

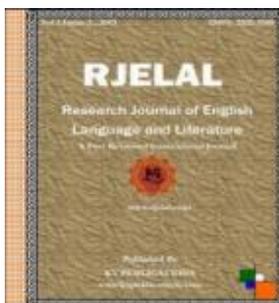
RESEARCH ARTICLE



THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI AND OTHER POEMS

GERA MANI BABU

Lecturer in English, Dept of English, The Hindu college
Machilipatnam, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh



Article Info:

Article Received: 16/07/2014

Revised on: 20/07/2014

Accepted on: 24/07/2014

ABSTRACT

Some of the major works of Sri Aurobindo can be listed as *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *the Letters on Yoga*. *Savitri* is the poetic rendering of *The Life Divine*; the two of which constitute the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. The major theme in all epics of great writers is "man and man's purpose in the world". This may be accepted if a progressive evolution of man and of his purpose also is admitted. Man has been trying to discover, or "uncover" his Self—and in this great discovery he is bound to discover also this purpose as an individual and as a collectivity. *Savitri* takes as its theme the life of man and the movement of his soul over all the cosmic planes. The vision of the poet is like a searchlight, turning its revealing light from plane to plane where it brings into our view worlds of being, unknown to the ordinary gaze, their workings and their influences upon earth and man, and the part they play in the evolution from the Inconscient to the Superconscient. In Sri Aurobindo's poetical expression taken as a whole, the movement towards a universal subjectivism gets released from the entanglements of intellectual theories, the uncanny attraction of the lower vital and the distorted view of the abnormal and flies steadily into the region of the higher inspirational consciousness and from there, views the whole of the cosmos including man, other Cosmic Powers and nature. The story of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* is a classical legend taken from the *Mahabharata*. The names of the characters of the story have a meaning appropriate to its theme and the role of each character. After studying about a many themes I have been able to summarize the results in terms of the selected themes and metaphors of personal psycho-spiritual integration in **Sri Aurobindo's** poetry.

Sri Aurobindo was a scholar, poet, revolutionary thinker, seer, philosopher, yogi and creator of an age. He is above all a 'Rishi', one who sees beyond, 'Kranti darsi', one who has realised his identity with the divine and wields His creative bow, *Sri* in his name means Glory, Glory of the Divine. *Sri* came to be used at a particular stage of his life when his consciousness underwent a revolutionary change. Sri Aurobindo started writing poetry as a young student, and continued until late in his life. The theme of his poetry changed with the projects that he undertook. It ranged from revolutionary

homages to mystic philosophy. In the early stage, the poet is quite young and immature and echoes of western poets can be heard in his creations. In addition to the great influence of the Greek and Latin poets which was great on his blossoming mind, the heart of young Aurobindo during his fourteen year stay in England was also coloured by the temper of Romanticism and late Victorian poetry. Such varied influence was not unusual in the 80's of the previous century. The exact date of composition of his early poems cannot always be settled and one must therefore be content with the broad period of

composition. But even in this early phase, we hear the authentic voice of the great Rishi and there are occasional flashes of genius. Many of the poems written by Sri Aurobindo, during the early stage, were published much later as *More Poems* and *Poems*.

In this literature, English is used according to the Indian themes and the aspects of Indian literary creativity. In Indian English Literature, we find impact and influence of British Literature; which is obvious because of long British 'imperialism' or 'colonialism'. This literature is not totally 'Indianised' but it is on the way to get the notion. A number of Indian English Litterateurs are successful on their praise – worthy endeavour. It is really a matter of pride to see Indian English Literature taught in many foreign universities. Sri Aurobindo's literary pieces are also engrossed with philosophical, metaphysical and mystical elements. Let us put forward briefly his main view points. Once he depicted- "A Yogi who writes is not a literary man who writes only what the inner will and word want him to express."- he clarifies that a writer is not always the slave of the inner voice or will, but he expresses with the aid of his own wisdom, intellectuality and practical ideas. This view is easily exposed in his writings. The 'Yogic Element' can be found in all of his literary pieces. His noted works are –'The Life Divine', 'The Synthesis of Yoga', 'The Future Poetry' and he summarizes the themes of these three works in 'Savitri', his crown piece in epic form. During the first thirteen years of his stay in India, Sri Aurobindo immersed himself in the study of Vedic culture and learnt on his own Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali. This phase of poetic activity was of prodigious literary productivity and most of his themes and the symbolism of his later poetry were first worked out during this period in works such as *Love and Death*, *Urvasie*, *Uloupie*, *The tale of Nala*, *the Rishi*, *Ahana* etc. Inspired by the British poets of the Romantic school, the matter is typically Indian and spiritual.

Savitri is Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece. We cannot fully understand or appreciate him and his philosophy unless we have an understanding and appreciation of his grand epic, *Savitri*, which he himself has described as "A Legend and a Symbol". The epic of *Savitri* consists of twelve books. We must note the title of the first Book, 'The Book of Beginnings', and its first canto, entitled 'The Symbol

Dawn'. Dawn, in the Indian spiritual tradition, represents the first radiance of the new light and symbolically it represents the beginning of a cycle of evolution of a new consciousness, to manifest a New Creation.

The names of the characters of the story have a meaning appropriate to its theme and the role of each character. Here they are not just personified qualities, but emanations of the conscious and active Forces working in the universe. The light of Truth-Consciousness with which Sri Aurobindo has written *Savitri*, lays bare before us all these forces, their play and significance in the evolutionary march towards the divine life upon earth. *Savitri* represents an aspect of the Divine Consciousness. The word *Savitri*, being a derivation from *Savitr*, meaning the Sun, symbolises the Truth. She comes down upon earth in response to the aspiration and the call of terrestrial humanity, represented by *Aswapati*, its protagonist and leader, in order not only to help and save mankind, but to lead it so as to transcend the ego-centric divisive and fumbling mental consciousness and reach to the plane of the Truth-Consciousness. In the second canto, entitled 'The Issue', Sri Aurobindo begins with its central theme, which is the destined death of *Satyavan* that *Savitri* has come to solve by staying the wheels of destiny. He puts in bold perspective this issue. Sri Aurobindo describes in powerful terms the character of *Savitri* who has come with the Consciousness-Force of the great World- Mother to press back the hands of Karmic Necessity presented by Fate and win back *Satyavan* from Death.

The story of *Savitri* is well known through *Vanaparva* of *the Mahabharata*. Some of the significant works of Sri Aurobindo can be listed as *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *the Letters on Yoga*. *Savitri* is the poetic rendering of *The Life Divine*; the two of which comprise the rationality of Sri Aurobindo. *The Secret of the Veda* acquaints us with the philosophical roots or the starting points of Sri Aurobindo's logic and gives us the bits of knowledge into the language that Sri Aurobindo found to portray his spiritual experiences. It can even be said that *Savitri* is the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's involvement of the Vedas in the English dialect. *The Synthesis of Yoga* manages the psychology and use of this logic, while the *Letters on Yoga* fill in as an

everyday guide for its training. The focal themes proposed by Sri Aurobindo without precedent for the spiritual history of the earth are as per the following.

Sri Aurobindo's visionary poem, *Savitri*, the longest epic ever written in English comprising 24000 lines is a delineation of the poet's philosophy of integral yoga which is being propounded in his book *the Life Divine* and other philosophical books. The simple legend in the Mahabharata is expanded to an epic which is compact in its form and thought provoking in its content. It is "the peak – or rather the many – peaked Himalaya – of Aurobindonian poetry" (Sethna, "Lights from Passages in Savitri" 200).

Pandit comments on the theme of the epic:

Adapting the story of Savitri- Satyavan from Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo portrays the entire history of man in the cosmos, his origin and his goal, the birth and the organization of the universe, the growth of Consciousness and its several planes or worlds through which the spiritual evolution of the earth being proceeds, and much more ("Sri Aurobindo Literature", 135).

After introducing the theme of Savitri, Sri Aurobindo takes us back to review in retrospect the necessity which compels the birth of Savitri through the Yoga of Aswapati—Book II—which describes Sri Aurobindo's own spiritual experiences. Aswapati travels from the world of subtle Matter, Life and Mind in their lower and higher planes of consciousness, meets the godheads or the powers of these typical worlds and describes their influence on the beings of this world. He shows the path of the Integral Yoga one must follow for the evolution of consciousness to transform our egocentric personality to a being of truth by the light of the Supramental Consciousness. In *The Life Divine*, however, most if not all of the major terms, themes, and insights are there in every chapter, making it that much more difficult to navigate these dense, but powerful passages. For example, in the relatively simple first few chapters, Sri Aurobindo refers to terms and insights about the nature of the divine Reality that are not explained until later on, making it difficult to follow his reasoning and arguments. There seems to be an assumption by the author that

the reader is required to understand a plethora of terms, principles, and methods before they are even explained! That might suggest that Sri Aurobindo did not write the book for the average person, or at least not for the one-time reader, but rather for those who are serious and are willing to make the journey through its dense underbrush of argument several times -- and do so with deep, concentrated effort. Or perhaps he secretly hoped that others (such as this writer) would break-down, digest, and reconstitute the knowledge so others (i.e. you the reader) could more easily make their way through this concentrated, though perfectly ordered opus of Ultimate Knowledge and Truth. Now Sri Aurobindo takes up the theme of why there is limitation in human existence. He says it is due to our divided being that does not exist in Oneness -- within our own self and with the world. If that is so, how does our divided being express? He says that it occurs in three ways: as death, as desire, and as incapacity/strife. They are the trinity of divided being. Sri Aurobindo in fact was aiming, as he has explained in *The Future Poetry*, for a level of linguistic expression that could be termed "mantric". Since this theme was touched upon in an earlier session, I would like to conclude by adding a few reflections of my own on this topic.

Sri Aurobindo's plays are modeled on Elizabethan drama and are "Elizabethan too in "their+ blank verse" (Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo the Poet*: 71). They explore various themes from various cultures. The manner of presentation of these plays is essentially Elizabethan but they show the Aurobindonian curve of the theme of evolution. Unlike Elizabethan plays, these plays have less action. The drama takes place in the minds of the characters and the thoughts are realized in action. Like, "Eric" is a play about emotions and the changes in the characters are primarily psychological. Similarly, his epic *Savitri* is written in the traditional form of an English epic. It has twelve books, further divided into cantos.

If imitation is to be extended to themes, he has borrowed much for his poems, "Urvasie", "Love and Death", "Ulopie", "Chitrangada", and his epic *Savitri* from the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*. Similarly, his poem in hexameter "Illion" is based on the Homer's *Illiad*; his "Ahana" and "The Decent of Ahana" have Vedic imageries. Though a few

elements are borrowed they cannot be entirely called imitation. Sri Aurobindo borrows either the theme, the form or the imagery; the poetry is his own as he transforms the original. Significantly, the imitation dissolves in poetry so much so that it becomes difficult to discriminate the original from the imitated. According to his definition, there has to be a transmutation of the external nature into that which is something more internal and profound. All these examples of imitation show that the imitation is transmuted by the profundity of thought and the eloquence of ideas.

These are some of the central themes discussed in Sri Aurobindo's major works. It can be seen that all the tenets proposed are novel and radical and any attempt to practice them is akin to a spiritual adventure for they have never been attempted before. They have been revealed to the humankind for the first time in the spiritual history of the world. To know them and to aspire to live them is a matter of rare honour and privilege, a direct action of the Grace of the Divine!

The Life Divine- This is a massive prophecy with its theme of 'the affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence'. It bridges between the realms of materialism and human consciousness. This is tough to be able to bridge the differences. The ascetics and yogis should not get inclined towards materialism and on the other hand the materialists do not believe in the existence of soul. Sri Aurobindo, in this book, simplifies and orders the verses of the Rig Veda in a newer way. The central theme of the Vedic scriptures is – Discovery and inculcation of the truth from the darkness of ignorance and with that the victory of eternity.

Concept of the Dynamic Truth or Supermind: The crux of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, its recurring theme and its culmination is the Dynamic Truth, the Supermind that can descend into matter and divinise Life on earth. This concept of the Supermind existed in the Vedas and also finds a brief mention in the Upanishads but is lost in the later texts.

Unification of mind-body-spirit: The theme "Unification of mind-body-spirit", which is one the principal tenets of integral psychology is by now a quintessential theme used in various ways in transpersonal psychology as well as in new-age psychology. It is often described as opening to the

spiritual experiences and using them to unify the mind-body which in most Western people's experience is initially seen as a duality.

Journey from unconsciousness to self-consciousness to super consciousness: This theme is used often in a developmental sense and is described in many different ways. Many use Jungian terminology to describe their growth process of integration of shadow into the ego to describe the first part of the journey. Many use meditative disciplines and other forms of psychospiritual practice to open up to the possibilities of the higher self and supra-consciousness

Embodied spirituality: This is a favorite theme for many, especially those aware of the importance of the role of the body as well as feminine energies and qualities in the process of personal integration. This theme is a unique contribution of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and is consciously used by those practicing integral yoga. This theme or metaphor, in one form or another, surfaces in many individuals' process of psycho spiritual integration.

Most of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is an expression of his experiences in his spiritual journey. Some are experiments in forms and themes and even in translation. His commentaries on the Veda, Upanishad and Gita are the expressions of his intense experiences and realizations of the scriptures and they found expression as a series of essays, commenting and clarifying certain concepts for all to understand. His visions as expressed in his poetry are spiritual experiences and realizations that he has undergone. Vision is only a faculty however; it is the most essential characteristic of the poet, contends Sri Aurobindo. It is through his yoga that he developed the *trikaladrishti*, the perception of past, present and future at once. It was not the limited vision belonging to the ordinary consciousness, but a vision attained through heightening of consciousness. These poetic visions have significance as they not only describe what Sri Aurobindo saw, but what he envisaged for the future of humanity for which he constantly labored, strived, experienced, experimented and expressed.

One of his early poems is *Iliad*. The significance of this unfinished poem lies in its profound epic vision, in its uniquely innovative hexameter and in its synthetic character. It is a truly Homeric epic based upon Homer's theme in the *Iliad*. The lyric range of

Sri Aurobindo embraces *Songs to Myrtilla*. Though it is one of his early poems, it is amazing to find such disarming play or fancy and rhythmic lilt and skill in it.

“A God’s Labour” is a beautiful poem, generally Indian in its theme and particularly Aurobindonian. The poem runs in thirty one lyrical stanzas, and the rhyme scheme is strictly maintained. It brings out to an extent the secret path that yogis and tapasvis tread. On reading the first stanza, the first question that arose in my mind is about the identity of “I” and “you”. Reading the poem revealed them as the poet-narrator and God. This poem is about the efforts involved in manifesting divinity on earth itself, and this agenda is conveyed in the first two stanzas itself. I particularly found the expression “Marrying the soil to the sky” so very potent and lending the poem to a metaphysical analysis.

Sri Aurobindo has contributed a lot to the Indian English Literature and that too with distinction. His contribution is not only to Indian English Literature but to the English Literature. He is unique in his creativity. Sri Aurobindo’s Literature is engrossed with ‘Upanishadic’ thought and it is wet with ‘Truth’. He wrote in elevated language. His central themes consisted of his philosophical and spiritual self – findings. As stated above, he considered poetry as ‘Mantra’- the spontaneous out burst of thoughts from the core of a truthful heart. He has influenced poets of other languages also- Subramaniya Bharati (Tamil), Nishi Kant (Bengali), Sumitranandan Pant and Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’ (Hindi), Bendre (Kannad), Sundaram and Pujalal (Gujrati).

References

- Aurobindo, *Sri. Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2006. Print.
- The Future Poetry*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953. Print.
- Letters on Savitri*: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2000.
- Collected Poems*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1999.
- The Synthesis of Yoga*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2006.
- The life Divine*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2006.

Pandit, M.P. *A Summary of Savitri: Pondicherry*, Dipti Publications, 1995.

Introducing *Savitri*: Pondicherry, Dipti Publications, 1982

Gitanjali JB, Some Central Themes In Sri Aurobindo’s Major Works, *New Race*, Vol. XII – I, February 2011, page 33-36