CHAPTER-IV

USE OF MYTHS
AND SYMBOLS
(MYSTIC SPECULATIONS)
Use of Myths and Symbols (Mystic Speculations)

Before the application of myth and symbolization (two terms denoting the linguistic properties of any writer), it seems appropriate to analyse the inner motifs of the myth first and then the art of symbolization. The study of ancient myths has called on the attention of the global writers. The decoding of the items of the myth might open new ways of reconstructing culture. Ernest Becker decodes the linguistic properties of the myth in the following words:

Probably for a half-million years mankind has believed that there were two worlds- a visible one in which every day action took place, and a greater, much more powerful world-the invisible one, upon which the visible depended and from which it drew its power.¹

There is no doubt that myths were created by the oral/written tradition of ancient people’s beliefs. The structuralist approach to the myths is mainly concerned with the knowledge of the ancient world. “Even the so called natural epics are nothing but the poetic configurations of the myths- the myths arranged in a poetic order.”²
Northrop Frye in his essay “Myth, Fiction and Displacement” has tried to trace the origin of some of the magic power of the myth interpretation. He says that the rising movement of the myths of spring and autumn can be found in comedy and tragedy. He also argues that “the structural principles of a mythology built up from analogy and identity, become in due course the structural principles of literature.” The human affairs of this world had somehow to be adjusted in such a way that they become "imitations" of the celestial phenomenon. The relation between these two facts is not based on reason, but on faith or on inner urge in the ancient man to draw power from the supernatural being:

By a myth.... I mean primarily a certain type of story. It is a story in which some of the chief characters are gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Very seldom it is located in history: its action takes place in a world above or prior to ordinary time, in iilotempore, in Mircea Eliado's phrase. Hence, like the folk tale, it is an abstract story pattern. The characters can do what they like, which means what the story teller likes: there is no need to be plausible or logical in motivation. The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories; they are in a self-contained literary world.
If the cultural context has grown unfamiliar, the pattern of the myth works in literature. Indian myths have not lost their cultural relevance and even in the present time their influence is applicable to literary theories. Some scholars are trying to interpret the Vedic “mantras” and Sri Aurobindo stands foremost among them. In fact, with regard to the mantras, their structure is more important than their meaning. In *Rgveda*, Yaksha interprets some of the mythical incidents. Here is an example:

His body lay hidden in the midst of water which neither stops nor stays in one place. Water moved in the private parts (also vulnerable spot) of *Vritra*. Vritra who was later killed by Indra lay in profound darkness.\(^5\)

The interpretation of this mantra *Rgveda* by Prof. R.G. Joshi reveals the mythic-symbolist meanings; the meanings that hold the inner validity of mantra even today:

Waters must flow because by nature water cannot stay in one place nor can it stop flowing. Clouds are the body of water. Water finds out the breach in clouds. Then who is Vritra? According to Nairuktikas, Vritra is cloud. When it rains there is water as well as light. This phenomenon is described meta-phorically as a battle. But in the other hymns and in the Brahmana texts Vritra is
described as serpent. The serpent enlarged its body and prevented water from flowing. When the serpent was killed, water began to flow. This hymn describes that phenomenon.⁶

Through myth the writer works on the process of *sadharnikarana* (transpersonalization) of human emotions. Thus, this way the art of symbolization takes place. The art of symbolization is nothing but the mode of suggestion through the appropriate use of language. The whole doctrine of symbolization is based on the assumption that words are in a position to signify contents other than the normal ones, enabling the comprehender to savour his own moods and passions. That words acquire new dimension of meanings is evident in ordinary employment of language as well where the total experience is conveyed by the sentence conveying a meaning other than the sum total of meanings signified by the words constituting a sentence. The entire meaning relation exists in the conceptual level. The word-concept and the meaning-concept raise into comprehension the significantly striking emotional mood exerting thereby to the appreciator an opportunity of savouring his own self by him. These "considerations prompt the Dhvani-theorists to regard *Rasadhvani* as of paramount importance and to consider attainment of poetic experience as the be-all and end-all specimen of poetic art."⁷
Myth, symbol, legend and history are the different modes of acquiring knowledge. Myth is used for legend and vice-versa. In the prefatory note to his *Perseus the Deliverer*, Sri Aurobindo writes, “the legend of Perseus” which gives an impression that the author calls the myth, a legend for some specific reason. But that is not so. The second paragraph of the note begins with this sentence: “In this piece the ancient legend has been divested of its original character of a heroic myth.” Thus, for Sri Aurobindo “legend” and “myth” seem to be synonymous and are easily exchangeable. Therefore, the text of Savitri and Urvasie be used as myths for the symbolization of his mystical reflections.

The myth embodies knowledge that is undifferentiated, whole and general. The legend, on the other hand, takes up the particular and translates it into the general terms of the myth. W.B. Yeats in his *explorations* gives a vivid picture of that world which gave births to myths and legends:

Mankind as a whole had a like dream once; everybody and nobody built up the dream bit by bit and the ancient story-tellers are there to make us remember what mankind would have been like, had not fear and the failing will and the laws of nature tripped up its heels.

Sri Aurobindo freely uses the myths and legends in his poetry. Take for example his early long poem *Urvasie* revealing
the philosophic vision of Urvasie and Pururavus. When Urvasie meets Pururavus there comes a specific energy in their meetings:

....At last he sighed
And the vague passion broke from him in speech
Heard by the solitude. O thou strong god
Who art thou graspest me with *hands of fire*
Making my soul all colour? Surely I thought
The hills would move and the eternal stars
Deviate from their rounds immutable
Never Pururavus; yet I fall
My soul whirls alien and I hear amazed
The galloping of uncontrollable steeds
Men said of me. “The king Pururavus”
Grow more than man: he lifts to azure heaven
In vast equality his spirit sublime.¹⁰

Urvasie deals with the variant of themes with its mythical approach. It poetises a triumphant struggle against the fate. The fate is negated in this poem. It is a long narrative poem in four cantos and details the well-known king Pururavus.

This poem is the poet’s first experiment in the epic form and through the device of myth and legendary figures. The poem has “the racy flow and the impressive sweep of its blank verse”.¹¹ There are some passages which reveal the earthly passion in Urvasie:
He moved, he came towards her. She, a leaf.
Before a gust among the nearing tress,
Cowered - - - - - - - - - -
With a great cry and glad Pururavus
Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled
Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair
Lossened and the wind seized and bore it treaming
Over the shoulder of Pururavus
And on his cheek a softness. She o’er borne
Panting with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail
Her naked arms clasping his cheek, her cheek
And golden throat averted, - - - - - -
Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met
With his sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts
Tumultuous up against his beating heart,
He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven’s desire
So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.  

The poet has made effective use of a number of Homeric similes in it. Canto- I narrates the heroic rescue of Urvasie by Pururavus from the hands of Cayshie, the demon, who was running off with her. This generates the deep suspense in love between the King and Urvasie.
A fine reference to Urvasie’s dear companions - Meneca, Mullica, Rumbha, Nelabha, Shela, Nolinie, Lolita, Lavonya and Tilottama has been made. There are brilliant flashes of Nature in it. The king is charged, by the patron- goddess of Aryasthan, of neglecting his duties and “a nation’s destinies” for the sake of his own passion. But the mightily mother, to whom the king had been sent by the patron- goddess, tells him that though he has failed in his kingly charge, God will neither blame nor punish him. Pururavus makes a passage to the upper regions and attains an immortal status to be forever united with Urvasie:

And they were left alone in that clear world
Then all his soul towards her leaning, took
Pururavus into his clasp and felt,
Seriously glad, the golden bosom on his
Of Urvasie, his love; so pressing back
The longed- for sacred face, lingering he kissed
Then love in his sweet heavens was satisfied.13

Urvasie anticipates Savitri in many ways. Both deal with the mythic world of Hindu legends. The Mighty Mother in Urvasie suggests the World Mother in Savitri. Both follow the epic pattern and employ blank verse for spiritual/metaphysical reflections. The poet was deeply influenced by the myth of Urvasie. It has been suggested that Sri Aurobindo considered this theme for his epic of human aspirations before finally adopting the myth of Savitri in a
narrative form.

_Savitri_ as the mythic poetry is the culmination of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic career. It is based on the myth of Savitri which has been derived from the tale of the *Mahabharata*. This myth or legend became the symbolization in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. The poem opens on the day when Satyavan is fated to die according to Narad Muni's prophecy. Among epics which can be compared with it in general poetic quality, only the *Shah Namah*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* exceed it in length. Three works which, like it, are products of the East. And indeed _Savitri_ stands with the masterpieces of Valmiki and Vyasa in more than one respect. It has been conceived with something of the ancient Indian temperament which not only rejoiced in massive structures but took all human life and human thought. A cosmic sweep is _Savitri_ and Sri Aurobindo wanted his poem to be many sided multi-coloured carving out of the gigantic secrets of his “supramental yoga”.

To begin with, the very name Savitri is of the Vedic origin. Etymologically, Savitri means “descended from Savitri”. “Savitra” is derived from “Su” which means “to give birth to” or “bring forth”. Savitri is the mysterious power of the word, or the mantra. Savitri stands for the dynamic or *Shakti*. Thus, in this “Shakti” aspect “Savitri” stands for the great creative mantra pertaining to the creative and the preservative power of the sun
god. This dynamic power or Shakti is known in the Vedas as Gayatri and this Gayatri is held in the highest esteem in all the Vedas and other Hindu religious scriptures like the Manu Smriti and the Puranas. Sri Aurobindo in his letters reveals his intents so far as the creation of Savitri is concerned:

.....Savitri is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. Done on this rule, it is really a new attempt and cannot be hampered by old ideas of technique except when they are assimilable. Least of all by a standard proper to a mere intellectual and abstract poetry which makes "reason and taste" the supreme arbiters, aims at a harmonized poetic intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration, a restrained emotive elements etc. The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psychophysical concreteness.\(^\text{15}\)

Describing the attunement of a sage the Gita brings the fact in to light in the 69 verse of the second chapter, "The man who is a controller of his self keeps awake in that which is night to all others and he regards as Night which is Day to others." In Savitri, the mind and thinking of Ashwapathy undergoes a change as a result
of his tapasya. His discrimination and the eye of wisdom is awakened. His awakening to the inner light in him is, after the manner of the Gita tells about the cyclicity of time inform of day and night. The very beginning of Savitri shows this point in detail:

It was the hour before the Gods awake
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’s marge
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world.
A power of fallen boundless self awake
Between the first and the last Nothingness,
Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,
Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth
And the tardy process of mortality.¹⁶

The example shows a deeper relationship for spiritual relationship among the Gita, Upanishads, Vedas and Savitri. In the Vedas and the Upanishads, the vision of spiritual reflections are dealt with perfect accuracy. They hold promise of a new universe of spiritual and mystical reflections. They are the experiences which humanity has been aspiring to possess since
time immemorial. What was only hinted in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* or was present in them in a seed from (*vijarupa*), has been developed and treated in some details in *Savitri*. Purani brings forth the revelative force of *Savitri* in the following lines:

Savitri is like a vast band of lightening steadied into the poetic empyrean, illuminating the cosmos from end to Nescience to the highest heights of the *Transcendent Divine*, revealing the double ladder of divine dynamics, the ladder of Descent of the Divine and the ladder of ascent of the human soul. It points to a culmination in the descent of the Divine into the Earth Consciousness and the consequent transformation of the earth-nature into the divine nature.¹⁷

The ranges of mystic and spiritual existence which even the most developed intellect and powerful intuition fail to perceive and about whose existence one gets only mysterious hints in the Vedas. In Savitri, Sri Aurobindo has created *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* poetry in English. It is not only influenced by the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* but has also become one like them. Apart from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, *Savitri’s* relationship with other prominent scriptures like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* has also to be studied. Sri Aurobindo once remarked that Savitri was planned like the *Ramayana* on a small scale. He said,
“Ramayana has epic sublimity in the conception and sustained richness of minute execution in detail.” The Ramayana is charged with the feeling of ideas and the emotions of things. It has ideal delicacy and sustained strength. It portrays ideal manhood and a divine beauty of virtue and ethical order, a civilization founded on Dharma, the ideal law of conduct.

The mythic qualities among the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Savitri can also be accomplished comparatively. The fight between the forces of good and evil may be regarded as a common factor between Savitri and the Ramayana on the one hand and between Savitri and the Mahabharata, on the other. The legend of Savitri is no doubt taken from the Mahabharata but this has been expanded and transformed and symbolized in such a manner that an influence of the Mahabharata on Savitri can not be claimed. In Ramayana, Dharma, the ideal law of life as formulated by the seers- the knowers of Dharma and Rama, the embodiment and upholder of this ideal standard, occupy a position of utmost supremacy. In Savitri, it is not the ideal of human behaviour in man’s normal day today affairs of life that occupies the pride of place. It is the divine power working within the creation and the created beings that gets paramount importance.

Savitri offers a whole world of experience but it is a world-different of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In
Savitri, the life of man and his whole concept of the cosmos undergoes a radical change. Savitri does not depict a vision of the world according to the current laws of human behaviour and ideals. It deals with the suprarational making it a natural part of the coming man and regarding it as a legitimate capacity to be attained by him. Sri Aurobindo in his reply to somebody else for the form and details in Savitri and why he has chosen this long narrative Savitri replies in his letters:

It has been planned not on the scale of Lycidas or Comus or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor Ramayana; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of the world-vision or world-interpretation. One artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination or understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like architectural is to give a large and a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness; that is the method I have chosen in Savitri.¹⁹
The poetry in Savitri is charged with the power of truth and the mystical reflections. It is the truth of the universal life-beat of a living impulse that is constantly pressing itself for manifestation. And this explication of the universal truth has not been at the cost of the charms that are the natural treasure of all good poetry. Aurobindo finally chooses a secluded life. He, however, keeps himself well-informed from the happenings that took place during the composition of *Savitri*.

The poetic vision of Sri Aurobindo and the poetic vision in *Savitri* is rich with modern elements as natural and organic parts of the poetry. This is because Savitri does not renounce the earth; the earth as myth makes the creative process in Savitri. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry has highlighted the necessity of transforming the earth life in order to “create” God on earth. Even the second world-war phase finds a place. The line behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tears, reminds us of Churchill’s famous speeches. Sri Aurobindo maintains the sublime quality in his *Savitri*.

Apart from the longer poems, Sri Aurobindo expresses the mystical reflections even in his short poems. In the short poems, he deals with the new world of insight and experience; he also deals with the unknown or partially known mode of being. Here is a very short poem “Nirvana” which states the points of specific cognition in the very simple words. The
poem becomes the part of mythical tradition. The language of wisdom can be felt in the following lines of this poem:

    All is abolished but the mute alone
    The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
    Grow in existent now beyond belief;
    There is no I, no nature, known- unknown
    The city, a shadow picture without tone
    Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief
    Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
    Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done

Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still
Replaces all-what once was I, in it.
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the infinite.\textsuperscript{20}

Here is what he has elsewhere called the poetry of “open realization”. This and other poems are beautiful in the sense in which Santayana described beauty as a contemplation of the essential. We may call it pure poetry with a difference. This is the poetry which borns out of superior organization of consciousness. That is also the poetry of the purification of language. This is the new creation, arising out of “Trance”, a tender epiphany:
My mind is awake in a stirless trance,
Hushed my heart, a burden of delight;
Dispelled is the senses' flicker dance,
Mute the body aureate with light
O Star of creation, pure and free
Halo- moon of ecstasy unknown,
Storm - breath of the soul-change yet to be,
Ocean self enraptured and alone.\textsuperscript{21}

However, these short poems bring a \textit{sphota} that becomes a life-nurturing force in the form of \textit{Savitri}. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry includes in the form of mantra the traits of Indian Poetics such as \textit{Rasa}, \textit{Alankara}, \textit{Dhvani}, \textit{Guna} (excellence) and \textit{Dosa} (faults) etc. It deals with the mystical reflections of the \textit{Vedas} and the \textit{Upanishads}. The Indian Poetics regards the poet as drista (seer) who “saw and found the inspired word of his vision” or even bothered to explore the possibility of that kind of poetry which “embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and presence of the very self”. Sri Aurobindo, however, regards vision and outlook as it was regarded in the Vedic times. The fact is that the mantra can never be a product of the human mind, however, great and brilliant; nor is it accessible even to the highest poetic imagination. Sri Aurobindo defines the mantric poetry thus:
As what comes from the Overmind inspiration. Its characteristics are a language that says infinitely more than the mere sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means ever more than the language and is born out of infinite and the power to convey not merely some mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing it speaks of, but its value and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness, which is behind them all.²²

Savitri is essentially spiritual and mystical. On the contrary, it is concerned with the realization "of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed".²³ The starting point may be, therefore, anything which belongs either to the outer or the inner or any supraphysical, transcendental world. But the "one thing needful is that he should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of the thing he sees, not be limited by them, but gets into the light of that which they have the power to reveal and flood them with it until they overflow with its suggestion or seem even to lose themselves and disappear into revelation."²⁴ The poet of mantra must be able to penetrate the very soul of the thing or image or word. He should reveal "inmost reality of things". The ultimate result of mantric experience is the discovery
of the highest word. And the discovery of such word is not something or imaginative but an actual seeing of it. Sri Aurobindo discovers such words not in the straight manner, but he uses them metaphorically and symbolically. The poetry of Sri Aurobindo should be analysed on the ladders of suggestion and symbolization. Before making an application of symbolical myths, legends, metaphors and words, it seems appropriate to analyse the inner properties of the word symbol itself.

Symbols have been used by poets since time immemorial. They help the poet in conveying his experience to the readers. All great poetry (ancient and modern) lies embellished with symbols. The Vedas and the Upanishads are entirely symbolic. For example, the myth of Pururavus and Urvasie has been derived from the Rgveda and Sri Aurobindo has used this myth for symbolical presentation; and it finally symbolizes the creation of Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, Savitri. The myth of Urvasie can be read for the purpose of symbolic presentation in the following words:

Urvasie was an Apsara or a water-born nymph who belonged to the Gandharvas, a clan ministrels. Pururavus was a man, the son of Ila who was the daughter of Manu. Urvasie was banished from the region of the sky and the cause of her banishment is not known. She was beautiful "like a flash of
lightning” and also, “difficult to capture like the wind.” Both of them fell in love with each other and she consented to marry him on two conditions: “thrice a day shalt thou embrace me, but do not lie with me against my will.” In addition to this, she asked him to take care of her two pet rams which were tied to their cot. Another condition was that she should never see him in undress. The Gandharvas who wanted her to come back, stole one of the rams and Urvasie raised hue and cry. Next day when the other ram was also stolen, suddenly Pururavus got up from his bed and in a hurry to rescue the ram, he forgot to put on his garments. At that moment, the Gandharvas produced a flash of lightning which revealed the naked body of Puruvaus. Seeing him in that conditions Urvasie instantly vanished. Pururavus who tried to keep up the condition of protecting rams had to break another condition of not showing himself naked. Thus both the condition were broken by Pururavus, though it was by the contrivance of the Gandharvas. Pururavus, in utter dejection, wandered all over Kurukshetra. There was a lake called Anyatahplaxa where the nymphs used to come in the form of
swans. One of the swans was Urvasie and she recognized him. Then followed the dialogue between them which is presented in the *Rgveda.*

The symbolic meaning of the story brings the fact about the nature of woman. As in the beginning of the story, we are told that Urvasie is difficult to capture like the wind and Pururavus can not possess her against her will. Urvasie's refusal is clear and unequivocal: "with women there can be no lasting friendship; hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women." The meaning of the Vedic myth is complex and is further complicated by the details added by the *Satapatha Brahmana.* They are symbolic in their meaning. While decoding the myth it is always safe to start with the personal names. The name "Pururavus" according to *Nirukta* means "one who howls and cries." In one sense, he symbolizes a cloud which rumbles and roars: "roaring he rises and pours water through the holes." In another sense, he represents the yearning of the vital spirit—"Prana". If Urvasie is like a flash of lightning, it is in the fitness of things that Pururavus should be like a cloud. Both the interpretations suggest the trouble and restlessness in the psyches.

The name, Urvasie, has been interpreted by the *Nirukta* in three ways: (1) "burning desire", (2) "one who approaches through her thighs" and, (3) "one whose reputation is great." The first two approaches denote erotic sense in Urvasie.
The union and separation of Pururavus and Urvasie “seems to symbolize tensions and frictions in the process of the narcissistic impulse, developing into a hetero- sexual desire.” The masculine and feminine are two opposite principles of a single personality, the possessive and full of desire, the other tempting, but difficult to capture. Sri Aurobindo chooses the myth of Urvasie Just to show the process of creation on the purity of human relationship.

The distinction between the divine and the human being, between the immortals and the mortals had been suggested in the myth through many devices. Urvasie lived with Pururavus for four autumns but did not eat the gross food that the human beings relish, "she lived on a drop clarified butter, and she neither felt hunger nor thirst." Sri Aurobindo portrays the sensuousness and the character of Urvasie thus:

The apsaras of heaven, daughters of the sea,
Unlimited in being, Ocean like
They not one Lord yield nor in one face
Limit the Universe, but like sweet air,
Water unowned and beautiful common light
In unrestrained surrender remain pure
In patient paths of Nature upon earth
And over all the toiling stars we fill
With sacred passion large high-venturing spirits
And visit them with bliss; so are they moved
To immense creative anguish, glad if through
Heart-breaking toil once in bare seasons dawn
Our golden breasts between their hands or rush
Our passionate presence on them like a wave.

But in the myth Urvasie the nakedness of Pururavus presents another problem. It was one of the conditions of their marriage. As long as Pururavus kept his word Urvasie lived with him as his wife. Once it was broken she disappeared.

In Savitri, Sri Aurobindo has made an expert and subtle use of symbolism. His aim in the narrative of Savitri is to present a way and the goal of spiritual evolution through the medium of the main adventure in the story. Secondly, he also aimed at imparting a symbolic character. He has indicated his intention in the wording of the title of the poem itself. He has called it a legend and a symbol. This legend from the Mahabharata has been galvanized just to present the human relationships, the ordeals of life and the highest spiritual achievement. In the process, the symbols have had to be universalized. In addition to it, Sri Aurobindo had also used suitable images to help in articulation and communication of the experience of his spiritual sadhana.

Aswapathy is a symbol of a man of controlled senses or the lord of senses. The “Ashwa” or the horse is also a symbol of vitality, prana and force. As- wapathy, therefore, is also symbolic of a person who has mastered his energies,
prana and vitality and has full control over them. Savitri symbolizes an incarnation of the Sun’s Shakti, the Divine Mother of Light. Savitri’s birth as a daughter of Aswapathy signifies the perfect control over the lower particles of life. She overcomes her animal nature in order to have the grace of the divinity. The death of Satyavan symbolizes the necessity for a seeker of personal salvation to leave this earth and to establish himself in bliss in some higher plane. But his marriage with Savitri represents the grace of the Divine Mother.

Dyumatsena, the father of Satyavan, symbolizes the blind desires of a person. His blindness symbolizes his wait of reason and discrimination that leads to dispossessing of his empire by his enemies. In the material world, one has to compete against others for possessing the good things of life. Material greed and sensual pursuits lead to a weakening and a loss of reason and “Buddhi”. This loss of “Vivek” or discrimination is in itself a type of blindness. The prayer in the Gayatri Mantra is for illumination of “Dhee” (the intelligence). The Gayatri is same as Savitri is. It is Savitri, the goddess of Buddhi whose meditation becomes instrumental in the restoration of his eyesight.

Only Satyavan is worthy of being chosen by Savitri, a symbolic embodiment of the Divine Mother’s Grace as her mate, lord or husband. Satyavan and Savitri come to the earth after realizing the spiritual force in themselves. This symbolizes the
basic "oneness" of the Prakriti and Purusha. Savitri wants to share her blessings with everyone else. The whole creation is interlinked and interdependent. A truly perfect and spiritually evolved person can not think of his own personal gains and comforts. Savitri's utterance expresses this very truth:

I climb not to the ever lasting Day,
Even as I have shunned thy eternal Night

Thy servitudes on earth are greater, king,
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.......
Too far thy heaven for me from suffering men,
Imperfect is the joy not shared by all.\(^32\)

It is, however, the death of Satyavan that is the one great symbolic representation of the whole world's miserable plight before inexorable law of the earthly existence and its pre-ordained destiny. The reversible operation of its Fate, Savitri chooses Satyavan. Savitri takes the challenge and through her *tapasya* transforms her earth-body into the celestial body in which there hardly exists any fear of death. Savitri struggles all alone. Savitri strives but not for herself alone. She strives for the higher cause of spiritual zone of human aspirations:

She had risen up from body, mind and life;
She was no more a Person in a world
She had escaped into infinity
What once had been herself had disappeared;
There was no frame of things, no figure of soul
A refugee from the domain of sense,
Evading the necessity of thought
Delivered from knowledge and from Ignorance
And rescued from true and the untrue,
She shared the Superconscient’s high retreat
Beyond the self-born word, the nude idea.

The act of sacrifice is also a great symbol in Savitri.
The act of sacrifice is in their love. Savitri sacrifices her own happiness and attachment to her parents by marrying Satyavan., Satyavan sacrifices his life before the law of fate. Savitri as a force overcomes all her lower desires just for one act; and that act is to save the life of Satyavan- a symbol to save light from the cruel hands of the black forces:

There was no temptation of the joy to be
Unutterably effaced, no one and null
A vanishing vestige like a violet trace,
A faint record merely of a self now past,
She was a point in the unknowable........
She was in That but still became not That.

Sri Aurobindo saw in the dawn a very appropriate symbol of
darkness retreating before the onslaught of Light. The *Vedas* have some very beautiful verses in praise of *Usha*- the dawn. The vast potential inherent in this symbol was thoroughly exploited by Sri Aurobindo. The very beginning of Savitri shows the deep effect of the symbol of *dawn* so far as the elemental realities of the earth is concerned:

She had brought with her into the human form
The calm delight that weds one soul to all
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy
Earth’s grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears
Rejected the undying rapture’s boon
Offered to the daughter of infinity.
Her passion flower of love and doom she gave
In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice
A prodigal of her rich divinity
Her self and all she was she had lent to men
Hoping her greater being to implant.

Sri Aurobindo’s genius has a great affinity with the Vedic mind and for writing this epic- the *Veda* of the modern times- he has employed images and symbols just as the Vedic Rishis had done for the Vedas. He was aware of this and once wrote, “Do not forget that Savitri is....... poetry cast into of symbolic figure....... it is really a new attempt.” Portrayed the prophetic character and the messianic purpose of its narrative,
Savitri is admittedly "a new attempt". So far as the symbolism in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo is concerned apart from the famous symbolists such as W.B. Yeats, George Russell, C Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Edith Sitwell, is entirely different.

Savitri is fully different from the creation of modern symbolists. The symbolism in Savitri is imbued with clarity, stability of character, luminosity of purpose and at times, is capable of a multi-planer movement and interpretation. The meaning, the idea, the experience they convey always carry an authentic touch with them, either from the poet's own experience or from their Vedic, Upanishadic and Scriptural and literary background. Symbolism in Savitri is of a sublime, sustained and superior character. Its greatest success is in its vast and cosmic scope and its appeal to the reader's inner self, bringing about its involvement in the movement, development and culmination of the narrative. The reader is not excluded from the throes and thrills of the experience that moves the poet himself so much.

Now examining the poetry in Savitri, in the light of the critical comments expressed by Sri Aurobindo relating to the shape and substance of the new poetry which, in his estimate is going to be the poetry of future- Savitri being a new experiment and a new attempt, a representative example of this type of poetry in his own words- one finds him remarking:
The inspiring spirit and shaping substance of this new poetry, that which gives it its peculiar turn, raises the power of its style to the intuitive closeness or directness. Poetry has been affected by the turn of the human mind in this age. The mind and the soul of race is now moving forward on the basis of what it has gained towards a profounder mood and a more internal force of thought and life. The intellectual way of looking at things is being gradually transcended or is raising itself to a power beyond itself; it is moving to intuitive experience to life and Nature as seen and felt by the soul in their spirit and reality.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry in general and in *Savitri* in particular, is an ideal precursor of this change from the intellectual source to the spiritual that he anticipates to materialize in the best poetry of the future. This makes himself the ideal poet, the poet of the *Mantra* that he predicts will emerge on the scene of the coming poetic excellences. He further writes:

"......now there are coming a universal subjectivity of the whole spirit, an attempt towards closeness and identity, a greater community of the individual with the universal soul and mind. The"
communion of the human soul with the Divine is becoming once more the subject of thought and utterance. A self-exceeding of the intellect and a growth of man into some freedom and power of an intuitive mentality supported by the liberated intelligence is in its initial travail of a new birth.³⁸

This “self-exceeding” of the mind that he speaks of is the very basic foundation of poetic creativity in Savitri and is the root of the perfect display of “the power of an intuitive mentality” in the composition of poetry. Sri Aurobindo writes further about:

\[
\text{........the reconciliation of the full power and meaning of the individual with the full power and meaning of the universal, eternal and infinite........}
\]

This enlarging of the particular to meet and become one with the universal and infinite.... is a very characteristic and indicative feature of this new poetry.³⁹

In the above lines there is a critical ideal as well as an anticipation, a critical prophecy one may say. An ideal and a prophecy, a touch stone of literary criticism that the poetry in Savitri perfectly realizes, fulfils and illustrates. The union of the individual with the universal, eternal and infinite; the enlarging of the particular to meet and become one with the universal and infinite, are the most striking, salient and essential occurrences in
Savitri. The success of Sri Aurobindo’s epic effort in Savitri has become possible by his successful communication of personal mystic and yogic realizations and revelations and by ability to elevate the legend to a universal and cosmic symbol. The whole narration has come to the reader through an ideally inspired, brilliantly conceived and skilfully employed symbolism.

The symbolism employed in Savitri completely fulfils the requirements of Sri Aurobindo’s critical principles relating to the character and the features of the best poetry. Sri Aurobindo’s symbols derive their origin, strength and power mostly from his astounding and unparalleled Vedic scholarship:

   The human battle is represented between the powers of Light and Truth and the power of darkness. The elements of sacrifice are used as symbols of inner sacrifice and self offering.⁴⁰

The poetry of Sri Aurobindo reflects the evolutionary process in the development of man’s intellectual process. He is a seer-man and a Rishi of modern India. Sri Aurobindo experiences the points of evolution inside his mind and psyche and therefore, he experiences different images which finally become symbolic representation in his poetry. So, there are manifold symbols in his poetical works. He himself acknowledges the manifold aspects of his symbols:
Symbols are of many kinds. There are concealing images capable of intellectual interpretation but still different from either symbolic or allegorical figures and there are those that have a more intimate life of their own and are not conceptual so much as occultly vital in significance, there are still others that need a psychic or spiritual or at least an inner and intuitive insight to identify oneself fully with their meaning. In the more deeply symbolist- still more in the mystic poem, the mind is submerged in the vividness of the reality and any mental explanation falls for short of what is felt or lived in the deeper vital or psychic response.\textsuperscript{41}

There are many kinds of symbols such as “Dawn”, “Fire”, “Bird”, “The Sea”, “The River” and “Colour” in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. Dawn is the pre-dominant symbol which stands for the “reawakening of man and is also stands for incessant human desire for spiritual awakening. It signifies the craving of man for an eternal Dawn, the Dawn of divine consciousness”.\textsuperscript{42} In “Urvasie”, king Pururavus while coming back from heaven after the war with the titans gazes at the quiet Maiden East watching the birth of Day “as if a line/ of some great poem out of grimness grew slowly unfolding into perfect speech”.\textsuperscript{43}
The concept of “Dawn” in *Urvasie* is not something physical but it is spiritual, for Urvasie is Usha, the mother of life. She is the goddess of Light and Dawn. Light is the power which gives life to the Earth. All creation comes to stand still if dawn fails to appear on the Eastern earth. It is in *Savitri*, the symbol of “Dawn” reaches to its highest point. In the very beginning of Savitri, it has been entitled as “The Symbol Dawn”. It suggests the spiritual point of re-awakening:

A thought was sown in the unsounded void,
A sense was born with in the darkness depths
A memory quivered in the heart of Time
As if a soul long dead were moved to live;
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall
Had blotted the Crowded Tablets of the past.\(^44\)

Another symbol that takes place recurrently in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is of “fire”. Fire or Agni is described as the force of Rudra and it becomes a force of cleanliness and purification. It also stands for truth consciousness and divine energy at the instance of Vedic symbols. Agni or Fire is described as the most important and the universal truth of the *Vedas*. He burns and also purifies; “Human passions and emotions are the smoke of Agni’s burning.”\(^45\) Vedas present *Agni* in the double aspect of power and light: the power of building worlds and the power of the perfect knowledge. Agni has been described as
Jatavedas, the knower of all births: “Agni is also the immortal in the mortals; the energy of fulfilment through which they do their work in him.”

There is one poem, “Flame Wind” in which Sri Aurobindo uses the symbol Agni in a very effective form. K.D. Sethna remarks that this poem “is a half house between the mystical poetry of the past and the unique Aurobindonean afflatus.” Here are a few lines of the poem, “Flame Wind”:

A Flame-wind ran from the gold of the East,
Leaped on my soul with the breath of a seven fold noon,
Wings of the angel, gallop of the beast!
Mind and body on fire, but the heart in swoon.
......O flame, thou bringest the strength of the noon
But where are the voices of morn and the stillness of even
Where the pale- blue wine of the noon?
Mind and life are in flower, but the heart must grieve
Gold in the mind and the life flame’s red
Make of the heavens a splendour, the earth a blaze
But the white and rose of the heart are dead
Flame- wind, Pass! I will wait for love in the silent ways.

The mind and the life of the poet are in full bloom like a flower. But the heart of the poet continues to grieve. The mind of the
poet is enriched by the Divine Knowledge that comes in the shape of the flame-wind. He visualizes heaven’s splendour and earth’s glorious blaze. But the poet ends the poem on a peculiar note.

The next important poem for the symbol Agni is *The Bird of Fire*. The intensity of symbol is more piercing than the previous poems for the symbol of fire. It is at once a bird and a fire. The bird of flame goes to the West with gold-white wings through the vastness of the sky. It sojourns very high and finally makes its abode in the heart of the poet. “It brings a silent and free spirit to the world and along with it a love divine.”\(^{49}\) The poet says:

Like the blood soul climbing
The hard crag-teeth world, wounded and nude,
A ruby of flame-petalled love in the silver gold altar vase
Of moon-edged night and rising day.\(^{50}\)

Fire as symbol in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is the bringer of light and the reflection of the Divine Consciousness. The fire in *The Bird of Fire* is suggested of the “fiery human soul”. *The Bird of Fire* is at once suggestive of the Divine Knowledge.

There comes another very important symbol of “bird” in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. The bird has been used as image and symbol by Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and so many other
poets of the West. Sri Aurobindo at the instance of the Romantic poets has made an application of the symbol of bird to his poetic creation. The bird in the Vedic symbolic series symbolizes "a free spirit". Sri Aurobindo also uses the symbol of bird for the human soul. The journeys of king Pururavus and Aswapathy remind one the symbol of the bird. The Blue Bird, though a very small poem, shows the quest of human being for the stage of liberation:

I am the bird of God in his blue;
    Divinely high and clear
I sing the notes of the sweet and the true
    For the god's and the seraph's ear
I rise like a fire from the mortal's earth
    Into a griefless sky
And drop in the suffering soil of her birth
    Fire- seeds of ecstasy.
My pinions soar beyond Time and Space
    Into unfading Light;
I bring the bliss of the Eternal's face
    And the boon of the Spirit's sight
I measure the worlds with my ruby eyes;
    I have perched on Wisdom's tree
Thronged with the blossoms of Paradise
    By the streams of Eternity
Nothing is hid from my burning heart;
My mind is shoreless and still;
My song is rapture’s mystic art,
My flight immortal will.52

“Rhetoric” in literature expresses the deeper meaning of literature;
“but the rhetoric of one kind or another has been always a great
part of the world’s best literature.”53 Sri Aurobindo points out that
Demosthenes, Cicero, Bossuet and Burke are rhetoricians, but
their work ranks with the greatest prose style. In poetry the
accusation of rhetoric might be brought against such lines as
Keats.

Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird!

No hungry generations tread thee down.

The Bird as such becomes a dominant symbol in the
poetry of Sri Aurobindo. The bird in The Bird of Fire again presents
him as a Yogi. The mental and spiritual progress of the poet can be
experienced through this symbol. The rich and the red breast of the
bird like “the blood of soul” suggests a soul which shows its quest
for the higher bliss. Even in Urvasie, the journey of Pururavus to the
higher realms of Godhead has also been suggested through the
symbol of “bird”. Pururavus as the earthly king remains in the
fulfilments of the quest of her soul. The Rajarshi (Saint King) aspires
for Urvasie, a Divine nymph. Thus, he goes and moves to onward
journey which leads him to the search of Urvasie:
Then northward blown upon a storm of hope
   The hero self- discrowned, Pururavus,
Went swiftly up to the burning plains and through
   The portals of the old Saivaalic hills
To the inferior heights, nor lingered long...⁵⁴

And he finally reaches the heavenly zones. If Pururavus is the symbol of the craving human soul, his journey upward is suggested by the movement of a soaring bird, signifying the spiritual quest of life.

Savitri presents the highest realization of the symbol of “bird”. The entire epic symbolizes the yogic experience of Sri Aurobindo. That Savitri becomes a literary and spiritual symbol for the Yogic realization of Sri Aurobindo; it is an example of the integral yoga. Savitri comes down in answer to the call of the human race. At every point the poet emphasizes this phenomenon. The Divine Consciousness descending into earthy life and gracing the world with human forms is itself symbolic in Savitri. Sri Aurobindo paints the scene thus:

A voyage upon uncharted routes
Prompting the danger of the unknown
Adventuring across enormous realms
He broke into another Space and Time.⁵⁵
The Sea and the Rivers are major symbols in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. "The Vedas speak of the two oceans- the upper and the lower waters, the ocean of the subconscient dark and inexpressive and the ocean of the superconscient, luminous and eternal existence. From this supreme ocean flows the seven rivers, the waters of truth and bliss. These waters flow in heaven. They are the inspiration which awakens truth consciousness or God consciousness in man." 56 Sri Aurobindo in The Secret of Veda finds the form of ocean as the ocean of heart- “hrdayat samudrat” and this ocean provides us “Ghrtasya dhara”. Sri Aurobindo divides sea into two parts: the sea of subconscient and the sea of superconscient. The river symbolizes the dynamism and the pure human consciousness; and the river flows from the subconscient form of the sea and comes to the superconscient.

Sri Aurobindo finds such kind of symbol even in the Puranas which show Vishnu sleeping on Anantha after the great pralaya. Here Anantha stands for infinity. The ocean of Vishnu represents the symbol eternal ocean. Therefore, in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo ocean becomes the symbol of infinite and eternity. But one hardly finds any distinction between the higher and lower ocean in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo though he frequently uses the symbol of sea in his poetry. In the poem To the Sea, Sri Aurobindo says that sea gives him and humanity a message that is to be followed by the poet and should also be followed by the humanity enmasse:
O grey wild sea,
Thou has a message, thunderer, for me
Their huge wide backs
Thy monstrous billows raise, abysmal cracks
Dug deep between.
One pale boat flutters over them, hardly seen
I hear thy roar
Call me “Why dost thou linger on the shore.”
With fearful eyes.\textsuperscript{58}

The images such as “wild sea”, “thunderer”, “pale boat” with the verb of an animal image “flutter”, “roar” give yet a deeper message so far as the wide backs and the monstrous form of sea is concerned. The inspired poet asserts himself and claims that man is mightier than the sea. The river of human mind seeks to reach the heights of heaven through the subtle ocean of Divine Consciousness. “If the eternal Goad-head is the goal of man, the sea is the way through which he can reach the Divine Abode. The path is not an easy one to tread. What is involved is yoga and a sadhana, pain, difficulty and danger are the barriers that man must cross to reach the destination.”\textsuperscript{59}

The poet compares the power of man with that of sea and finds that a man stands superior to sea in his might. In the following lines, with the metaphor of the "rude sea", the poet challenges even the might of the sea:
Take me be
May way to climb the heaven, thou rude great sea
   I will seize thy mane
O lion, I will tame thee and disdain;
   Or else below
Into thy salt abysmal caverns go,
   Receive thy weight
Upon me and be stubborn as my Fate
   I come, O Sea,
To measure my enormous self with thee. 60

In another poem, Ocean Oneness, the poet in the
possession of an eternal calm, sees the silent form of the sea:

Silence is round me, widerness ineffable
White birds on the ocean diving and wandering;
A soundless sea on a voiceless heaven,
Azure on Azure, is mutely gazing
Identified with silence and boundlessness
My spirit widens clasping the universe
Till all that seemed becomes a Real,
One in a mighty and single vastness
Someone broods there nameless and bodiless,
Conscious and lonely, deathless and infinite
And sole in a still eternal rapture,
Gathers all things to his heart for ever. 61
The poet reaches a silence, wide and vast and ineffable. The sea he reaches is also soundless and the heaven he meets is voiceless. The spirit of the poet widens, clasping the universe:

The horizon of his consciousness goes on widening until all that “seemed becomes Real, one in a mighty and simple vastness. There he feels the presence of someone deeply in thought. Who is this someone?-bodiless, nameless, conscious, lonely, deathless and infinite. Every single word adds strength to the vision of the poet and to the comprehension of the reader.\(^{62}\)

Sri Aurobindo has not written many poems on the River. There is only one poem with the title The River. He regards the river in the wild form and it is approaching to meet its bigger wild form, “sea”:

Far now is that birth place mid abrupt mountains
and slow dreaming of lone valleys.\(^ {63}\)

The lines above suggest the thought that the stream of human consciousness has started millions and millions of years back proceeding farther and farther to reach the sea of Divine Consciousness.

If Rabindra Nath began the poetry of Bhakti Yoga and accomplished it as Indian English poetry, Sri Aurobindo wrote the poetry of Jnana Yoga. He wrote the poetry of spiritual truths and
values which he wanted to accomplish in society. Thus the process of thought itself becomes the symbolic process in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo.

According to him there are five great Sums of poetry- they harmonize and blend the vision and intuitions of the poet. Truth, Beauty Delight, Life and Spirit are the five Sums of poetry. He strongly believed that the ultimate purpose of poetry is to bring Beauty and Bliss to the human heart. Such Beauty and Bliss can come to human life and enlighten the spirit only when the Truth - the ultimate spiritual Truth- is enshrined in the temple of Poetic Muse.⁴

There are many short poems such as Revelation, Reminiscence, The World of Science, Thought the Paraclete and Soul, My Soul are the poems which reflect the symbolic thought process in Sri Aurobinodo's poetry. In Reminiscence, though a short poem, the poet's soul hears the voice of the conscience. This voice comes to him in the form of the “solitary bird” with the image of “winged compeer”. Then after the poet finds lustre and realizes the sensibility of an eternal sojourn. Infact, the voice that the poet hears is the voice of his thought. The contact with the Divine archangel brings back to the poet’s mind to the conscious realization. This thought takes him to the eternity and the poet recalls how he woke up and made the skies and built the earth and
formed the ocean. In Revelation, Sri Aurobindo talks of the illusiveness and the evasiveness of the idea:

Some one leaping from the rocks
Past me ran with wind blown locks
Like a startled bright surmise
Visible to mortal eyes -
Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows
Just a footstep like the wind
And a hurried glance behind
And then nothing- as a thought
Escapes the mind ere it is caught
Some of the heavenly rout
From behind the veil ran out.

The textual and critical analysis done so far in this chapter bring the fact into light that Sri Aurobindo uses freely the myth, mythopoeic vision and their symbolization and objectivization in his poetical works. Sri Aurobindo derives his symbols and myths mostly from the Vedas, Puranas and the Upanishads. This way he reveals the tradition of India and its rich cultural heritage with the myths and symbols from the Vedas and from the nature, the poet sings the spiritual hymns; and at the same time brings his spiritual and metaphysical reflections in his poetry. His poetry thus becomes symbolic of the seer-poets and remains on the tradition of Rishis of ancient Indian cultural heritage.
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