



Cosmic Poetics and Semiotic Structures: Language, Style, and Symbolism in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri and Milton's Paradise Lost

¹Divyata Verma, ²Dr. A. Vijayanand

¹Research Scholar, ²Faculty of English Department

^{1,2}Kalinga University, Raipur

Abstract

This paper presents a thorough comparative examination of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* alongside John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, concentrating on language, style, and symbolism as key components in shaping their unique metaphysical perspectives. Milton's epic illustrates a theologically ordered universe conveyed through intricate Latinate syntax and careful rhetorical choices. In contrast, Aurobindo's *Savitri* utilizes a mantric and fluid linguistic style that reflects themes of spiritual growth and integral consciousness. Employing insights from stylistics, semiotics, and comparative poetics, the analysis posits that language within both works functions not only as a medium of expression but also as a fundamental creator of meaning. Furthermore, it reveals that Milton's symbolic representations remain relatively static within a doctrinal context, while Aurobindo's symbolic framework is characterized by dynamism and evolution. Ultimately, this study underscores how differing linguistic and stylistic approaches illuminate contrasting epistemological views—Milton's theological determinism versus Aurobindo's experiential spirituality.

Keywords: Epic poetry, stylistics, semiotics, symbolism, Sri Aurobindo, John Milton, comparative literature, language and consciousness

1. Introduction

Epic poetry has historically served as a literary vehicle for cultures to express their profound metaphysical, theological, and philosophical inquiries. Noteworthy contributions to this genre include John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (1950). Despite the differences in time, location, and cultural context separating these works, both strive to convey cosmic truths through poetic expression.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is grounded in the Judeo-Christian theological framework and seeks to "justify the ways of God to men." Conversely, Aurobindo's *Savitri* is influenced by Indian spiritual thought, particularly Vedanta and Integral Yoga, aiming to illustrate the progression of human consciousness toward divinity.

While many comparative analyses have examined thematic and philosophical similarities between these texts, fewer studies have thoroughly investigated language, style, and symbolism as interconnected systems of meaning. This paper aims to fill that void by exploring how linguistic and stylistic selections influence symbolic frameworks and philosophical interpretations.

The primary argument of this research is that:

Language in both epics acts as a creative force that shapes distinct metaphysical realities—static and hierarchical in Milton's work, while dynamic and evolutionary in Aurobindo's.

2. Literature Review

The academic discourse surrounding *Paradise Lost* has historically underscored Milton's "grand style," which is marked by intricate syntax, a Latinate vocabulary,



and a balanced rhetorical approach (Leaska; Lewis). Scholars like William Empson have examined the theological conflicts embedded in Milton's linguistic choices, whereas Northrop Frye places the poem within a wider mythological context.

In contrast, analyses of Savitri focus on Aurobindo's unique poetic methods and spiritual insights. K. R. S. Iyengar and Prema Nandakumar highlight the philosophical richness of the poem, while modern researchers investigate its "mantric" aspects—language that goes beyond mere representation to foster spiritual enlightenment.

Nonetheless, comparative studies frequently prioritize thematic elements over stylistic considerations. This paper aims to expand upon theories of style (Leech & Short) and semiotics (Barthes, Eco) to examine how meaning is constructed through various linguistic and symbolic frameworks.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative textual analysis based on the following components:

3.1 Stylistic Analysis

Assessment of syntax, diction, rhythm, and poetic techniques

Recognition of linguistic anomalies and recurring patterns

3.2 Semiotic Analysis

Interpretation of symbols as systems of signs

Examination of the construction and transformation of meaning

3.3 Comparative Approach

Cross-cultural analysis of Western and Indian epic narratives



Situating findings within philosophical contexts

Primary texts, specifically *Savitri* and *Paradise Lost*, are examined in conjunction with critical and theoretical literature to provide a comprehensive interpretative framework.

4. Linguistic Structures and Poetic Diction

4.1 Milton's Latinate Sublimity

Milton's use of language is characterized by:

Syntactic inversion (hyperbaton)

Periodic sentence constructions

Latinate and classical vocabulary

For instance:

"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit..."

This syntactic inversion emphasizes the thematic focus while postponing the grammatical subject, thereby instilling a sense of grandeur and gravitas. The influence of Latin enriches the text with an elevated tone, aligning it with the traditions of classical epic poetry.

Milton's blank verse exhibits a high degree of control, with rhythm reinforcing a hierarchical structure. The arrangement of his sentences often reflects the theological order of the universe—systematic, stratified, and governed by divine authority.

4.2 Aurobindo's Mantric Language



Conversely, Aurobindo's language defies strict syntactical constraints. His poetry is defined by:

Extended, flowing lines

Rhythmic repetition

A blend of abstraction with vivid imagery

For example:

“A lonely soul passions for the Alone...”

In this instance, language serves to evoke rather than describe, aiming to elicit a spiritual resonance. The repetition and rhythm mimic Vedic chants, suggesting that meaning emerges not solely from words but also from sound and cadence.

Aurobindo's diction merges philosophical terms with sensory images, producing a rich linguistic texture. His language transcends mere representation; it acts as a medium for transformation.

5. Stylistic Configurations

5.1 Rhetorical Formalism in Milton

Milton's writing is characterized by a strong rhetorical approach, incorporating:

Epic similes that are frequently elaborate and extended

Formal speeches, particularly showcasing Satan's compelling rhetoric

Balanced and symmetrical sentence constructions

These characteristics:

Strengthen moral and theological dichotomies



Promote intellectual involvement

Echo classical influences from authors like Homer and Virgil

For example, Satan's oratory reveals remarkable rhetorical skill, merging persuasive language with ethical ambiguity. This intricate interplay heightens the epic's dramatic tension.

5.2 Mystical Fluidity in Aurobindo

Aurobindo's stylistic approach is distinctly different:

Lines often exceed traditional metrical boundaries

Imagery tends to be both visionary and symbolic

Narrative elements frequently intertwine with philosophical contemplation

His writing fosters a meditative reading experience, allowing meaning to unfold gradually. The lack of strict structure symbolizes a worldview that values fluidity and transformation.

6. Symbolism and Semiotic Systems

6.1 Fixed Symbolism in Milton

Milton's use of symbolism is firmly rooted in Christian theology:

Light → Represents divine truth and grace

Darkness → Signifies sin, ignorance, and separation

Eden → Embodies innocence and divine harmony

These symbols function within a consistent semiotic system, where their meanings are largely stable and can be universally understood within the Christian context.



6.2 Dynamic Symbolism in Aurobindo

In contrast, Aurobindo's symbolism is characterized by its dynamic nature:

Light → Indicates the ascent of consciousness

Night → Represents both ignorance and the potential for transformation

Journey → Denotes spiritual evolution

Unlike Milton, Aurobindo permits symbols to change meaning based on their context. This approach mirrors his philosophy of integral evolution, suggesting that reality is always in a state of flux.

7. Language and Ontology

7.1 Milton: Theological Determinism

Milton's use of language illustrates a world governed by:

Divine principles

Moral certainties

A structured hierarchy

Language functions to express and uphold this established order, characterized by its authoritative, precise, and doctrinal nature.

7.2 Aurobindo: Evolutionary Consciousness

Aurobindo's linguistic approach represents:

A universe in a state of flux



Ongoing development of consciousness

The fusion of material and spiritual realms

In this context, language takes on a creative and participatory role, actively shaping reality rather than simply reflecting it

8. Readerly Engagement

Milton's Text:

Engages with logical reasoning and theological comprehension

Necessitates a background in biblical and classical knowledge

Aurobindo's Text:

Invokes intuition and personal experience

Promotes reflective reading practices

This contrast illustrates two distinct approaches to knowledge:

Rational understanding (Milton)

Spiritual insight (Aurobindo)

9. Discussion

The comparative examination indicates that linguistic and stylistic selections are closely linked to underlying philosophical views. Milton's formal, rhetorical



expression creates a rigid and structured cosmos, whereas Aurobindo's flowing, mantric style conveys an open and dynamic universe.

From a semiotic standpoint:

Milton's symbols represent fixed interpretations

Aurobindo's symbols embody processes of meaning generation

This differentiation underscores the broader cultural and philosophical contrasts between Western theological frameworks and Indian spiritual ideologies.

10. Conclusion

This research indicates that language, style, and symbolism function not just as artistic components but as essential elements in the formulation of metaphysical perspectives within epic poetry. Milton's *Paradise Lost* serves as an illustration of a methodical, doctrinal framework, whereas Aurobindo's *Savitri* embodies a more fluid and experiential expression.

The comparison highlights:

The influence of language in shaping perceptions of reality

The connection between stylistic choices and philosophical ideas

The dynamic relationship between symbolism and its meanings

This perspective adds to the wider realm of comparative literature by stressing the significance of linguistic and semiotic analysis for comprehending texts across different cultures.

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