CHAPTER III
Psychological Aspects related to the choice of structure, Technique, symbolism and imagery used in Savitri by Sri Aurobindo

The epic Savitri, the Veda of the new Age, is the record of the experience of Sri Aurobindo. It also arouses the same experience in one who reads it. Sri Aurobindo has always used poetry as a channel for the communication of his experience of consciousness. Using poetry, he has given concrete forms to certain experiences at the spiritual and psychological levels. He strongly believes that poetry performs the highest function among men. He states "poetry of future will open to and interpret not only men and terrestrial Nature, but other domains also, of our spirit. It will give the key of the worlds of supernature, and allow us to move among the beings and sense, images and influences and presence of the psychic kingdoms which are near to us behind their dark or luminous curtain and will not be afraid to enter to vaster realms of the self and other universal states and the powers that stand behind our life and soul's eternal spaces. It will do this not merely in a symbol of greatened human magnitudes, as the old poets represented
the gods, or the hues of romantic glamour or in
the far-off light of a mystic remoteness, but with
the close directness and reality that comes from
intimate vision and feeling, and make these things
a part of our living experience" (53 P-568). In
these aspects he fulfils his poetical expression
in his epic Savitri.

He was inspired to a great deal by the Indian
legend of Savitri in the epic Mahabarata (vana parava)
which emphasises the power of women's chastity. He
saw something more in the legend and the name of the
characters appeared to him with special significance.
He perceived the truth behind the legendary story and
found the story of Savitri suitable to express his
philosophy of the life divine and to unfold the inner
drama step-wise. The poetical expression in him is
taken as a whole and it is "the movement towards a
universal subjectivism gets released from the entangle-
ments of intellectual theories, the uncanny attraction
of the power vital and the distorted view of the abnormal
and flies steadily into the region of the higher inspiration
consciousness and form there, views the whole of the
cosmos including man, other cosmic powers and nature" (58:1-4).
And the epic stands out as a power of truth and light
of knowledge.
Sri Aurobindo adopts suitable style, structure, technique, symbols and images for his poetry influenced by the overhead powers—higher mind and illumined mind. He says "I have not anywhere in Savitri written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do, everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced" (65, P-249). And Savitri remains as overhead poetry, mystic poetry and mantra.

Structure and technique:

The epic Savitri has unity of structure which is one of the classical conventions of epic tradition. Sri Aurobindo's main aim in his epic is to bring out the cosmic action. Hence he introduces the reader first to the central problem of death conquering man. Savitri, the chief character, is introduced who is to solve this cosmic problem. The reader of the epic is prepared in the first book of the epic itself, to enter into the seer's vision and made anxious to know about the meeting of Savitri and Yama, the Death God.
Sri Aurobindo perceived and felt the action of Savitri in his heart and this vision has shaped the character of Savitri.

As a next step, the recollection of Savitri's childhood days and the answer to the question why Savitri is born to Aswapathy are introduced with his action. Thus Sri Aurobindo follows unity in structure as per his needs as a poet. One familiar criticism regarding the structural organisation of the epic is that there are too many repetitions of the same and similar ideas, feelings, experiences and visions. To this criticism Sri Aurobindo's comment itself serves as an answer and helps us to know why he did so.

"Its rule (Law prohibiting repetition in art) does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions, so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer... In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating
himself.... In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable... The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the truth more than anything new that the poet is after. He (mystic poet) uses 'avritti', repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the most just, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration" (51 p-772). He uses repetition to picture his exploration of human and cosmic existence, journey through cosmic and mental terrains. Besides, the argumentation and the presuasiveness in the later part of the epic are intensified.
To suit his theme Sri Aurobindo adopts a particular kind of language. As the epic is the poetry of overmind inspiration, each verse stands as a mantra. The words are used and arranged in such a fashion that the sound of the rhythm itself takes you to the original sound of Om", says the Mother. Sri Aurobindo comments on the characteristics of mantric verses "a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface 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 it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of thinkings uttered, but its significance figure in same fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater" (56: P-79).

He strongly believes that poetic rhythm strongly influences the movement of thought in the word. For the depth of thought impression, the musical sound image comes to help. For the soul’s expression the chosen medium is the word which helps one feel even the abstract things.
To give special effect to his poetic expression he uses a particular type of Blank verse, for which he says, "The structure of the pentameter blank verse in Savitri is of its own kind and different in plan from the blank verse that has come to be ordinarily used in English poetry. It dispenses with enjambment or uses it very sparingly and only when a special effect is intended; each line must be strong enough to stand by itself, while at the same time it fits harmoniously into the sentence or paragraph like stone added to stone; the sentence consists usually of one, two, three or four lines, more rarely five or six or seven; a strong close for the line and a strong close for the sentence are almost indispensable except when some kind of inconclusive cadence is desirable; here must be no laxity or diffusiveness in the rhythm or in the metrical flow anywhere there must be a flow but not a loose flux" (65 1P-248).

Sri Aurobindo has adopted a diction (a system of words refined from the grossness of domestic use) of his own to bring out his vision successfully. His poetic words embody all branches of knowledge. He uses prosaic words, technical words, hyphenated substantives as epithets. He says, "It (Savitri) expresses or tries to express total and many sided vision
and experience of all the planes of beings and
their action upon each other. Whatever language,
whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth
of vision and experience it uses without scruple
or admitting any mental rule of what is or is not
poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which
might be considered as technical when these can be
turned to express something direct, vivid and power-
ful [(66, p. 427)].

Narrative style is used in the epic to introduce
the characters and situations. With this narrative
style, he also uses metaphors and similes to make it
more poetical. He also employs lyrical, expository
and illuminative style. Although he strongly believes
that poetry is written out of inspiration, he pays more
importance to his poetic style. Savitri has not only
various types of styles, but also has a note of
simplicity and depth. He uses apocalyptic speeches which
have their own significance in explaining and interpreting
the mystic experience of the higher planes of consciousness.
Symbolism and imagery:

Sri Aurobindo believes that, to give in concrete form to the spiritual and mystic experiences in poetry, the symbols are the only poetic device. He says a symbol "expresses... a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot bring out except through symbolic images" (57:6-7). The symbol is defined as a word or a set of words that signifies an object or event which itself signifies something else.

At first Sri Aurobindo has been struck by the symbolic meaning of the characters in the legend. It has come as his main inspiration for the present work. The symbolic meaning of different characters in the epic has been explained by him as Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the divine word, daughter of the Sun, Goddess of the Supreme truth who comes down and is born to save. Aswapathy, the Lord of horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of the spiritual endeavour that
helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes. Vyumathsena, Lord of the shining hosts, father of Satyavan, is the divine mind, here fallen blind his celestial kingdom of glory" (31: P- 99)

To elaborate his vision of love conquering the Death, he uses symbolic language in his epic and his art is not mimetic but it is realistic and communicative. He aimed at integral transformation of all the elements in man and establishment of life divine on the earth to attain this, man must come out of his present imperfection such as failure, incapacity and unavoidable death. Is the aim possible? Is the question put before the humanity? The answers to them will solve the mystery of human birth. Savitri faces the great questions.

Fate comes before her in the form of her husband's death. She confronts the Death at his root and makes the impossible become possible. It comes out in form of a promise. And she brings down into this world of obscurity and falsehood, death and suffering, truth and light life-divine and immortal Ananda.
While Savitri is the explorer of inner countries, Aswapathy is 'traveller of the worlds he stands' and as the symbol of the aspiring soul of man as manifested in life on the earth. When writing Savitri's yoga, Aurobindo drew the experiences of himself but when writing the yoga of Aswapathy, he recalled the spiritual experiences of the Vedic Aswins. All the other symbols employed by Sri Aurobindo other than Savitri and Aswapathy help to enrich the main symbols. According to psychologists, image means a mental reproduction and a memory of a past sentimental or preoccupational experience, not necessarily visual. Imagery beside, representing intellectual and emotional events, can also represent psychic, super sensuous, intuitional and supramental events. An image presents as well as represents even something invisible.

Image has in it the great potentiality to communicate the very totality, the heart and soul of an experience and even the vibrations of an inner vision. Sri Aurobindo uses image to direct to the spiritual truth which lies beyond secular and religious values.

The whole epic is pregnant with images which themselves merge into symbols and every symbol hides in living power. The imagery becomes the very texture
of the epic as the work is the outcome of a 'vision'.
His vision is an insight into cosmic secrets and realities. When he put in writing, he comes out
with images after images revealing his inner realization and describes in exact terms what is actually
happening to him in his experience.