

The Seeing Word

V. Uma "Time and space in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri" Thesis. Department of English , St. Thomas College, Trichur, University of Calicut, 2004

Chapter VI

The Seeing Word

Vedic poetry is the earliest utterance of the perceiving soul attired in polyvalent symbols and intuitive images. Word and vision are regarded as inseparable and hence the expression *pasyanti vak* or the seeing word. Echoing Vedic wisdom Sri Aurobindo holds the view that the intensity of poetic vision is a must, for without it, the *mantra* of the Real, the apt garb for the supreme truths is not possible (Future Poetry 17). Most of the time man merely drifts in a "world of fragile forms / Carried on canvas-strips of shimmering Time [. . .]" (Savitri 1.2. p. 16). However, there are moments in his terrestrial existence when "the inconstant tread of Time can seem / The eternal moment which the deathless live [. . .]" (6.1. p. 421). In such instants "vision climbs beyond the reach of Time" (2.15. p. 299). "A cosmic vision, a spiritual sense / Feels all the Infinite lodged in finite form [. . .]" (10.4. p. 662) and hears "the sole timeless Word" that "carries eternity in its lonely sound" (2.1. p. 97). The visionary quality of Savitri bears out this fact.

It is generally agreed that Savitri is in the direct line of the incantatory Vedic hymns, the poetry of vision, in which Sri Aurobindo, like an ancient *rishi*, intuits an aspect of reality and transfers its vibrations to the "word". Sri Aurobindo affirms that the occult experiences of subtle hearing and subtle seeing take place in a state

of utter silence linking us to the Timeless, Spaceless Absolute, and that such moments are rare: "Few are the silences in which Truth is heard, / Unveiling the timeless utterance in her deeps ; / Few are the splendid moments of the seers" (11.1. p. 689). The poet elucidates how the images are spontaneously born:

The Timeless looks out from the travelling hours ;
 The Ineffable puts on a robe of speech
 Where all its words are woven like magic threads
 Moving with beauty, inspiring with their gleam [. . .].

(10.4. p. 662)

These experiences gush forth out of his golden quill in a torrential flow of images and pictorial expressions. Savitri, indeed, is replete with numerous word pictures and picturesque turns which constitute the very fabric of the epic's poetic utterance. Sri Aurobindo's imagery and symbolism are characterised by a bewildering variety, depending on the vastness and depth of his spiritual vision.

Temporal and spatial images figure prominently in Savitri. Every page contains invariably an image or, at least, a picturesque expression of Time and Space or related ideas causing the reader to marvel at Sri Aurobindo's genius. As Mody observes: "Not a single page passes under his eyes without unloading its rich and varied cargo of imagery before him [. . .]." He elaborates that it is a cargo of

"dreamlike realities and of eternal verities lying beyond our poor limited human vision" (354). Based on a close reading of the first canto, Flick asserts that images related to three main lines of contrasting themes, namely, "Time vs. Timelessness, World and Nature vs. Spirit and God, and Darkness and Sleep vs. Light and Awakening" lie scattered with varying levels of density and effect at various places of the epic (405). These images may be classified as word-groups, epigrams, word-pictures, and long, sustained metaphors.

Firstly, groups of words or phrases consisting of symbolic ideas or images are interspersed pervasively so as to become an integral part of the epic style. In Ganguli's view: "Though only made of a few words, yet these expressions suggest a world of hidden meanings to the responsive sensibility of the reader" (426). To cite a few such expressions from the epic at random: "spirit-space" (2.6. p. 182), "vibrant secrecies of Space" (2.9. p. 234), "stainless space" (4.1. p. 357), "soul space" (2.14. p. 292), "trance of Space" (1.1. p.1); "time-walk" (2.1. p. 97), "timeless heart" (2.2. p. 111), "toiling Time" (1.4. p.51), "earth-time's sea" (2.2. p. 104), "magic waves of Time" (1.4. p. 71), "timeless Time" (2.15. p. 298), "slate of hourless Time" (6.2. p. 453), and so on. Time and Space are variously personified as a banker, a tyrant, a slave driver etc. in such effective expressions like "Time's credit bank" (2.13. p. 285), "Time's dull yoke" (4.4. p. 383), "Time's slipshod caprice" (2.5. p. 162), "iron Lords of Time" (2.8. p. 226), "Time's heavy cup" (2.8. p. 228),

"knot of Space" (2.14. p. 290), etc. The heart or the bosom is highlighted in such personifications like "bosom of Space" (2.11. p. 264), "hidden heart of Time" (6.2. p. 447), "calm of Space" and "fathomless heart of Time" (3.3. p. 325), and the like. Murti rightly remarks: "Personification (or Apostrophe) is the *tour de force* of the Saint-Poet" (77).

In the second place, there are several single, end-stopped lines packed with concentrated, symbolic expressions of Sri Aurobindo's poetic vision. They are pithy aphorisms which often transcend the limitations of the context in which they occur. A few instances may be presented to illustrate this point: "The Earth-Goddess toils across the sands of Time" (Savitri 1.4. p. 50); "The voice of Time sang of the Immortal's joy" (2.3. p. 123); "Speak not my secret name to hostile Time" (3.4. p. 335); "A mighty Supernature waits on Time" (2.5. p. 169); "All Time is one body, Space a single look" (10.4. p. 660); "The visage of Space and the shape of Time is lost" (11.1. p. 698); and so on. Some of these lines are highly alliterative, thereby enhancing the cadence of the verse. To mention a few examples: "A silent spirit pervaded silent Space" (7.6. p. 544); "Wings of vague questioning met the query of Space" (2.6. p. 173); "Timeless in the Timeless, in Time ever born" (7.6. p. 541); "He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time" (1.4. p. 61); etc. Evidently, the poet's purpose in all these cases is to drive home the truth through a bare minimum of words, directly uttered.

The third category includes symbolic portraits which are perfect paintings in words, characterised by truth and beauty and the chiselled finish of a fine figure. In the following image, for example, we have a vision of Aswapathy, "an aspirant to supernal Timelessness" (1.3. p. 26), leaving the world of Time and Space in the course of his onward journey to his Timeless, Spaceless abode:

He has turned from the voices of the narrow realm

And left the little lane of human Time.

In the hushed precincts of a vaster plan

He treads the vestibules of the Unseen [. . .]. (1.5. p. 80)

The fourth type of imagery employed in Savitri comprises long and sustained metaphors or clusters of images which augment and furnish a cumulative effect to the Truth conveyed. Explaining Sri Aurobindo's technique Ganguli writes that the poet takes up "a symbol with a vast universal or even a transcendental canvas that would symbolise the universal or transcendental truth-vision of the poet" (428). This class includes three superb symbols in the epic, namely, the Symbol Dawn, the World-Stair, and the Sailor Image. These image clusters produce various effects such as reinforcing the meaning, evoking a certain mood or atmosphere, or advancing the narrative.

However, an alternate way, in fact, a much more relevant approach to the

imagery in Savitri, is to study it in relation to the epic's thematic significance, in other words, to analyse how the images of Time and Space contribute to the structural unity and the total meaning of the multilayered epic. Verma's authoritative statement validates such an approach: "Although the structure of *Savitri* is intricate, self-defiant and elusive, the poem is extremely well-unified and tightly knit. The nature of its unity is not literal but symbolic, that is, the unity of form and meaning" ("Sri Aurobindo As a Poet" 13).

The theory of Emergent Evolution, which forms the background of the epic, is exemplified in terms of fine images and symbols. Murti's analytical view is pertinent here: "The Saint's spiritual flight (or vision) refracts, in his imagery, towards the Normal, and the unseen Divine is brought through the imagery nearer, magnified and beautified to the readers' perception" (79).

In Sri Aurobindo's vision, "The cosmos is no accident in Time [. . .]" (Savitri 2.11. p. 271). On the contrary, it is "the riddle of the Immortal's birth in Time" (1.4. p. 50). Time is conceived as a disguise or an attire worn by Purusha in this cosmic game, that is, "the Everlasting puts on Time's disguise" (1.3. p. 36). To depict the Eternal Sacrifice of the "Universal and Sole" (1.5. p. 81) in order to confine itself to the Space-Time continuum, a triad of disconnected conceits - a garb, a drop and a house - are used in succession with a magnificent effect:

A miracle of the Absolute was born;
 Infinity put on a finite soul,
 All ocean lived within a wandering drop,
 A time-made body housed the Illimitable. (2.1. p. 101)

In another brilliant picture, the Divine manifestation on the terrestrial plane is compared to the act of sketching a plan of the Universe, just as a draughtsman would do, for the unhampered adventure of the pilgrim-soul:

Annulling an original nullity
 The Timeless took its ground in emptiness
 And drew the figure of a universe,
 That the spirit might adventure into Time
 And wrestle with adamant Necessity
 And the soul pursue a cosmic pilgrimage. (10.3. pp. 621-22)

A related image is that of a divine playground, a secret bower for the Lord's pastimes. Here, Time and Space are conceived as the living presence of God infused with His many miracles and acts of love:

The Spirit's white neutrality became
 A playground of miracles, a rendezvous

For the secret powers of a mystic Timelessness:

It made of Space a marvel house of God,

It poured through Time its works of ageless might [. . .].

(3.3. p. 326)

In another instance, the poet mentions: "A camp of God is pitched in human time" (7.5. p. 531). There is yet another image which depicts the Lord as a tenant occupying a circumscribed space for a limited period of time. Thus the "little plot of our mortality / Touched by this tenant from the heights became / A playground of the living Infinite" (1.3. p. 23). There is a quaint image from Grammar in which Sri Aurobindo explains how *Sachidananda* organises itself for manifestation in the way one would achieve concord or agreement between mood and tense, or between style and syntax: "United were Time's creative mood and tense / To the style and syntax of Identity" (1.5. p. 90). In Mody's opinion: "It is the word "mood" and its association with grammar that has given rise to the whole image" (365).

The cosmic *lila* of the Divine is envisaged as the "cry of birth into mortality / And the opening verse of the tragedy of Time" (Savitri 1.5. p. 75). Such a yoking together of two radically distinct images has a Metaphysical streak about it and is indeed a stroke of poetic genius or *kaviprathibha*. The poet follows it up with the depiction of the Eternal sacrifice as a rhythmic act: "The Immortal bound to earth's mortality / Appearing and perishing on the roads of Time / Creates God's moment

by eternity's beats " (6.2. p. 447).

In order to indicate the origin of Time and Space in the phenomenal world, Sri Aurobindo employs an image from the smithy to show how "Unending Space was beaten into a curve" and "Indivisible Time into small minutes cut" (2.11. pp. 266-67). Then comes another impressive image from Mechanics and metal-casting. The role of each moment in the unrolling of Time that shies away from Eternity like a runaway prisoner is determined and fixed permanently by the earthly powers of possibility which act like a groove of bronze. To cite the poet's words:

A groove of bronze prescribed for force and act
 And shown to each moment its appointed place
 Forewilled inalterably in the spiral
 Huge Time-loop fugitive from eternity. (267)

The ephemerality and insubstantiality of mortal existence is dwelt upon several times in the epic. Sri Aurobindo presents in geometrical terms the triviality of human existence in relation to the entire cosmic scheme as a "little curve cut off in measureless Space, / A little span of life in all vast Time" (2.4. pp. 148-49). In another image, the poet compares the transience of earthly life to some mediocre music which can, at best, provide entertainment for the time being. "An evanescent music it repeats / Wasting on transience Time's eternity" (2.6. p. 195). Business, commerce, economics and banking, rather prosaic and mundane matters, are deftly

employed by the epic poet to drive home his point. For instance, even the greatest triumphs and highest raptures won in the battle of life eventually turn out to be as useless as an invalid cheque drawn on Time's bank, which is a monument of ignorance. "For all we have acquired soon loses worth, / An old disvalued credit in Time's bank, / Imperfection's cheque drawn on the Inconscient" (1.5. p. 78). In another context, Sri Aurobindo draws on the same source for imagery when he declares that all that we take for "reality's shining coin" appear "as frauds upon Time's credit bank / Or assets valueless in Truth's treasury" (2.13. pp. 284-85). Commenting on the poet's repetition of the figure of speech, Mody writes: "Here we can see that even when a figure is repeated, it is so very different and so uniquely lovely, that we hardly feel or even become aware of its repetition" (364). In fact, it serves to highlight the point in question.

The fleeting nature of Time and its termination at the cruel hands of death, which is the burning issue in the young Savitri's life, is conveyed by Narad by means of a bird-metaphor, which sets the ball rolling. Narad begins his awesome prognostication thus: "In one brief year when this bright hour flies back / And perches careless on a branch of Time," then, after elaborating, he winds up: "Twelve swift-winged months are given to him and her; / This day returning Satyavan must die" (6.1. p. 431). There is an evident touch of novelty in the sustained image of the bird of Time. In another moving, though conventional picture, the poet imagines

the passing of each day as a golden leaf being torn in a most unkind manner from Savitri's thin book of marital joy. The young wife looked on with mute despair: "Each day a golden leaf torn cruelly out / From her too slender book of love and joy" (7.1. p. 469). In one other instance Sri Aurobindo fuses two diverse figures, that of an accountant taking stock of his inadequate resources and of a threatening stranger, in order to highlight Savitri's gnawing grief:

A trembling moved accountant of her riches,
 She reckoned the insufficient days between:
 A dire expectancy knocked at her breast;
 Dreadful to her were the footsteps of the hours:
 Grief came, a passionate stranger to her gate [. . .]. (469)

As the fatal hour of Satyavan's destined end draws closer and closer, Savitri becomes all the more conscious of Time stopping in the dark. She is depicted as an anxious, miserly merchant economising on every second as though it were gold:

Her life was now in seconds, not in hours,
 And every moment she economised
 Like a pale merchant leaned above his store,
 The miser of his poor remaining gold. (8. p. 563)

Sri Aurobindo has yet another splendid image-cluster to offer in order to illustrate how Savitri longs to arrest the relentless, irrevocable passage of time. The poet resorts to the images of imprisonment, compression and construction in a highly innovative way:

Intolerant of the poverty of Time
 Her passion catching at the fugitive hours
 Willed the expense of centuries in one day
 Of prodigal love and the surf of ecstasy;
 Or else she strove even in mortal time
 To build a little room for timelessness [. . .]. (7.1. p. 471)

Sri Aurobindo employs several images to portray the predicament of man trapped in the snare of Death and Time. Man is a beast of burden, or a toy for the idle amusement of "the iron Lords of Time" (2.8. p. 226), who keep a stern watch over this masquerade in Space-Time. All these impressions come to us in a single cascade of images:

A creature born to bend beneath the yoke,
 A chattel and a plaything of Time's lords,
 Or one more pawn who comes destined to be pushed
 One slow move forward on a measureless board

In the chess-play of the earth-soul with Doom,-

Such is the human figure drawn by Time. (1.2. pp. 17-18)

Man goes through life like a sleepwalker listlessly, as though he were in a dream, totally under the spell of a ghostly or unreal time. In the poet's view man, in his ignorant surface self, is a "somnambulist walking under the moon, / An image of ego treads through an ignorant dream / Counting the moments of a spectral Time" (2.5. p. 166). The choice of the figure of the somnambulist is a happy one suggesting that the soul is in an ignorant state of unspiritual sleep. In an equally effective image Sri Aurobindo describes the plight of man subject to the constant change of body, due to the unending cycles of birth and death, in terms of a nomadic existence. Thus man is a "traveller in his oft-shifting home / Amid the tread of many infinities, / He has pitched a tent of life in desert Space" (3.4. p. 336).

Human nature, with all its salient characteristics and limitations in relation to Time and Space, is elaborated in a series of scattered images in the epic. In one brilliant image, Sri Aurobindo visualises the human body as a taxpayer making a mandatory payment in the form of pain and death for the great soul-destiny or the assurance of the final beatitude that he enjoys. "Our bodies are an engine cunningly made," begins the poet, and he then adds:

Its payment of the tax of Time and Fate,

Its way to suffer and its way to die.

This is the ransom of our high estate,

The sign and stamp of our humanity. (6.2. pp. 438-39)

The human mind is pictured as a puppet king of an unstable kingdom who merely dances to the tune of Time and who is ever at the beck and call of Time like a wretched slave:

In his floating house upon the sea of Time

The regent sits at work and never rests:

He is a puppet of the dance of Time;

He is driven by the hours, the moment's call [. . .]. (7.2. p. 478)

In a similar manner, the poet yokes together images from metallurgy and despotism to show that the phenomenal world is like a prison with Mind as a despot who enslaves Timelessness: "A timeless Spirit was made the slave of the hours ; / The Unbound was cast into a prison of birth / To make a world that Mind could grasp and rule" (2.11. p. 268). The pun on the word 'cast' suggests the double image.

Sri Aurobindo metaphorises Time as a dilapidated building to demonstrate how the mind can function only within the precincts of Time and Space, and how it sticks to the known and the familiar: "In decayed and crumbling offices of Time / It

keeps close guard in front of custom's wall [. . .]" (2.10. p. 246).

In order to clarify that Thought can have only a limited perception of time, the poet imagines Time as luring and capturing Eternity into the prison of temporality: "This was the play of the bright gods of Thought. / Attracting into time the timeless Light, / Imprisoning eternity in the hours [. . .]" (2.11. p. 274). In short, man, with his bloated ego and limited mind, ciphers "his thought on a slate of hourless Time" (6.2. p. 453). Little wonder therefore, that terrestrial existence appears to be a "strange and sterile interlude / Lasting in vain through interminable Time [. . .]" (6.2. p. 441). Apart from such telling pictures, the epic is interspersed with picturesque phrases like "Time's slipshod caprice" (2.5. p. 162), "endless clamour of Time's mart" (10.4. p. 654), "perilous bridge in Time" (6.2. p. 461), "suffering Time and tortured Space" (2.7. p. 218), etc. which conjure up a bleak, uncertain picture of human existence in the mind of the sensitive reader.

Man is essentially a pure and peaceful soul, a concentrated projection of the Timeless in the realm of Time, a formation of the Spaceless in Space. Sri Aurobindo resorts to Projective Geometry for an explanatory image:

This faint and fluid sketch of soul called man
 Shall stand out on the background of long Time
 A glowing epitome of eternity,

A little point reveal the infinitudes. (2.1. p. 100)

Our present destiny as an embodied soul, which is the outcome of all our past *karmas*, is a stumbling block on the road to Immortality. The epic poet employs a highly effective image from commerce and banking to explain how it is obligatory for the soul to exhaust all its *prarabhda karma* or accumulated deeds just as one pays off prolonged debts at exhorbitant rates of interest, in order to shake off servility at the hands of the lords of *karma*. Thus Savitri realised that:

Acquittance she must win from her past's bond,
 An old account of suffering exhaust,
 Strike out from Time the soul's long compound debt
 And the heavy servitudes of the Karmic Gods [. . .]. (1.2. p. 13)

In order to return to its Origin the evolving soul has to consciously withdraw from its involvement in the world movement and cross through the belt of silent infinity. Sri Aurobindo adapts a splendid metaphor from archery to describe how the soaring soul of Aswapathy passed through that region with the ease and agility of an arrow: "An arrow leaping through eternity / Suddenly shot from the tense bow of Time, / A ray returning to its parent sun" (1.5. p. 79). However, if the pilgrim soul is not ever vigilant, he may miss his sole chance, and be written off as a failure. The poet's employment of an image from an official register is indeed quaint:

So might one fall on the Eternal's road
 Forfeiting the spirit's lonely chance in Time
 And no news of him reach the waiting gods,
 Marked "missing" in the register of souls,
 His name the index of a failing hope [. . .]. (2.7. pp. 210-11)

Transcending Time and Space is ultimately the choice of the soul to climb beyond terrestrial bounds and meet Death "upon a silent desperate brink" "on some verge between Time and Timelessness" (6.2. p. 461). In order to drive home the idea that time ceases in the realm of Death, Sri Aurobindo utilises the picturesque simili of passing through receding passages behind heavy walls which demarcate life and mortality; all the three times appear to fade into a vacuum one after the other. To quote from Savitri's experience:

The rock-gate's heavy walls were left behind;
 As if through passages of receding time
 Present and past into the Timeless lapsed;
 Arrested upon dim adventure's brink,
 The future ended drowned in nothingness. (9.2. pp. 582-83)

Perhaps the most conspicuous image in the epic pertaining to Time and Space is that of the human soul as a traveller or voyager, who has embarked on an endless

return journey to the starting point. In a characteristic metaphor, man's life is delineated as a long voyage across the aeons of Time in which his body is a fragile ship which "conveys through the sea of years / An incognito of the Imperishable" (1.3. p. 23). Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo refers to human existence most aptly as a "Time-inn for the Unborn" (2.2. p. 109). He asserts that the trajectory from the temporal to the eternal, that is, the pathway along which life on earth flows in the passage of Time to the origin has been impeccably drawn: "Infallibly the curves of life are drawn / Following the stream of Time through the unknown [. . .]" (6.2. p. 456). There is much novelty in the following image which depicts the advancement of the soul towards its ultimate destination. The epic poet projects before us the terrific picture of a full fledged army equipped with spears making a forced advance; the long series of births spanning several centuries is metaphorically portrayed as a long array of soldiers: "Adventurer through blind unforeseeing Time, / A forced advance through a long line of lives, / It pushes its spearhead through the centuries" (6.2. p. 459).

Besides being a traveller on the roads of Time, the evolving soul is also a "voyager upon uncharted routes" continually breaking into "another Space and Time" (1.5. p. 91). The most spectacular word-painting of the voyaging human consciousness that Sri Aurobindo displays before us is the "sailor" metaphor. It is a very long and sustained metaphoric passage of one hundred and four lines of

majestic verse (1.4. pp. 69-72), resembling a Homeric or Miltonic Simili in grandeur, picturesqueness and magnitude. It delineates the symbolic voyage of the human soul as a sailor on the river of Time, who ventures out on a daring adventure to higher and subtler realms of consciousness in the ship of his body moving into the sea of Timelessness. Marvelling at this symbolic metaphor Sisirkumar Ghose observes: "The sea, the sailor, the voyage, the search, and the secret are all in you. On the raft of a single metaphor, we have gone round the world and found ourselves" ("The Symbol Quest" 33). This is how the image unfolds:

This is the sailor on the flow of Time,
 This is World-Matter's slow discoverer,
 Who, launched into this small corporeal birth,
 Has learned his craft in tiny bays of self,
 But dares at last unplumbed infinitudes,
 A voyager upon eternity's seas. (69)

Ganguli remarks: "At each stage of this symbolic journey the poet uses a different image to suit that stage" (432). At the outset, the voyage is undertaken very cautiously "on the trade-routes of Ignorance" for the sake of "the world's commerce in the riches of Time." But soon the traveller "turns to eternal things his symbol quest; / Life changes for him its time-constructed scenes, / Its images

veiling infinity" (Savitri 1.4. p. 70). The poet declares: "A greater world Time's traveller must explore" (71) on his way back home. "He looks out on the magic waves of Time." He continues to sail "on the Inconscient's fathomless sea" (71):

And never can the mighty Traveller rest
 And never can the mystic voyage cease
 Till the nescient dusk is lifted from man's soul
 And the morns of God have overtaken his night. (72)

Little wonder that one feels like asking with Ganguli: "What adventure can be more daring, more perilous and yet more satisfying and joyous than [. . .] his symbolic quest into the unknown for a new mind and body in the city of God?" (433).

Another memorable and outstanding image of a sustained nature found in Savitri is that of the World-Stair, which appears in Aswapathy's Yoga. Through intense *sadhana*, verging on trance, the King experiences great stairs or rungs of consciousness climbing up to unborn heights, where "Time's last ridges touch eternity's skies" (2.11. p. 264). Aswapathy perceived that: "Ascending and descending twixt life's poles / The seried kingdoms of the graded Law / Plunged from the Everlasting into Time," and climbed "back from Time into undying Self, / Up a golden ladder carrying the soul, / Tying with diamond threads the Spirit's

extremes" (1.5. pp. 88-89). Paranjape offers a lucid explanation of the ladder image: "The whole of creation is a continuum of Time-Space, like a ladder of consciousness or a great chain of being ascending above man to God and Eternity, and descending beneath man into matter and Time" (116). The World-Stair image is a marvellous specimen of architectural design reminiscent of Jacob's ladder in the Bible. It symbolically represents Sri Aurobindo's theory of Ascent and Descent. Accordingly, in the evolving soul's efforts to transcend Time and Space, "A mighty Supernature waits on Time" (2.5. p. 169). *Sachidananda* watches with confidence the moments as they hurry towards their ultimate goal: "It sees the hurrying crowd of moments stream / Towards the still greatness of a distant hour" (2.5. p. 160). The World-Stair is evidently a kinetic image of Space and Time.

Numerous sensuous images of Time and Space lie scattered in a pervasive manner in the epic. These reveal that, at heart, Sri Aurobindo could be more romantic and passionate than the greatest of the Romantic and Victorian poets. We come across poetic turns like "young and virgin Time" (1.3. p. 38), "dreaming Space" (2.12. p. 277); epigrams like "In Time he waits for the Eternal's hour" (1.4. p. 58); "She has lured the Eternal into the arms of Time" (2.6. p. 178); "His soul left naked to the timeless One" (1.5. p. 80), and so on. Further, the epic poet employs several superbly sensuous word-pictures to bring out the inherent attraction or affinity of Eternity for Time, or of Infinity for Space by portraying them as lovers. In one

case, for example, he pictures the Timeless Reality as chivalrously rescuing Life from the tragic hold of Time and holding Life in Time in his arms: "Eternity drew close disguised as Love / And laid its hand upon the body of Time," and thus "Immortality captured Time and carried Life" (2.9. p. 237).

The poet employs a flower image to indicate the innate propensity of Time to gaze in the direction of Eternity just as the sunflower's gaze is always directed toward the sun:

Here upon earth are early awakenings,
 Moments that tremble in an air divine,
 And grown upon the yearning of her soil
 Time's sun-flowers' gaze at gold Eternity [. . .]. (2.12. p. 279)

The marriage motif is repeatedly used by Sri Aurobindo to highlight the aim of attaining the bliss of the Supreme by transcending body consciousness. He speaks about it in terms of a happy wedding of Time and Eternity, of Space and Infinity: "Only when Eternity takes Time by the hand, / Only when infinity weds the finite's thought, / Can man be free from himself and live with God" (7.4. p. 516). In another instance of splendid verbal mosaic, Nature and Soul (*Prakriti* and *Purusha*) are depicted as bride and bridegroom, who can no longer be separated by space or time, when once the ignorance of their true self is dissolved. Displaying a high

flight of poetic imagination, the poet conjures up Space as a semi-transparent curtain, and Time as the vibration of their conjugal joy:

Then never more can space or time divide
 The lover from the loved ; Space shall draw back
 Her great translucent curtain, Time shall be
 The quivering of the spirit's endless bliss. (11.1. p. 684)

In all these sensuous images we perceive a happy fusion of love and spirituality which becomes acceptable for two reasons. In the first place, man-woman relationship is an acknowledged symbol used in mystical poetry to denote the bond between soul and God, or between the human consciousness and the blissful "All-Conscious" (1.4. p. 66). Secondly, love and marriage as conceived by Sri Aurobindo is never gross or sensational. Mody's perceptive remarks endorse these opinions:

It would appear queer that such figures should be woven into a poetry that is purely spiritual; for it is usually supposed that spirituality is something that should remain above all such human relations, especially marriage and love between the opposite sexes. But [. . .] it is never the vital or grossly sexual love that is pictured in the images. (373-74)

What is most striking about the sensuous images of Time and Space found in Savitri

is that even drab metaphysical notions are miraculously transformed into flesh and blood entities through the warm personification by a poet of keen sensibility, who is also endowed with a flight of imagination.

No discussion of the symbolism in Savitri will be complete without a mention of the Symbol Dawn. The epic begins and culminates in dawn. The first line is: "It was the hour before the Gods awake" (1.1. p. 1); and the last line is: "And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn" (12. p. 724). The poem, indeed, moves from dawn to greater dawn. In the epic "dawn" does not allude so much to the physical phenomenon as to the evolution of the human consciousness from its inconscient state symbolised by Night to the superconscient state, the *Eternal Now* and the *Spaceless Here*, where all things exist simultaneously, and hence Time and Space are perceived in a "fourth dimension of aesthetic sense" (2.2. p. 112). Savitri is portrayed as the Dawn of the Supramental consciousness on earth trying to emancipate aspiring humanity caught up in the mesh of Time and Space. Nolini Kanta Gupta attests to this view:

Savitri represents one such divine dawn at a crucial moment of the earth-life. She embodies creation's entire past and shows in her life how that past is transformed through the alchemy of Divine Grace into glorious future- the inevitable destiny that awaits man

and earth. ("The Opening Scene of Savitri" 67)

Ganguli indicates two purposes which are served by the Dawn symbol in the thematic design of the epic:

First, it is the God-touch, the supreme Grace and Light that touches
 inconscient Matter to bury its seed of grandeur in evolutionary
 Time as to lift and release the imprisoned consciousness from
 Night. [. . .] Secondly, its manifestation paves the way for the
 Divine Mother to enter into Space and Time and look for herself
 the situation and difficulties of creation [. . .]. (431)

Dawn is the most pervasive symbol used in the epic. Sri Aurobindo's depiction of this image is in line with the Vedic *Usha*, who symbolises an eternal succession of dawns, whose beginning or end no one knows, who stands for a constant ascent of consciousness to higher and ever higher levels till the pilgrim soul attains "the calm of Space" in "the fathomless heart of Time" (*Savitri* 3.3. p. 325).

The supramental vision of Time and Space finds expression in several, marvellous word-carvings. In one image the epic poet resorts to weaving in order to illustrate how everything is woven into a single compact whole: "There consciousness was a close and single weft; / The far and near were one in spirit-space, / The moments there were pregnant with all time" (2.15. p. 301). In another

vision, Sri Aurobindo employs the quaint idea that Aswapathy's supernal consciousness is similar to a story written long ago but enacted now, so that all the events therein from start to finish are already known to him. The smaller units of Time resemble dots on the page of Time:

As if a story long written but acted now,
 In his present he held his future and his past,
 Felt in the seconds the uncounted years
 And saw the hours like dots upon a page. (1.3. p. 33)

Sri Aurobindo describes the process of attaining the consciousness of all times and spaces with the help of a fantastic metaphor - of entering a house and going more and more into the inner rooms and hidden passages to arrive at the ultimate. The mind is spoken of as the wall and the subtler realms of consciousness are the interior apartments or ante-rooms in the house of Time and Space. In such an unhorizoned state of consciousness, the soul is no more a prisoner of the present, the past does not fade out into oblivion; nor is the future concealed to sight. On the contrary, all the three times are seen in one vision. Here is Aswapathy's experience of supramental vision:

In the Witness's occult rooms with mind-built walls
 On hidden interiors, lurking passages

Opened the windows of the inner sight.

He owned the house of undivided Time. (1.3. p. 28)

In an interesting study on the use of gold and precious stones in the epic, Keshari illustrates that "diamond" is employed almost exclusively to connote a spiritual significance. After winning the momentous battle for mankind's transformative redemption in the Everlasting Day Savitri returns to earth with Satyavan:

The prophet moment covered limitless Space

And cast into the heart of hurrying Time

A diamond light of the Eternal's peace,

A crimson seed of God's felicity [. . .]. (Savitri 11.1. p. 712)

Commenting on this passage Keshari writes:

The prophet moment that penetrates into the future can travel more swiftly than the measure of Time and overtake it. It sows into Matter's inner fields God's peace and beatitude, so that diamond-like Savitri's victory remains a permanent feature. (507)

What has been presented in the foregoing paragraphs are only a handful among the numerous images and verbal paintings of Time and Space that adorn the epic,

and which constitute a "caravan of the inexhaustible / Formations of a boundless Thought and Force" (2.6. p. 177). However, taken together, they serve as signposts in a long track which help to exemplify the thematic design of the epic, namely the endless journey of the human soul, the pilgrim of eternity.

There are many unique aspects about the temporal and spatial images contained in Savitri. In the first place, they are not "detachable ornaments" employed merely for decorative purposes. The mystic Truth is first perceived and experienced ; the symbol then becomes a garb or a vehicle through which the poet's vision is conveyed to the reader. Romen notes that Sri Aurobindo's similes refer to subjective experience. He adds that "they are there to make living the subjective experience, by reference to another living vibrant and subjective experience" (338). Secondly, the same image is sometimes repeated, probably because the poet's mystic experiences were recurrent and repetitive. But, sometimes the same image is employed with differences. To prove the poetic practice with an example, Sri Aurobindo uses the image of an inn twice to refer to Time. In the first case, the poet alludes to man's "figure of a Time-inn for the Unborn" (2.2. p. 109). Later, he writes: "The home of a perpetual happiness, / It lodged the hours as in a pleasant inn" (3.3. p. 328). While it is Time that is imagined as an inn in the former case, in the latter case, it is substituted by Matter, which gives lodging to the hours as in a comfortable inn, implying a temporary existence. Mody commends Sri Aurobindo's

kaviprathibha in a pithy statement: "This shows what a great poet can do, even when he is using the same image" (359).

Thirdly, the range and source of the temporal and spatial imagery in *Savitri* is astounding, even bewildering, in variety and complexity. The epic poet draws his images from many reservoirs, both traditional and modern ones, ranging from the most mundane to the most metaphysical. Whatever be the source or nature of the image, they do help us to probe into the poet's vision. Rameshwar Gupta writes perceptively in this regard:

As images they may not in their details be scientifically correct; but in their symbolic significance they do give us an apprehension of a deeper reality. Night, Nothingness, Infinity, Eternity are no mere conventional Personifications (or empty abstractions) but are seen and felt as actual Presences, Powers and Beings. ("The Opening Lines of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*" 48)

Sri Aurobindo's poetic style and technique enhance the effect caused by his images. He employs blank verse with a consummate ease, preferring end-stopped lines to enjambment, which infuses a rare *mantric* quality to the words and the sounds which, in turn, evoke visions in the mind of the sensitive reader. But, unlike several other writers, Sri Aurobindo does not strain himself to arrive at the best

words in the best order. In fact, as Romen testifies, words "come to him packed with the power, the bliss, the grandeur, the richness of another world. He invokes them, and makes silent his vessel for their reception" (350). Sri Aurobindo's poetic speech resembles the Vedic and Upanishadic utterances through which the Timeless, Spaceless Absolute is gleaned. This is an experiential fact endorsed by Rameshwar Gupta: "One appreciative of the music that is in the Vedic Verses could hear in each a sound coming from the cosmic deep with the deep-toned ring of the Vedic mantras" ("Opening Lines" 49). Like Vedic chanting or melodiously divine music the majestic lines of Savitri, packed with *mantric* power, can silence our thought-cluttered mind and elevate our consciousness to ever-widening vistas of the realities that lie beyond. This makes Ghosal assert that "there are moments in *Savitri* where new revelations flow down to us, sometimes in a series of end-stopped lines, but often in wonderful "run-on" images" ("Savitri" 480).

It is to Sri Aurobindo's immense credit that he has been able to fuse the revelatory powers of word and vision in a language like English, to which his subjective, occult experiences are rather alien matters. Rameshwar Gupta is all praise for the painstaking efforts and the poetic inspiration which enabled the epic poet to accomplish this stupendous task:

Metaphorising apart, the task was not so easy, still by his persistence aided by inspiration, the poet succeeded in forcing

and dislocating from the deep mine a language and an idiom that could bear the sound of Eternity and give to timeless thoughts a form in time: He had discovered symbols equal to the Truth. ("Opening Lines" 49-50)

Much adverse criticism has flowed out of the pens of many critics about Sri Aurobindo's use of language and imagery in Savitri. Confining ourselves to the spatial and temporal images and expressions, we note that Sastri finds some of the compounds like "time-born", "space-tenancy" (1.1. p. 5) etc. to be not felicitous. He points out expressions like "trance of space" (1.1. p. 1) "infinity's centre" (1.1. p. 4) and the like to prove that Sri Aurobindo's diction is "full of abstractions which have a place in metaphysics and not in poetry" (91).

If Sri Aurobindo places before us images of Time and Space which sometimes turn out to be marvellous or fantastic, it is because he is trying to communicate the incommunicable. Gokak's explanation is convincing : "A soul-state or superconsciousness can be experienced. But it is not easily communicable, for it is only through figures of speech and images of earthly life that some idea of it can be conveyed to the reader" ("Diction of Savitri" 236). The more open and receptive we are, the more we can experience the inevitable bond between vision and *vak* throughout the epic. Shukla's profoundly poetic lines serve to firmly establish the fact that the temporal and spatial images hide the golden key to Savitri. "Only when

the reader awakens to the radiance of an inner dawn illuminating his psychological space does the clearly mapped - out landscape of *Savitri* begin to unravel the infinity of its horizons" (826).