
His steps familiar with the lights of heaven  
Tread without pain the sword paved courts of hell:  
There he descends to edge eternal joy.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

Like Kalidasa, he employs images which display a harmony between man and nature:
As a star, unaccompanied, moves in heaven
Unastonished by the immensities of space,
Travelling infinity by its own light.
The great are strongest when they stand-alone. 148

Thus Savitri has a grand style and great poetic qualities. It has grandeur of thought, musical quality and the flight of imagination. It is remarkable for its felicity and novelty and decorum. Its apocalyptic speeches explain and interpret the mystic experiences of the higher planes of consciousness.

Diction

Sri Aurobindo, who is remembered as an Indo-Anglian poet, chose to write epic Savitri in a language that is now current all over India. To a poet-Philosopher, with a global vision, English is the ideal instrument of communication. Hence, Savitri is written not in Bengali or Sanskrit but in English. One of the great achievement of Sri Aurobindo in Savitri is the creation of a great epic diction which is commensurate with the lordliness of the theme.

Sri Aurobindo, too formulates a diction which is not restricted to poetic words alone but consists of words from almost all branches of knowledge. Savitri abounds in words with technical denotations. Words like 'soul', 'Spiritual', 'Supermind', 'Nesience', 'Overmind', 'Oversoul', 'Inconscient', 'Subliminal', 'Supernature' and the like convey to us the poet's vision of life. They are as significant as the astrological words of Milton and the theological terms of Dante.

Sri Aurobindo uses hyphenated substantives as epithets. In words like 'dream -fact', 'truth-light', 'moon-flame', 'Sun-thoughts', 'Ocean - silence' and the like, the hyphen serves as isthmus, of the ascending soul, while the juxtaposed substantives appear to be concrete images. They make us aware of the unity of two ultimates: man and nature, human and divine.

Sri Aurobindo endeavours in this epic to express the inexpressible, to convey with the accuracy of a scientist, the clarity of a philosopher and the
imaginative and emotional vividness of a poet, certain states of intuitive and spiritual experience which used to be expressed by ancients in myths and parables. He tries to carry the intellectual structure of the modern consciousness into mystical levels and planes of experience. Hence, Savitri is a poem in English, but it is also a poem of India, a poem for humanity, and a poem of the future, which convey Sri Aurobindo's total vision of the Modern World.