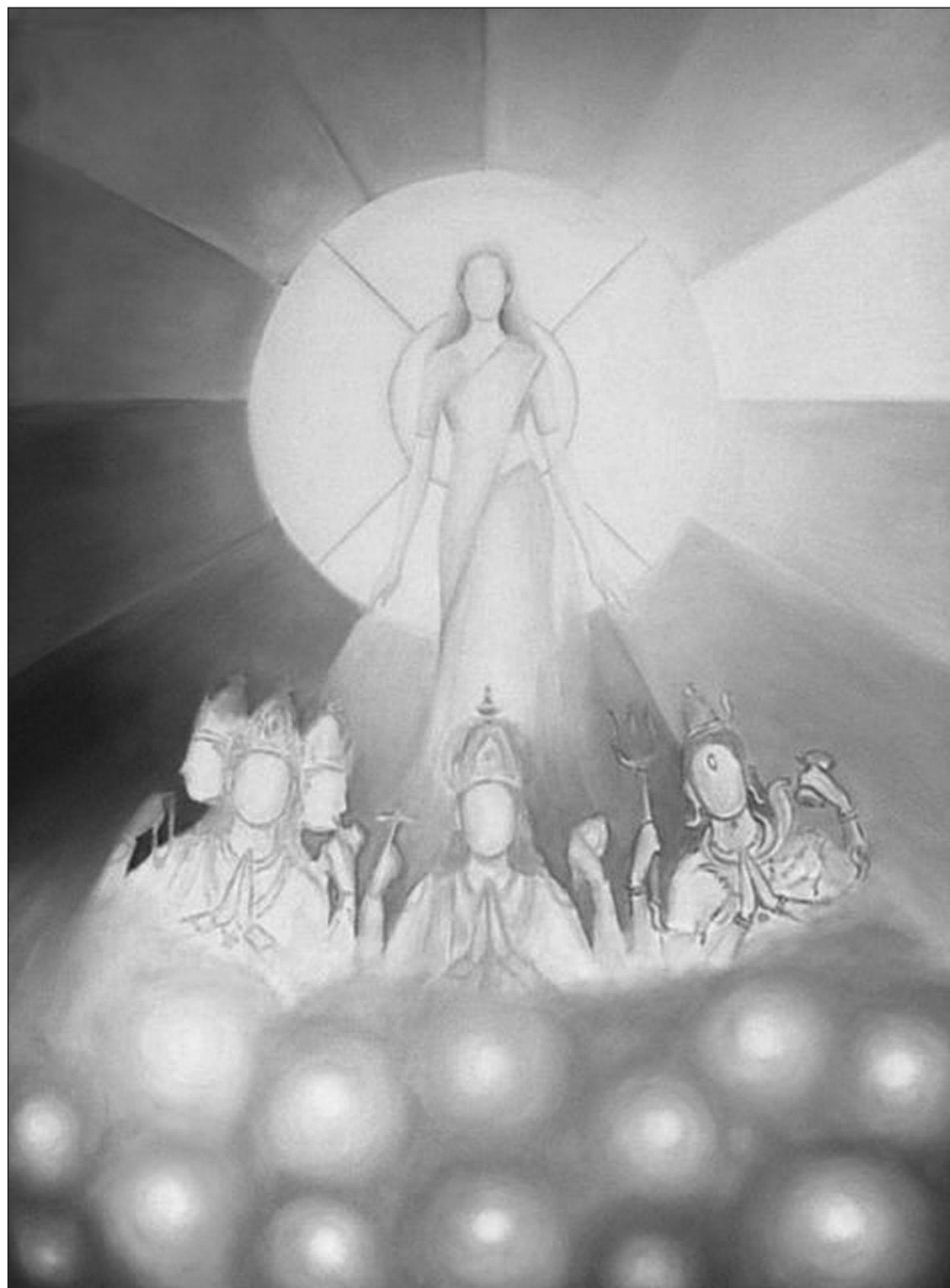


Collaboration

Summer & Fall 2011

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 36, Nos. 1-2



Special double issue on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, *A legend and a symbol*



About the cover

"Creation of the gods." This is a grayscale copy of a painting by Shiva Vangara done in Alkyds, the most advanced colors from Winsor and Newton, London. Throughout this issue we feature Shiva's fine paintings, many of which are based on *Savitri*. These paintings and others can be viewed in all their exquisite colors on his blog: <http://visionsoncanvas.blogspot.com>.

The authors and poets

Anurag Banerjee is the founder and chairman of the Overman Foundation (see <http://overman-foundation.wordpress.com>). His email address is: anuragbanerjee2002@yahoo.co.in.

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Muriel Ghion (muriel_ghion@yahoo.com) is a newcomer to Auroville from Belgium who is working at Savitri Bhavan.

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Kailas Jhaveri (richardkailas@gmail.com) is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Her biography, *I am with you*, was published in two volumes by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The late **Mangesh Nardkarni** (1933-2007) was a gifted and widely-known speaker on Savitri and other aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought. He was connected the Sri Aurobindo Society and often traveled to the US.

Tizia O'Connor (tizia@auromesa) is a certified Ayurvedic practitioner and co-founder of Auromesa Center in Hondo-Arroyo, NM.

Mona Sarkar is a senior member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, whose outstanding books *Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes* and *The Supreme* recount his conversations with the Mother.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is a facilitator of online courses on Sri Aurobindo's thought at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research and editor of *Collaboration*.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this special issue, we focus exclusively on *Savitri*, and reproduce a number of excellent articles that have been written on Sri Aurobindo's great epic poem. In Current Affairs, we have articles on two U.S. centers that specially concentrate on *Savitri*, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center near Crestone, CO by Swaha, and Auromesa, near Taos, NM by Tizia O'Connor. Both centers engage in regular *Savitri* study, and often have special *Savitri* workshops in the summers. Both are located in relatively remote scenic locations not far from each other that readers may like to visit. We also have a report by Anurag Banerjee on the passing of Amal Kiran, at age 106, who was so instrumental in eliciting Sri Aurobindo's explanations about the overhead poetry used in *Savitri*. In Briefs, we report on a *Savitri* play that was staged at the AUM 2011 in Lodi, CA (more on the AUM in next issue), and bring news from Matagiri and a new *Savitri* study group.

In AV Almanac, we have an article by Muriel Ghion on *Savitri Bhavan*, a center of *Savitri* studies in Auroville, home to "all kinds of materials and activities to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic." It is also noteworthy that *Savitri Bhavan* publishes the *Invocation* newsletter (more like a journal), from which four of the articles included in our special issue have been selected, with the kind permission of Shraddhavan, the director. *Savitri* lovers should consider subscribing.

Our main articles start off in Chronicles with Mona Sarkar's account of the Mother's discussion with him about *Savitri*, in which she conveyed its extraordinary importance and value. Upon reading this recollection, which was written seven years after their discussion, the Mother said that although she could not remember her words, it was correct and true as an appreciation of *Savitri*, and recommended others to read it. This is followed by an article by Shraddhavan, in which she discusses various ways in which to read, study and utilize Sri Aurobindo's epic poem. These first two articles do not focus on the content of the poem per se, but on its value and on ways to appreciate and use it.

The next article, in Essays, by Kailas Jhaveri, provides a stimulating summary of *Savitri*, recounting the plot and highlights of the spiritual journey that is revealed. Using ample quotes, it gives a synopsis of the poem especially helpful for newcomers, and for others it is an excellent review preparatory to the articles that follow. Next comes a talk by the late Mangesh Nadkarni, a widely known speaker on *Savitri*. This is also an overall summary, but focuses on certain aspects of the poem he found particularly important. It is followed by a talk by Arabinda Basu, one of the Ashram's great Sri Aurobindo scholars, that takes us into the depths of the poem through the immense spiritual and philosophical significance of one key line, "A god come down, and greater by the fall." Next comes a penetrating study by Richard Hartz that not only highlights the affirmative nature of *Savitri* and of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy, but examines critical parallels between *Savitri* and *The Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo's yogic diary, pertaining to four inter-related affirmations on which his yoga is founded. This is followed by a study by Kalpana Bidwaikar, a chapter from her doctoral thesis, of the supramental transformation as expressed in corresponding ways in *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*. The last essay is by Larry Seidlitz, the only one previously unpublished, on certain key symbols in *Savitri*, which gathers together a variety of insights from other writers that bring into focus fundamental issues in the poem and in the Integral Yoga.

These main articles are followed by important source material from Sri Aurobindo on the nature of overhead poetry, and from the Mother in several extracts from *Mother's Agenda*, each bringing out the deeper significances of particular key passages.

In the Poetry Room, there is a selection of extended passages from throughout the epic which I believe exemplify the greatness of the poem, and bring home some of the profound wisdom embodied there. In *Apropos*, I have similarly selected a set of short passages ranging from one to several lines, each expressing a world of meaning.

The artist

Shiva Vangara (4d.dimensions@gmail.com) is from an artist family in Andhra Pradesh. He lived in the Ashram from 1983-1986, and was initiated to *Savitri* by a senior Ashramite. Inspired by the Mother's words, his view of art developed. For the past 18 years he has been working to realize his dream of a Hollywood adaptation of *Savitri*, in IMAX 3D, followed by 7 sequels to cover the entire epic poem. At present he lives in Mumbai pursuing the film project. Apart from film and painting, his interests include contemporary dance, Bio Technology, Nano Technology, and Quantum Physics and Consciousness.

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About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Lynda Lester, president; Vishnu Eschner, vice president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Kalpana Patel, treasurer.

Contributions: Donations for the work of the SAA, Auroville, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram may be sent to SAA. Donations are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.



Current affairs

Sri Aurobindo Learning Center

by Swaha

In January 2011, I (Swaha, formerly Kathryn Van Note) became the new steward of Sri Aurobindo Learning Center (SALC), popularly known as Savitri House, in Crestone, CO. I took over the reins from Pavita, who had shepherded the Center since Seyril Schochen's passing in December 2006, and had worked to build bridges with the larger community. Seyril had founded the SALC in 1986 as an educational foundation. Her vision was that it be based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and associated with Auroville. Pavita's grant-writing efforts allowed the Center to become a work study site for students from the Crestone Charter School to learn about renewable energy applications and efficiencies, while moving the Center toward a lower carbon footprint, and earning the students money for their annual school trip. Steve Carter and Brian Dyer were also important during the period following Seyril's passing by helping to complete and upgrade the physical premises, and by their active participation in the spiritual community.

I bring a deep devotion to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, a passionate love of *Savitri*, and a wide experience of working in the complex, international, human unity experiment called Auroville. I was first introduced to the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo by Seyril, whom I met in 1981 while we both were living in Boulder. I have always felt a deep connection to and gratitude for Seyril, who represented for me a kind of lighthouse, guiding me to my spiritual home after a decade of searching and exploring various paths and teachings. I am honored to be the SALC's new steward. My goal is to further the Center as a venue for transformative learning—a laboratory of evolution—and I am experimenting with ways to make the evolutionary teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother more accessible to the wider community of seekers.

The Learning Center sits at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains just outside Crestone, CO. In addition to the main house, where there is a guest room, library and bookstore, there is also a Meditation Dome and Solar Bridge. The Meditation Dome is used mainly during the milder and warmer months for meditation (it's open to anyone) and has been used for summer Savitri Immersion workshops that have been led by Rod Hemsell, as well as for other special events. *Savitri* is read every Tuesday evening and



Swaha (Photo courtesy www.sriaurobindolc.com)



Inside the Solar Dome (Photo courtesy www.sriaurobindolc.com)

all are invited join. There is also a weekly event that explores Conscious Evolution, and a monthly study group, currently delving into collective yoga. The library provides a place to obtain information and books on the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Integral Yoga. The SALC also offers occasional meditations, talks, performances and workshops, all open to the public.

The Center has been seeing some long needed maintenance in the last months—the two bedrooms have been painted and re-carpeted, a tube skylight installed in the kitchen, a new water heater, and the deck is being rebuilt and stained. We have a beautiful guest room now—clean and light! There is much left to do. We are working on a proposal for a solar hot water system that will provide both domestic hot water and heating for the bedrooms, and that project will again provide an opportunity for our local students to learn another renewable energy application. The Center's buildings need substantial weatherization treatments and exterior maintenance, and major appliances need to be replaced. After our summer intensive, fundraising is the next focus. Donations are greatly appreciated!

During the last week of July 2011, the SALC is hosting a potent retreat experience called an "Integral Soundscapes Intensive." Some talented people will guide an exploration of sound/vibration, including Leigh Ann Phillips and her incredible crystal bowls; Jillian Klarl Ellzey, leading a powerful practice called Yoga of the Voice as well as kirtan; and renowned artist Marika Popovitz, exploring the sound of color. Other planned activities include the yoga mantra of *Savitri*, sounding with instruments, listening to Nature, the sound of silence, Qi Gong and breathing, delving into the properties and possibilities of water, conscious relationship with plants, and experiencing the power of the Solfeggio frequencies. The intention for this gathering is a kind of research—a deep exploration and discovery of the impacts of sound and vibration, both audible and subtle. In order



to concentrate attention, we will remain in silence from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, except for presenters and any focused inquiry or sounding that is evoked by them.

May 2011 saw the initiation of a Conscious Evolution course at Sri Aurobindo Learning Center. I had been following a course given by Barbara Marx Hubbard in association with The Shift Network, and am so thrilled with the optimism, synergy and collective empowerment that I am experiencing with others worldwide that I wanted to share it locally—and create a Conscious Evolution Home Team! A flyer around town describes this course as “midwife training for planetary Birth 2012.” To expand on that a little: There is a tremendous amount of awareness and energy globally around the 21 December 2012 date. Predictions and scenarios abound, be it apocalypse, ascension, transition, transmutation, merging/emerging, destruction and new creation, pole shift, new grids, parallel universes, returning to star source, etc. Some scenarios are hopeful and some provoke fear, but for the most part they leave us waiting and/or preparing for something to happen to us. The aim of Barbara and the Shift Network in offering this course is to connect and synergize as many people as possible worldwide, to create both a “map of what’s working” and a pooled field of talents for ecstatic co-creation that is an exponentially potent evolutionary force. Whether we are aware of it or not, we ARE participating in a process of “evolution by choice, not by chance.” So, what do we choose? What do we imagine that we CAN choose?

The SALC’s aim in mirroring the course locally (with lots of room for spontaneity) is to create a participatory, resonant field of infinite possibility right here, and a co-creative, no-dreams-barred vision and action plan for the concentric circles of I—individual, family, community, country, planet. Humanity is now empowered to create the collective reality that we want to live in. This is the evolution foreseen 100 years ago by Sri Aurobindo—human will merging with Divine Will, through progressive union with the essential Self (psychic being, indwelling divine)—the whole evolving consciously and naturally through each one discovering and living the truth of his/her being.

The Center’s regular offerings include:

- Potluck, Savitri reading and meditation, Tuesdays, 6 p.m.
- Conscious Evolution Synergy Group, Thursdays, 7 p.m.
- Library & Meditation Dome
- Guest room w/bath, kitchen privileges, WiFi—\$30/night
- Cozy space for intimate workshops, functions

SALC is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Since Seyril’s passing, the guest house, donations, rents, grants and programs are the principal means of sustaining its vision. We appreciate donations and invite individuals and groups to use the facilities. Please contact SALC for more information: sriaurobndolc@gmail.com, or visit the website: www.sriaurobndolc.org. Our phone number is 719-256-4917.

Auromesa Center

by Tizia O’Connor

Auromesa is a center dedicated to traditional Ayurvedic treatments and Integral Yoga. It is perched on a high mesa between the Rockies and the Rio Grande in a very small village called Arroyo-Hondo in New Mexico. My husband Paul and I built our home here about 20 years ago, and we started the center recently with the help of some others. I offer a wide range of Ayurvedic treatment regimes



Tizia O’Connor. (Photo courtesy www.auromesa.com)

including various types of massage, aquatic body work, weekend retreats, and panchakarma retreats lasting up to 10 days. Kelly Pasholk specializes in flower essence and Reiki energy work for people and their companion animals. With its scenic location along the Rio Grande near natural hot springs, it is an awesome place for peace and wilderness lovers. The center also has library/meditation room and holds weekly meetings involving meditation and readings from *Savitri* and *Mother’s Agenda*.

One of the recent additions to the center is our Labyrinth. One day in early 2009 we had the dream of building a Labyrinth. There are not many distractions in this part of the world and rock gathering is one of the few that we practice intensively. There are many different ways to built Labyrinths. We wanted a Native American one and we ‘googled’ quite intensively to find the location of one, and that one was the only one to be found on the net. It was carved in a big black mountain rock located a mile away from us in Arroyo-Hondo.

During a November retreat at our center we gathered with



Auromesa Center. (Photo courtesy www.auromesa.com)



The stone Labyrinth. (Photo courtesy Auromesa)

other devotees of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and built the core Labyrinth together. It was not so easy, there was lots of geometry involved and while the men were pondering on drawings and directions, the women got impatient and started to build the heart of the Labyrinth around the architects' feet. It took stamina, brain and heart. It took climbing up and down the gorge with a huge rock you have fallen in love with—many times—and always with Mother smiling her sunshine and strength in our limbs.

In 2010, during a Savitri immersion workshop we added Sri Aurobindo's symbol as the entry way into the Labyrinth. People brought some precious stones, and there was much love and reverence from everyone involved, some barely knowing who He is.

Then, this spring, we decided that something was amiss and built the Mother's symbol with many stones taken from Crestone, CO near the Sri Aurobindo center there, and a few that had been brought back from Auroville in my suitcase. Conglomerates that are rare and dreamy, pink stone pad underneath, and white quartz to draw the symbol. The Rocks were coming alive. The feel of the Labyrinth when finished was amazingly happy.

Every Wednesday night before our Savitri immersion, we walk through it in silence under the open eye of the heavens. Birds, light wind, snow and stars are the Labyrinth's closest friends. One day a herd of deer visited the Labyrinth and never displaced a stone; they went to the center and left, only a few prints were to be found.

A Labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering purposeful path, a journey to our own center and back again into the world. Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. As a tool for spiritual growth, the Labyrinth should be approached with reverence during your journey in and out of its center. This Labyrinth is dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Auromesa is one of Savitri's many shores.

For further information, please visit our website at: www.auromesa.com, or feel free to email me at tizia@auromesa.com.

The passing of Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna)

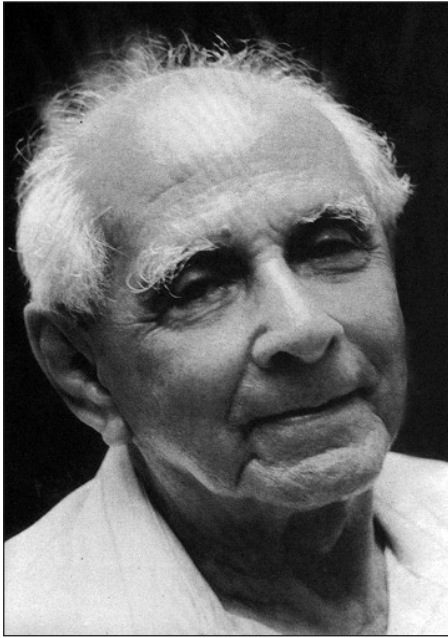
by Anurag Bannerjee

Courtesy the Overman Foundation

On Wednesday, 29 June 2011 at 12:15 p.m., Shri Kaikhushru Dhunjibhoy Sethna alias Amal Kiran left his physical body. He was 106 years of age. Born on 25 November 1904 in a Parsi family, he had his early education at St. Xavier's School and College. At college he won in his Intermediate Arts examination of Bombay University the Hughlings Prize in English and the Selby Scholarship in Logic. He passed his Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Philosophy and won the Ellis Prize in English. His first book 'Parnassians' was published in 1922 and it was a critical analysis of the works of H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, G.K. Chesterson and Thomas Hardy. H.G. Wells had remarked about the young writer to the Parsi author A.S. Wadia: "Your young man will go far."

K.D. Sethna joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at the age of 23 on 16 December 1927. On his request he was given the name of 'Amal Kiran' meaning 'The Clear Ray' by Sri Aurobindo on 3 September 1930. From 1949 he was the editor of the monthly journal 'Mother India'.

Amal Kiran was a multi-faceted genius; he has penned more than fifty scholarly books including volumes on poetry (*The Secret Splendour, The Adventure of the Apocalypse, Overhead Poetry, Altar and Flame* and *Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran*), literary criticism (*Parnassians, Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare, Sri Aurobindo—The Poet, The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo, "Two Loves" and "A Worthier Pen", The Obscure and the Mysterious: A Research in Mallarme's Symbolist Poetry, Blake's Tyger—A Christological Interpretation, Talks in Poetry, The Inspiration of Paradise Lost, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal": An Interpretation From India, Adventures in Criticism, The Thinking Corner, Classical and Romantic: An Approach Through Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo on Greece*), philosophy (*Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo, The Spirituality of the Future, The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo, Aspects of Sri Aurobindo, The Mandukya Upanishad and The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual Thought and the Mother's Contribution to it*), history and culture (*Evolving India, The Indian Spirit and the World's Future, The Problems of Aryan Origin, Karpasa in Prehistoric India, The Sun and the Rainbow, Ancient India in a New Light, The Beginning of History for Israel, India and the World Scene, Problems of Early Christianity, Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time, Problems of Ancient India, The Virgin Birth and the Earliest Christian Tradition etc.*) His volumes of epistolary exchanges (*Life-Poetry-Yoga, Volumes I-III, A Follower of Christ and a Disciple of Sri Aurobindo and The English Language and the Indian Spirit*) are a rare treat where the reader comes to know of his profound erudition as well as his wonderful sense of humour.



Amal Kiran, (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The late Jugal Kishore Mukherjee had rightly remarked about Amal Kiran: "K.D.S.'s shining complexion, his delicate sensitive face, two eyes radiating a keen and kind glint of intelligence and a sweet smile as innocent as that of a child, cannot but captivate the hearts of the visitors."

One of the foremost sadhaks of the Aurobindonian community, Amal Kiran had unreserved devotion and profound love for Sri

Aurobindo and the Mother. He lived for Them and in Them. His deep aspiration is reflected in one of his writings where he says:

From the very beginning of my stay in the Ashram I have sought to quicken to the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from the core of my heart... An inner urge...has yearned for an Unknown surpassing every object of my senses and my thought and making nothing worth while unless that Unknown were first found... There is one single wish running through all the years—and that is to be open more and more to the transforming grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. On each birthday it gets an extra spurt.

I have pledged my whole life to the great Beyond and the deep Within and longed to live in the wide Without with the ego-swamping light from on high and the ego-refining warmth from the secret psyche... I have the conviction that I am in omnipotent hands which at any moment will lift me out of myself and carry me where Time neighbours Eternity.

Amal Kiran was blessed with a long and fruitful life which was a prayer offered to the Divine. Age could not take away the natural sweetness and warmth which existed in him. Unlike others who would shriek at the thought of death, Amal Kiran was ready for it for a number of years. In his own words: "I am doing my best to live long both because I am happy and can give happiness and because I want as much time as possible to go nearer to Sri Aurobindo's luminous Truth and the Mother's radiant Beauty. All the same I am ready to say 'Hurrah' whenever they tell me, "Your time is up."

The Clear Ray is no longer with us physically. But his fond memories would always brighten up our lives.

Briefs

A children's production of *Savitri* was a highlight of AUM 2011 in Lodi, CA. It was based on a script by Saraswati Chávez, the children's program coordinator. Part I featured Narad as Aswapathi, and his disciple from New Jersey, Aurovind Ahluwalia.

Shree Srinivasan played Savitri whose dancing perfectly represented the awakening of the New Dawn. Chait Malik, the oldest child at age 13, was Satyavan. His father, Pravir Malik, was the Voice of the Divine who speaks to Savitri. Falguni Patel guided the play into Savitri's search for her soul in Part II. Her daughter Neeraja was the Goddess of Compassion; Aurolei Braroo and Mirra Singaram respectively played the Goddesses of Might and Light. Mirra's brother, Aravind, played the Lord of Death, just as his father once had as a child.

The family of Ashutosh, Shubhra, Arya and Miransh created the props, assisted by Fiona Om Shanti from Australia, and stage hand Aditya Malik; Arya was also the MC. Assisted by Lily Peryn, Skandha Srinivasan, the youngest participant at age 4, rang the bell for silence.

Photos were taken by Neeraja's father, Kant, who posted them online (https://picasaweb.google.com/kant.patel/AUM2011_20110703). Many others helped, and the audience was warm and appreciative. As the children marched off the stage and out of the conference center, the audience followed, all aptly described in the final reading by Pravir of Sri Aurobindo's "The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn."

Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center has published a new edition of "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother On Collective Yoga" to honor the 80th birthday of editor, Eric Hughes. It is available from SABDA and Matagiri. Eric is the co-founder of Matagiri and continues in his 43rd year of stewardship where he receives visitors daily. Devotees come to this beautiful location in the Catskill mountains 100 miles north of New York to visit the meditation room with its marble Samadhi throughout the year but especially on Darshan days and weekends. Eric shares his insights on Integral Yoga. He reads every Saturday morning at 9 a.m. during a meditation open to the public.

Matagiri has initiated a fund raising campaign for new infrastructure which includes a hall for talks, concerts, hatha yoga and "Awareness Through the Body" exercises. This will include guest and kitchen facilities for visitors, a long-standing wish. A new meditation room is part of the Master plan for the Center. Details are available on the Matagiri website: www.matagiri.org.

The (new) Santa Cruz (CA) Savitri group meets every Wednesday 10 -12 to read together, beginning and ending with a time of silence. Afterwards we enjoy a time of conversation and sharing over tea and snacks. We take turns in meeting in each others homes. Anyone interested visiting the Santa Cruz or Bay Area would be most welcome to join us. Contact June Maher: 831-688-4173, jmaher212@cruzio.com; or Mateo Needham: 831-331-6850, mateoneedham@gmail.com.



AV almanac

About Savitri Bhavan

by Muriel Ghion

Savitri Bhavan is a center in Auroville dedicated to fostering a living sense of Human Unity through spiritual education based on the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Its central focus is Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic *Savitri—A legend and a symbol*.

Savitri Bhavan aims to gather and create, to house and share all kinds of materials and activities that will aid a deeper appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic, of the lives, work and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and of the aims and ideals of Auroville.

Activities at Savitri Bhavan are organised to make Sri Aurobindo's vision accessible to people of very varied psychological types and cultural backgrounds. Outreach activities are held in the four languages of Auroville: English, Tamil, French and Sanskrit. Learning Materials are created and collected to support these activities. Research projects provide new materials. A team of 18 Aurovilians and seven employees is supported by many volunteers and visiting teachers. It is estimated that during 2010 at least 6000 people were involved in or touched by the activities of the Bhavan.

Savitri Bhavan is a project of SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research) Auroville, open to the interested general public seven days a week all through the year.

History

The Foundation Stone of Savitri Bhavan was laid by Dr. Nirodbaran on 24 November 1995, then a master plan and model for the complex was created by architect Helmut and presented on 24 November 1996.

At first, all activities took place under the trees near the site of the Foundation Stone. In early 1998, a keet hut was built where gatherings were held until completion of the first permanent structure, which was inaugurated by Dr. Nirodbaran on 8 August 1999. This building served as the hub of a growing programme of activities over the following years.

In June 2001, Huta entrusted to the Bhavan the entire collection of 472 *Meditations on Savitri* which she had created under the Mother's close guidance and instructions from 1961 to 1966, along with many other related materials and paintings.

In November 2003, work started on a second permanent structure, a large Hall, which was opened on 21 November 2004. This is used for guest lectures and exhibitions.



The main building was officially inaugurated on 29 September 2006 by Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation. (Photo courtesy Savitri Bhavan)

From 2005 onwards, work started on the Main Building of the Campus, with funding from the Government of India under the SAIER Development Scheme. The completed Main Building was opened by Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation on 30 March 2008.

At Dr. Karan Singh's wish, a bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo, similar to those installed in Sri Aurobindo Sadan in Kolkata, the Parliament House in New Delhi, and UNESCO headquarters in Paris, was installed outside Savitri Bhavan on 21 February 2008, as a gift from the Auroville Foundation to Auroville.



Statue of Sri Aurobindo near the entrance to the main hall. (Photo courtesy Savitri Bhavan)

Looking ahead

Further elements of the Campus are yet to be fully realised:

The hostel: A hostel is under construction and requires further funding for completion—the completion date is projected for 24 April 2012.

Since accommodation in Auroville is insufficient, and expensive for many visitors, the aim is to provide free or very moderately priced boarding and lodging within the Savitri Bhavan complex to people offering their services in support of Savitri Bhavan, such as visiting speakers and teachers, students and researchers,



The new hostel is under construction and is expected to be completed by April 2012. (Photo courtesy Savitri Bhavan)

and volunteers. A fund-raising appeal has been launched to complete the hostel.

And also, a Sangam Hall with multimedia facilities will complete the Main Building. Thereafter it is planned to double the size of the Picture Gallery, to enable all the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings to be kept there on permanent display, according to the Mother's wish. The Savitri Park is being developed around the buildings, with inspiration and guidance from Narad (Richard Eggenberger).

Facilities offered by Savitri Bhavan :

- Reception and Information Service: The Reception Desk is open from 9-5 daily, 6 days a week, to receive visitors and answer queries. Queries from students and researchers are also dealt with by e-mail and correspondence. Books, recordings and other learning-materials related to the activities of Savitri Bhavan are available from the Information Service.

- Picture Gallery: displaying the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings made by Huta under the guidance of the Mother, illustrating selected passages from Sri Aurobindo's poem.

- Reading Room: housing a reference collection of books and journals to facilitate study and understanding of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

- Audio-visual Collection: a rich collection of recorded talks, video-films and music relating to *Savitri*, the life and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the aims and ideals of Auroville, for use by groups and individuals

- *Maison de l'Agenda de Mere*—House of Mother's Agenda: created in 1988 to provide access to the *Mother's Agenda*—the Mother's record of her sadhana from 1956–1973. The House of Mother's Agenda has been located at Savitri Bhavan since 2006 under the care of Gangalakshmi.

- Programmes: A programme of regular weekly classes, courses and activities; exhibitions, musical events, guest lectures and film shows, as well as workshops, retreats and orientation sessions, is offered to the interested public.

- Publications: Savitri Bhavan publishes two journals of Study Notes on Savitri: *Invocation* in English, and *Prarthana* in Tamil, in addition to books, booklets and CDs.

- Research

Savitri Bhavan has been created to foster a living research that aids the growth of consciousness. To support all these activities researchers are engaged in developing materials that will foster a deeper

understanding and appreciation of the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the aims and ideals of Auroville. Assistance is also offered to students and researchers in this field from around the world.



Nirodbaran speaking at the inauguration on 8 August 1999. (Photo courtesy Savitri Bhavan)

The Dream

We dream of an environment in Auroville:

- that will breathe the atmosphere of *Savitri*;
- that will welcome *Savitri* lovers from every corner of the world;
- that will be an inspiring centre of *Savitri* studies;
- that will house all kinds of materials and activities to enrich our understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that has come from the Sun.

Support is welcome from everyone who feels that the vibration of *Savitri* will help to manifest a better tomorrow "for earth and men." For more details, please contact:

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Savitri is a Mantra for the transformation of the world.
—The Mother



Chronicles

Savitri—A revelation

by Mona Sarkar

From Mona Sarkar's book, *Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2010.*

When I went to see the Mother on my 26th birthday, She spoke to me first about kindling the psychic flame. Then She spoke about *Savitri*. She had spoken to me about *Savitri* earlier, but this time, it was in a special way, for it was a complete teaching that She revealed. I remained as quiet and as concentrated as I could, in order to assimilate Her words.

Back home, I wanted to note down what the Mother had explained to me about *Savitri*. But something within me kept saying that the task was too difficult, that I would not be capable of rendering it, that it was too beautiful and much too extraordinary and that I would spoil it all. So I put aside the idea of writing down what the Mother had explained.

Years passed, but some phrases kept echoing in my mind, words like: "I have launched myself in a rudderless boat upon the vastness of the infinite." The Mother had spoken to me these magical words of Sri Aurobindo. And likewise there were many others which came floating in occasionally. But even then, I did not like the idea of noting them down. Then, one day, I was advised by Nolini-da to put down what the Mother had told me, and I began my work.

However, seven years had passed. It was a work which I would not have ventured even in my dreams to undertake. I could only try to be as docile and receptive an instrument as possible. I then concentrated and what the Mother had told me, began to come back gradually: "Each verse of *Savitri* is like a Mantra which surpasses all that man possesses by way of knowledge and is arranged in such a way that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to

the origin of sound which is OM.... It is the most beautiful thing He has left for man, the highest possible." So, slowly, bit by bit, almost the whole of it was written down, in French.

Later on, I read to the Mother this report written from memory. She heard it and gave Her blessings. She intended to work anew on the text and make some changes. She started the work but perhaps the time to reveal everything had not come and the circumstances did not allow Her to finish.

The Mother found this report—'Compte-rendu note de memoire' as She called it—'very useful.' She once wrote to a disciple: "...years ago I have spoken at length about it to Mona Sarkar and he has noted in French what I said. Some time back I have seen what he has written and found it correct on the whole."

[In the following, we give the English translation of the conversation on *Savitri*.]

A report noted from memory

Do you read *Savitri*?

Yes, Mother.

You have read the whole of it?

Yes, Mother, I have read it twice.

Have you understood all that you have read?

Not much, but I like poetry, that is why I read it.

It does not matter if you do not understand *Savitri*, read it always. You will see that every time you read it, something new will be revealed to you. Each time you will get a new glimpse, each time a new experience; things which were not there, things you did not understand arise and suddenly become clear. Always an unexpected vision comes up through the words and the lines. Every time you try to read and understand, you will see that something is added, something which was hidden behind is revealed clearly and vividly. I tell you, the very verses you have read once before, will appear to you in a different light each time you re-read them. This is what happens invariably. Always your experience is enriched, it is a revelation at each step.

But you must not read it as you read other books or newspapers. You must read with an empty head, a blank and vacant mind, without there being any other thought; you must concentrate much, remain empty, calm and open; then the words, the rhythms, the vibrations will penetrate directly to this white page, will put their stamp upon the brain, will explain themselves without your making an effort.

Savitri alone is sufficient to make you climb to the highest peaks. If truly one knows how to meditate on *Savitri*, one will receive all the help one needs. For one who wishes to follow this path, it is a visible help, as though the Lord himself were taking you by the hand and leading you to the destined goal. And then, every question, however personal it may be, has its answer here, every difficulty finds here its solution, indeed there is everything that is necessary for doing the Yoga.

He has crammed the whole universe in a single book. It is a marvellous work, magnificent and of an incomparable perfection.

You know, before writing *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo said to me *I am impelled to launch on a new adventure; I was hesitant in the beginning, but now I am decided. Still I do not know how far I shall succeed. I pray for help.* And you know what it was? It was—before beginning, I warn you in advance—it was his way of speaking, so full of humility and divine modesty. He never... *asserted himself.* And the day



he actually began it, he told me: *I have launched myself in a rudderless boat upon the vastness of the Infinite.* And once having started, he wrote page after page without intermission, as though it were a thing already complete up there and he had only to transcribe it in ink down here on these pages.

In truth, the entire form of *Savitri* has descended "en masse" from the highest region and Sri Aurobindo with his genius only arranged the lines—in a superb and magnificent style. Sometimes entire lines were revealed and he has left them intact; he worked hard, untiringly, so that the inspiration could come from the highest possible summit. And what a work he has created! Yes, it is a true creation in itself. It is an unequalled work. Everything is there, and it is put in such a simple, such a clear form; verses perfectly harmonious, limpid and eternally true. My child, I have read so many things, but I have never come across anything which could be compared with *Savitri*. I have studied the best works—in Greek, Latin, English and of course in French literature, also in German and all the great creations of the West and the East, including the great epics; but I repeat it, I have not found anywhere anything like *Savitri*. All these literary works seem to me empty, flat, hollow, without any deep reality—apart from a few rare exceptions, and these too represent only a small fraction of what *Savitri* is. What grandeur, what amplitude, what reality: it is something immortal and eternal he has created. I tell you once again, there is nothing like it in the whole world. Even if one puts aside the vision of the reality, that is, the essential substance which is the heart of the inspiration, and considers only the lines in themselves, one will find them unique, of the highest classical kind. What he has created is something man cannot imagine. For, everything is there, everything.

It may then be said that *Savitri* is a revelation, it is a meditation, it is a quest of the Infinite, of the Eternal. If it is read with this aspiration for Immortality, the reading itself will serve as a guide towards Immortality. To read *Savitri* is indeed to practise Yoga, spiritual concentration; one

can find there all that is needed to realise the Divine. Each step of the Yoga is noted here, including the secret of all other Yogas. Surely, if one follows sincerely what is revealed here in each verse one will finally reach the transformation of the Supramental Yoga. It is truly the infallible guide who never abandons you; its support is always there for him who wants to follow the path. Each verse of *Savitri* is like a revealed Mantra which surpasses all that man possesses by way of knowledge, and I repeat this, the words are expressed and arranged in such a manner that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to the origin of sound, which is OM.

My child, yes, everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, the history of man, of the gods, of creation, of Nature; how the universe was created, why, for what purpose, what destiny—all is there. You can find there all the answers to all your questions. Everything is explained, even the future of man and of the evolution, all that nobody yet knows. He has expressed them in beautiful and clear words so that spiritual adventurers who wish to solve the mysteries of the world may understand it more easily. But the mystery is well hidden behind the lines and one must rise to the required level of true consciousness to discover it. All the prophecies, all that is going to happen is presented with a precise and wonderful clarity. Sri Aurobindo gives you here the key to find the Truth, to discover the Consciousness, to solve the problem of what the universe is. He has also indicated how he has opened the door of the Inconscience so that the light may penetrate there to transform it. He has shown the path, how to liberate oneself from the Ignorance to climb up to the superconsciousness; each stage, each plane of consciousness, how one can scale them, how one can cross the very barrier of death and attain Immortality. You will find the entire route in detail, and as you go forward you can discover things altogether unknown to man. That is what *Savitri* is, and yet much more. It is truly an experience—reading *Savitri*. All the secrets that man possesses, he has revealed

them, as well as all that awaits him in the future; all this is found in the depths of *Savitri*; but one must have the knowledge to discover them,—the experience of the planes of consciousness, the experience of the Supermind, even the experience of the conquest of Death. He has noted all the stages, marked each step needed in order to advance in an integral way in the integral Yoga.

All this is his own experience, and what is most surprising is that it is also my own experience. It is my sadhana which he has described. Each object, each event, each realization, all the descriptions, even the colours are exactly what I saw and the words, the phrases are also exactly what I heard. And all this before having read the book. I read *Savitri* many times afterwards, but earlier, when he was writing he used to read it to me. Every morning I used to hear him read *Savitri*, at night he would write and in the morning read it to me. And I observed something strange, that—day after day, the experiences he read out to me in the morning were those I had had the previous night, word for word. Yes, all the descriptions, the colours, the pictures I had seen, the words I had heard, all, all, I heard it, put by him into poetry, into miraculous poetry. Yes, they were exactly my experiences of the previous night which he read out to me the following morning. And it was not just one day, but for days and days together. And every time I used to compare what he said with my previous experiences and they were always the same. I repeat, it was not that I had told him my experiences and that he had noted them down afterwards, no, he knew already what I had seen. It is my experiences he has presented all along and they were also his experiences. It is, moreover, the picture of our adventure together into the unknown or rather into the Supermind.

These are experiences lived by him, realities, supracosmic truths. He experienced all these as one experiences joy and sorrow in a physical manner. He has walked in the darkness of inconscience, even in the neighbourhood of death, endured the sufferings of perdition, and he has emerged from the mud, the world-misery,



to breathe the sovereign plenitude and enter the supreme Ananda. He has traversed them all, these realms, borne the consequences, suffered and endured physically what one cannot imagine. Nobody till today has suffered like him. He has accepted suffering to transform suffering into the joy of union with the Supreme. It is something unique and incomparable in the history of the world. It is something that has never happened, he is the first to have traced the path in the Unknown so that we may be able to walk with certitude towards the Supermind. He has made the work easy for us. *Savitri* is his whole Yoga of transformation, and this Yoga, it is for the first time that we see it appear in the earth-consciousness.

And I think that man is not yet ready to receive it. It is too high and too vast for him. He cannot understand it, grasp it, for it is not by the mind that one can understand *Savitri*. One needs spiritual experiences in order to understand and assimilate it. The more one advances on the path of Yoga, the more one assimilates and better. No, it is something which will be appreciated only in the future, it is the poetry of tomorrow of which he has spoken in *The Future Poetry*. It is too subtle, too refined,—it is not in the mind or by the mind, it is in meditation that *Savitri* is revealed.

And men have the audacity to compare it and find it inferior in inspiration to that of a Virgil or a Homer. They do not understand, they cannot understand. What do they know? Nothing at all. And it is useless to try to make them understand. It will be known what it is, but in a distant future. It is only the new race with the new consciousness which will be able to understand. I assure you there is nothing under the blue sky to compare with *Savitri*. It is the mystery of mysteries. It is a *super-epic,* it is super-literature, super-poetry, super-vision, it is a super-work even if one considers the number of lines he has written. No, these human words are not adequate to describe *Savitri*. Yes, one needs superlatives, hyperboles to describe it. It is a hyper-epic. No, words express nothing of what *Savitri* is. There are no proper adjectives to describe what *Savitri* is, at

least I do not find them. It is of immense value—spiritual value and all other values; it is eternal in its subject, and infinite in its appeal, miraculous in its mode and power of execution; it is a unique thing, the more you come in contact with it, the higher will you be lifted up. Ah, truly it is something! It is the most beautiful thing he has left for man, the highest possible. What is it? When will man know it? When is he going to lead a life of truth? When is he going to accept this in his life? This yet remains to be known.

My child, everyday you are going to read *Savitri*; read properly, with the right attitude, concentrating a little before opening the pages and trying to keep the mind as empty as possible, absolutely without a thought. The direct road is through that—the heart. I tell you, if you try to really concentrate with this aspiration you can light the flame, the psychic flame, the flame of purification in a very short time, perhaps in a few days. What you cannot do normally, you will do it with the help of *Savitri*. Try and you will see how very different it is, how new, if you read with this attitude, with this something at the back of your consciousness; as though it were an offering to Sri Aurobindo. You know it is charged, fully charged with consciousness; as though *Savitri* were a being, a real Guide. I tell you, whoever wants to practise Yoga, if he tries sincerely and feels the necessity, he will be able to climb with the help of *Savitri* to the highest rung of the ladder of Yoga, will be able to find the secret that *Savitri* represents. And this without the help of a Guru. And he will be able to practise it anywhere. *Savitri* by itself will be his guide, for all that he needs he will find in *Savitri*. If he remains absolutely quiet when he is faced with a difficulty, or when he does not know where to turn in order to go forward and how to overcome obstacles, for all these hesitations and these incertitudes which overwhelm us at every moment, he will have the necessary indications, and the necessary concrete help. If he remains absolutely calm, open, if he aspires sincerely, always he will be as if led by the hand. If he has faith, the will to give himself and the essential sincerity,

he will reach the final goal.

Indeed, *Savitri* is something concrete, living, it is all replete, packed with consciousness, it is the supreme knowledge above all human philosophies, all human religions. It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga, Tapasya, Sadhana, everything, in its single body. *Savitri* has an extraordinary power, it sends out vibrations for him who can receive them, the true vibrations of each stage of consciousness. It is incomparable, it is truth in its plenitude, the Truth Sri Aurobindo brought down on the earth. My child, one must try to find the secret that *Savitri* represents, the prophetic message Sri Aurobindo reveals there for us. This is the work before you, it is hard but it is worth the trouble.

Mother's comments on the text

After having heard the full text, the Mother said:

It is good. Only, I do not remember what I had said. I never remember what I speak. When I speak, it comes down like this (gesture). I speak of things which come down, for the moment, like inspirations and then it is over. When I have spoken once, I do not remember at all. All disappears from my mind. It is so strange that I do not remember the thing that I have spoken just a moment ago. It is like this, my child. When I speak, I say many things which come at that moment, and the next minute—it is gone. That is why I do not remember what I had told you. Well, I do not know. I do not know what I had said. I do not remember anything at all.

But, Mother, how do You find this?

I find it very good. It is all right. Is it you who have written it?

Yes, Mother, I have noted down what You had told me.

Is it your French?

What You had told me, that I have written and then Nolini-da has corrected a bit.

It is good. As an appreciation of *Savitri* it is correct. This is *Savitri*. But I do not remember what I said. That is why, I can say nothing. But all that is said here seems to me correct. It is true. It is good, my child.



Reading *Savitri* for progress and delight

by Shraddhavan

From a talk given on 18 August 2001 at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry, and subsequently published in the journal Invocation, No. 14, February 2002, pp. 25-35.

Friends, it's a great honor for me to be invited to speak to you about *Savitri* and I would like to invoke the presence of the Mother and the Master to be with us and give their illumination during our time together.

Although I am happy to be here, I face you with some trepidation, because this is actually the first time that I will be addressing a large group of informed Aurobindonians like this. In fact I feel very hesitant to speak about *Savitri* at all. As Ananda mentioned when introducing me, my speciality has been reading, and I am going to cheat a little and spend the last portion of our time together simply reading. The title given for this talk is 'Reading *Savitri* for Progress and Delight' and I hope that together we can make a brief survey of different approaches to reading *Savitri*.

Most of you must be familiar with the words of Mother on this topic. She told Norman Dowsett, here in the Ashram, in the 1960s I believe:

For the opening of the psychic, for the growth of consciousness, and even for the improvement of the English it is good to read one or two pages of *Savitri* each day.

And I am sure that many of you here, like Aurobindonians all over the world, are following that practice of reading one or two pages of *Savitri* every day individually at home, as a meditation for yourselves with the aspiration that it will assist you towards opening of the psychic and the growth of consciousness.



Photo courtesy Shraddhavan

But while this is a practice for individual concentration, more and more groups are taking up the practice of reading *Savitri* together, whether regularly or on special occasions. This practice has been going on in Auroville since the very early days there. The Mother gave blessings to several different people to read aloud to groups there regularly. One of those was our friend 'Narad'—the Mother gave him that name in 1972—an Aurovilian from America, a singer and poet, and a gardener. He was looking after the Matrimandir Plant Nursery, and in that beautiful garden he used to read from *Savitri* every Sunday morning to a small gathering. Another was Shyam Sunderji, the Mother's Secretary for Auroville. I remember that at a very difficult time in Auroville's history, some of us used to gather at his house at 8:00 every evening and he would read, and what a help and strength that was to us at that time.

It was shortly afterwards that I made a first experiment at the request of a group of friends, of reading *Savitri* with them for the improvement of English. I am continuing that now at Savitri Bhavan with people who feel a deep inner attraction to *Savitri*, but who for various reasons like to have some help with understanding Sri Aurobindo's vocabulary and sentence structure, and with correct English pronunciation. We read about a page each time. I read first to give the pronunciation, then we go through the passage again to look at difficult words, understand the sentence

construction clearly, get an idea of the surface meaning; and then each of the students has a chance to read for improving their pronunciation. I find that my early students from those first classes in the 1980s have amply rewarded my hopes that by learning English through *Savitri* they would gain a mastery of the English language in its richest scope. I remember one of those students in the beginning complaining, "Well, we are reading poetry and Sri Aurobindo, and it's all very inspiring. But for the work that we are doing we need a lot of legal and commercial vocabulary, and how are we going to get that?" It was amusing for us all to see how Sri Aurobindo answered him, because the passage we read that day—I think it was in Canto 4 of Book One—was full of exactly this kind of vocabulary. We find that, just as it is said of the ancient Indian epic that what is not in the Mahabharata is not in the world, the same can be said about *Savitri*. The whole universe with all its planes is there, all human experience is there, and the whole width and depth and richness of the English language is there. But of course this approach, of reading *Savitri* for the improvement of English, benefits people when they have some inner opening, inner response to it. Then what happens is that the lines that we read together and that they read again for themselves sink very, very deep into the consciousness and there they do their work—a work that includes building up connections in the physical brain that enables them at a later stage to gain a spontaneous understanding and mastery of the language. I have seen this process take effect many times, but as I say it works for those in whom there is a soul response to *Savitri*—and that is the theme I will be coming back to again and again this morning.

Another way of reading *Savitri*, which I believe is practised in many groups, particularly perhaps here in India, is as a kind of sacrifice: to read the whole of *Savitri* from beginning to end; this is usually done during a particular period of special days. A practice of continuous reading, sometimes for 24 hours a day, covering the whole of *Savitri*. In Auroville too we have



observed such a practice; for example, during the month of February 2000 which had 29 days. Starting on the first day of that special month, people met regularly, reading for an hour or an hour and a half each day to complete the reading of the whole poem during that one month period. At a normal reading speed it takes about 40 hours to read all the 49 cantos.

I know some individuals who make this their daily practice: starting at the beginning and reading a canto or half a canto every day till they reach the end and then starting at the beginning again, and in that way they have gone through the whole of *Savitri* many times. When this is done in groups there's really no doubt that by this going through the whole sound-body of the epic from beginning to end aloud, there must be built up a very strong force field of vibrations. It is definitely of benefit to the people who participate in it. But again I would say that the effect or benefit of this sacrifice will be richer to the extent that the reading is done with understanding and above all with soul surrender. It shouldn't become a mere ritual. Sri Aurobindo's mantric lines, repeated one after the other, will always have their power; but the power will be much greater if the mind can participate, and the will and the heart.

I have also heard of some groups who select one line that seems to have a particular mantric power and then within the group they chant that line many, many times. They concentrate on that one special line, and try to take its vibrations deep into themselves. Again I am sure that this is very beneficial to those who practice it. In that way the words enter very deeply into the consciousness. There they resonate and do their work, and perhaps not just the surface meaning but the deeper meaning and the deeper vibrations may reveal their full depth to those who undertake this exercise if it is done with self-dedication, with a true aspiration to internalise the heart of the meaning, not just as a mere repetition.

At another end of the spectrum of possible approaches to *Savitri*, we can say there would be the aesthetic approach,

the approach of enjoying it for its poetic beauty. I met a gentleman a couple of months ago, who told me, "We have faith in Sri Aurobindo, but it is so difficult to understand his books. We tried with *The Life Divine*, we tried with *The Synthesis of Yoga* but we found them so difficult. But when we read *Savitri*, even though we don't understand, we get many pictures, many inner experiences, all kinds of inner movements." So this poetic appeal, the beauty and suggestiveness of *Savitri* might be one reason why *Savitri* has overtaken *The Life Divine* as Sri Aurobindo's "bestseller." It used to be that everybody who wanted to make an attempt to come close to Sri Aurobindo would buy *The Life Divine*—perhaps feeling that even if they didn't manage to read it at least they had it, and that maybe one day they will read it. So I'm told that now *Savitri* has taken this position. More and more people are feeling that although *Savitri* is such an immense ocean of mysteries, they can dip their toes in it, even if they can't yet swim and revel in its deeper waves.

Of course, this kind of poetic appreciation will be enhanced by some natural capacity to respond to poetry and by some knowledge about poetry. Sri Aurobindo has provided us, in this one poem, with supreme examples of all the different types of poetry that poetry-lovers relish. There is wonderful nature poetry in *Savitri*. There are wonderful passages of lyrical love poetry in *Savitri*. There is masterly sustained narrative and story-telling in certain sections of *Savitri*. There is supreme philosophical poetry carrying profound knowledge to satisfy our thought capacity. As he has shown in all his poetical output, Sri Aurobindo is the supreme Master of every range of poetic expression. And here in his masterwork, which he spent so many years of his life perfecting, he has enormously expanded the capacities of the English language and created a whole new subtle rhythm to carry all these many different kinds of poetic tones. There is no other poet in English who has the same special music which is characteristic of *Savitri*. This is something that should be appreciated by all lovers of poetry, lovers of English literature.

But we find that the academics in the universities in England, the professional poetry specialists, have not opened up to this. They have not yet accorded Sri Aurobindo the recognition that he deserves as the supreme poet in the English language. This is because he is breaking new ground, using techniques that they are not familiar with, and above all because they lack the soul response that would enable them to enter into that new thing that he is doing. So this particular delight is open to only to those whose souls are touched by Sri Aurobindo and his poetic expression.

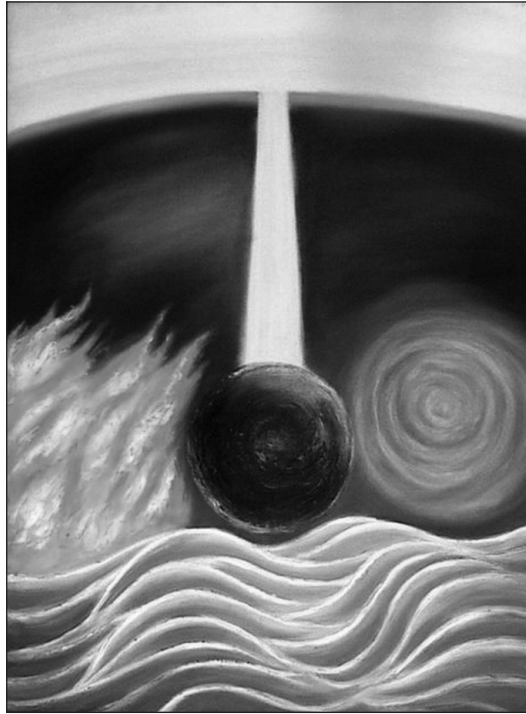
The true role of all art, Sri Aurobindo tells us, is to go beyond the appearances and surfaces of things and to reveal something of their deeper truth and power. The true artist is one who is able to reach the higher levels of his aesthetic being and there gain access to those tracts of glorious beauty and power which have not yet been reached by nature's evolutionary process, which are still lying waiting for us in the future. And one thing that the true artist can do is to go behind the surface into those subtle planes, those higher planes, and bring forms from there closer to our human consciousness. This is so whether he is working with painting, sculpture, music or through words. And when we respond to those artistic creations, we are also participating in that movement of bringing those beings and those possibilities from higher and more beautiful worlds closer to our human world. This is the true role of the artist, and the deepest value of Art.

Perhaps you know about the work that the Mother has done with Huta, of capturing certain images from selected passages of *Savitri* in painting. At that time she told Huta, "These are beings. It is not just paint on canvas." Through this conscious work that they have done together or that the Mother did through Huta's hands, beings and vibrations from those other worlds have been fixed in physical form. This immense work allows a very great enrichment of our understanding and appreciation of *Savitri*, and we feel deeply honoured by the fact that those paintings have now been given into the



care of Savitri Bhavan. At the moment they are in storage with us, but we hope the day will come when we will be able to have them all on permanent exhibition as the Mother had wished. Then not only will they continue to do their work of radiating those subtle levels of consciousness into the human atmosphere, but we will all have permanent access to them. This will be a very, very great enrichment and mark the fulfilment of part of our dream for Savitri Bhavan from the very beginning. We never dared to speak about this dream, but there was the hope that if we could create the proper place perhaps one day they would come to us. And now that they have been given into our care, we look forward to the day when we will have the very special art gallery where they can all be on permanent display in ideal and very secure conditions, to enhance our ever-deeper contact with the marvel that is *Savitri*.

If we move on from the aesthetic aspect, the aspect of artistic beauty and its power, another approach to *Savitri*, and another part of our work at Savitri Bhavan, lies in the realm of study. For there is not only the physical body of this poem with its sound, its rhythms, not only the beautiful images which can delight our sense of aesthetic beauty, it also contains and carries, translated into terms that human minds can access, Supreme Truths. Sri Aurobindo has brought those high truths close to us, in such a way that our minds can get some small touch of those higher truths through the evocative work that he has done with mantric language. This intellectual understanding is not the whole of the story. It will not be possible even to grasp it, unless, as with the other kinds of enjoyment, there is a soul opening. But the intellect, the mind, is the highest level that has so far been established in natural evolution. We human beings carry that power. Sri Aurobindo has emphasized that the mind is not to be left out, in fact it is to be made an instrument of the future development. So reading *Savitri* with as much intellectual understanding as we can manage enables us to enter more deeply



"Earth is the chosen place." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

into what Sri Aurobindo is saying there; enjoying as fully as possible all the allusions that he makes to different literatures to enrich his poem, or even just having a general understanding of the development of the poem—all this can help us very much. So we make a place for that kind of approach too in our programs at Savitri Bhavan, and we are very grateful to all the guest speakers who have come and shared with us their insights and the fruits of their sacrifice of *Savitri* study. Let us just review these different ways of reading.

Perhaps that first kind, where the emphasis is on faith and devotion rather than understanding, we can call 'bhakta reading.' We concentrate and aspire that illumination shall come, and we get the benefit of the sound values whether we read aloud or silently to ourselves. In this connection two things are important: with all poetry it is true, but it is particularly and specially true with Sri Aurobindo's poetry that the sound values of the words and rhythm are so important in the whole effect that it is advisable to read aloud if possible, even when we are reading alone, to ourselves. And if there are reasons why you can't read

out loud, then at least try to read it word by word at the aloud reading pace, sounding each word in your mind, in order to get as much as possible the value of each word, each line.

I have also heard of people who write out passages from *Savitri* in a similar spirit. I believe our elder brother Madhavji Pandit has advised some people that if their mind is troubled, if they are finding it difficult to concentrate, then to sit down and write out a page or two from *Savitri*. I can personally vouch for the fact that this does produce a special quality of concentration, for we are involving our body in the concentration. I know of one artist who used to come here to Pondicherry—a wonderful artist from Holland. With immense concentration he has written out the whole of *Savitri* on a single large sheet of our Ashram handmade paper, writing and writing again and writing over and over again. I haven't seen that sheet of paper, but I would like to see it. It must be charged with immense energy. So we could say that this is a kind of 'bhakta approach.'

Then there is this aesthetic approach we spoke of, the enjoyment of beauty at different levels; and thirdly the intellectual level where we study and try to absorb through our minds as best we can, as much as possible of what is Sri Aurobindo is communicating.

There are two other approaches I would like to mention. One perhaps you may know of. The Mother has mentioned that *Savitri* is an ideal book to consult for guidance from our higher and innermost being. We can use it as an "oracle." If we have some problem we want to receive guidance about, we can start by putting our question to the Divine with some concentration. If we like we may write it down, for it is important to formulate our question as clearly as possible. Then we take up the book and, still with concentration, open it. We may do this with closed eyes, and with the left hand to avoid too much interference from our normal active everyday mentality. Then we open our eyes and see the lines before us. In them there



is likely to be some message that comes to us from our own true highest being, a message which our soul can recognize. Perhaps many of you might have had this experience and can confirm it.

In this connection, I would also like to mention the role of translations. I met a lady the other day who told me that from the first time that she opened *Savitri*, she felt that it represented her own soul speaking to her. Now this is a very remarkable experience, considering that she read *Savitri* in a German translation. And ever since then, her contact to *Savitri* has been through this German translation—which informed people consider to be unsatisfactory in many respects. This proves, I think, that what we contact most deeply in *Savitri* is the subtle truth in it, the power behind, and that the words on the page are just a help and a channel for that. You may know that the Mother herself has translated quite large passages of *Savitri* into French, and that she concluded that it is impossible, that *Savitri* cannot be translated. There is no way to do it and she was not at all satisfied with her translation. Nevertheless when people approached her and said, “You know, I really feel the urge to translate *Savitri* into my own language,” normally she encouraged them. Because this was a way for them to bathe in the atmosphere of *Savitri*, to come into contact with it in a very special close relationship. So while I think we have to say that probably all translations cannot but fail to carry the whole of *Savitri*, this is no reason for not attempting them and they may be helpful. Translations have their role to play, both in helping people towards an intellectual understanding and, as we’ve seen in the case of that German lady, some kind of direct soul contact may become possible through the channel of an translation, even though it is imperfect.

But we shouldn’t consider any of these translations as definitive, just as we shouldn’t consider any of our readings and understandings and interpretations as definitive. There is a passage in *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo warns us against tying up the sacred book in silken strings of interpretation, saying, “It means this,

it doesn’t mean anything else.” Whatever intellectual interpretation we may give to *Savitri*, it still has resonances which lie far beyond our interpretations and which can awaken new understandings in our minds and new movements in our beings. So we should be very careful about this. Now it is still the early days, for the time being perhaps we are not really in danger of this. But there is a possibility that in the future certain interpretations might become fixed and accepted. We should beware of any rigidity of this kind.

All this amounts to saying that behind these various different kinds of approach and response lies the deeper response of our souls. If that is missing, the continuous reading becomes just a ritual, aesthetic appreciation may hardly be possible, study and intellectual understanding runs the risk of becoming stereotyped. What truly attracts us to *Savitri*, what truly prompts us to read this book as a means of progress, is the delight of the soul. Its delight in recognizing, expressed in perfectly appropriate images, rhythms, word-music, its own beauty—the soul’s own beauty, its own depth, its own diversity, its own knowledge, its own native atmosphere.

Savitri deserves a type of reading that would give us all these things: the power of the words and the rhythm, the sound power, the mantric effect, the aesthetic delight, the intellectual illumination and the conscious soul thrill. The soul thrill is behind all those other forms of delight, but we would get most delight and most progress if we could come into conscious contact with that soul thrill.

Now it so happens that the Mother has mentioned, in connection with listening to her music, a method that might help us towards that integral kind of reading. She said that when we are listening to her organ music, we shouldn’t just be hearing the harmony with our surface ears. We should try to quieten our whole being, making it as still as possible, and then listen to her music from the deepest heart center, in such a way that the movements and notes of her music would seem to be taking place within our own consciousness, as if we ourselves are creating that

music, playing that music. This is a kind of listening through identification. Of course to start with, it will be only an imaginative identification; but this may lead us to a deeper state of identification with the inner movement of the music. This has a resemblance too to the way that Mother said that she and Huta approached the painting work. First they would read the passage, the Mother would read out the passage. If we hear those recordings which Huta made, around which Sunil-da has composed his *Savitri* music, we can notice with what concentration the Mother has read those passages. After the reading they concentrated in silence. Whatever image came up then, the Mother would describe it to Huta, giving her instructions how to paint it; and Huta had to go home and complete the canvas. So, if you like, we can make a kind of experiment together, trying to read and listen to *Savitri* in this way, in this state of inner concentration.

Before we try that, I would like to say that every single one of Sri Aurobindo’s books, all his writings, every little letter, is a window onto a vast coherent body of Truth; and because of the process by which he has written, all of them are charged with the plenary power of his consciousness. This is what attracts us to Sri Aurobindo’s writings. I recall one friend in Auroville, who described to me how *The Life Divine* came into his hands: he said he couldn’t put it down for three weeks. He said he was just totally absorbed in *The Life Divine*. He felt he was swimming in an ocean of delight and consciousness. Other people can tell how a single sentence in a brief letter has been enough to change their lives. Even his books like *The Human Cycle* or *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which are addressed more to the reason and the intelligent will, are carrying an immense charge of soul-electricity from far beyond the mind. This is true of all his writings, but nevertheless the Mother has given a special place among the whole body of Sri Aurobindo’s works to *Savitri*, calling it “The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision.”

So what is this specially illuminating and uniquely delightful quality and power



Essays

Savitri: A brief introduction

by Kailas Jhaveri

This essay was included in Kailas' book, "I am with you," vols. II-III, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2008, pp. 426-446.

of this work? My answer for myself is that *Savitri* is integral in its appeal to all the different planes of our being, of our capacity of response and appreciation, and it is of course integral in its scope. You know that the Mother has said that "He has packed the entire universe into one book." You also know, I am sure, that Sri Aurobindo spoke of himself as primarily a poet. I think he would have been a remarkable poet even if he had never taken up first politics and revolution, and then yoga. I think we would still have heard his name as a figure in English literature. Having devoted himself to an immense spiritual realization, through *Savitri* he consciously took up the work of giving expression in poetry to whatever higher levels of consciousness he was able to securely achieve. And he went on successively revising as more and more capacity of expression became available to him. In this immense work he has surely succeeded in doing what he said the mantra must do. In *The Future Poetry* he writes :

The Mantra is the word that carries the godhead in it or the power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute, perpetuate the miracle of the supreme utterance. (CSWA 26:313)

This is what he has done in *Savitri*.

That is why I would request you to join me in this little experiment and indulge me in my delight in reading *Savitri*. I would like to read the first four pages of Book One Canto One, "The Symbol Dawn." And I would request you to try to do this quietening of the consciousness, listening from the deepest inmost centre and trying to follow from there, through identification, the movement of dawning which is described in these four pages, the movement from the dark resistance of our normal material consciousness, to the first quiver of aspiration, then the response of the divine light, becoming gradually a beautiful magical dawn and finally the full light of consciousness.

Savitri is a magnificent epic poem of over 23,803 lines, covering such a vast range of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experiences on all the levels of consciousness in the most powerful mantric language that it beautifully evokes the mystic images of these planes of consciousness. I would like to quote these passages, but it is difficult to introduce the subjects in such a short space. This is just an introduction, which I hope will inspire you to read the original which contains not only an inexhaustible treasure of knowledge, but many uplifting passages to fill you with an unsurpassable delight.

The story of Savitri and Satyavan is a classical legend taken from the Mahabharata. Sri Aurobindo turns this legend into a beautiful symbol of His own spiritual experiences, keeping intact the main lines of the development of the story. The legend achieves its most profound significance in the hands of Sri Aurobindo.

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



Kailas in 1970. (Photo courtesy Kailas Jhaveri)

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.

Satyavan is the soul, carrying the divine truth of being within himself, but unconscious of it due to the soul's original descent into the grip of the Inconscient from which it has evolved. He has developed into a fine being, but his is a search for reconciliation between the Self and the world or between Spirit and Matter. It is not by renouncing the world and its forms, but by an active participation in it that he seeks to establish Truth in the very conditions of this terrestrial life. He has tried to realise this but in vain. However, he feels the possibility of this realization in his meeting with Savitri.

Aswapati means the Lord of Tapasya or Energy. The name literally means the Lord of the Horse, but in spiritual parlance the horse signifies energy. Aswapati by his spiritual askesis represents the controlled and concentrated energy of a spiritual endeavour. Sri Aurobindo describes His own spiritual experiences through Aswapati.



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 first canto is vividly and penetratingly described in symbolic language, introducing the central theme of the epic, which is the work *Savitri* has come to do by confronting Death, Time and Fate to establish a promise and a hope for the light of a New Consciousness in the heart of the earth.

Sri Aurobindo chooses one particular night before 'the day when Satyavan must die' to represent the state of the Inconscient universe before the very beginning of creation. He opens the canto with the most striking line:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

Sri Aurobindo gives a powerful description of the Night through many symbols and vividly striking images, created out of His own spiritual experience:

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'
marge.

One must mark the subtle meaning of each chosen word and phrase: 'foreboding mind of Night,' 'unlit temple of eternity,' 'Lay stretched immobile' and 'upon Silence' marge.' There is inertia and unwillingness in the deep darkness of the night to receive the light. The mind of the night is secretly aware of the coming event, but dreads this since it would disturb the peace of its sleep. The earth which is the self-chosen temple of a great Divinity was still unlit, because the foreboding mind of night lay there stretched out immobile in torpor on the brink of Silence.

It is the most powerful description of

the Night to make us aware of the state of the rock of Inconscient Matter whose deep darkness refuses any ray of light to enter. As Sri Aurobindo says, 'one who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness.' We are poignantly enlightened by the intensity of His spiritual experience and power of creative faculty which are maintained throughout the epic.

Besides the images seen in His own vision, Sri Aurobindo uses universal symbols as well as those images peculiar to the Indian mystics which are often present in the Vedas. These images are authentic experiences of Sri Aurobindo and therefore effective in transmitting the force of His experience. He is the *drista* (seer) who sees the vision by the power of His consciousness and he is also the *kavi* (poet) who expresses his spiritual experiences in an inspired flow of verse, charged with mantric force carrying all the subtle and deep vibrations of His experience.

As Sri Aurobindo explains: 'A symbol expresses not a play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but 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 be brought out except through symbolic images.'

One must read *Savitri* again and again with one-pointed concentration and in silence to feel the impact of 'the abyss of the unbodied Infinite' when 'a fathomless zero occupied the world.' It was a bottomless, unfathomable emptiness or an abyss of the infinite Zero. But this is not the zero of the Buddhists—*shunya* or *Nihil*. It is the Zero that contains all in its silent bosom.

In the very beginning the movement of Nature is blind and mechanical—'eyeless'—not knowing the purpose of existence or its goal and without any conscious control over it. It does its work like a somnambulist who is unconscious of his acts while in sleep. But this is a creative slumber—'eyeless muse'. Yet one wonders, out of these seemingly mechanical orbit-

ings of the earth what can emerge in the heavy stupor of Nescience?

Earth wheeled abandoned in the
hollow gulfs
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.
The impassive skies were neutral,
empty, still.

But the Supreme Consciousness is there involved in its extreme opposite state of Nescience, secretly waiting to evolve as a tree waits in its seed. So,

Something that wished but knew not
how to be
Teased the Inconscient to wake
Ignorance....
And a blank Prescience yearned
towards distant change....
Insensibly somewhere a breach
began....

The goddess Dawn sends out a scout of reconnaissance to find out if there is a place on earth to receive her, meaning any opening in the rock of the Inconscient. Sri Aurobindo gives us a vision of the beginning of creation out of inconscient Matter and its gradual evolution by the slow penetration of a ray of the light of consciousness through a slight crack in Matter, an opening, revealing its willingness to receive it. And we begin to see the emergence of the goddess Dawn in her full glory and splendour, representing a promise and a hope for the Supramental Light, which is the work *Savitri* has come to fulfil on earth. Thus 'Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues' and left her message of grandeur and greatness on earth.

Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy....
All can be done if the God-touch is there....
The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.



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.

Sri Aurobindo introduces the heroine of the epic by the most magnificently sublime description of Savitri as an emanation of the Divine Mother on earth. It is so powerful in its mantric effect that when read with absolute silence and profound receptivity, one is filled with the power of Savitri's character. As a matter of fact, all knowledge and powers are within oneself, but in order to realise them, one must first silence the mind, its narrow, half-lit knowledge and beliefs, doubts and questionings and reach the profound depths of one's being, where the true individual godhead lies hidden.

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.

We travel with Aswapati, the protagonist and forerunner of humanity, through the typical worlds of Consciousness. We descend with him into the abyss of Night and enter into the region of the Inconscient and Ignorance. We see there the world of Falsehood, meet the Mother of Evil and the sons of Darkness. As Sri Aurobindo writes: 'None can reach heaven who has

not passed through hell.' But He reminds us again and again:

A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
Await discovery in our summit selves;
Unmeasured breadths and depths of
being are ours.

It is the story of the evolutionary march of man from the Inconscient Matter to the Superconscient Spirit. And as we journey with this world traveller Aswapati, the leader of humanity, to the highest region of Consciousness, presided over by the Divine Mother, we discover the significance of our birth in Time and find the key to our magnificent evolutionary destiny. Through this journey of Aswapati, Sri Aurobindo lets us know that this world is neither a chance, nor a whim, nor an illusion or Maya. There is a purpose and a plan in human birth and its struggles which finally lead man to the divine manifestation on earth. Till then, '... never can the mighty traveller rest.... And never can the mystic voyage cease.'

He stood fulfilled on the world's highest line
Awaiting the ascent beyond the world,
Awaiting the Descent the world to
save....
Infinity swallowed him into shoreless
trance:
As one who sets his sail towards
mysteried shores
Driven through huge oceans by the
breath of God,
The fathomless below, the unknown
around,
His soul abandoned the blind star-
field, Space.

For Aswapati this was not the end of his search. He had travelled to find an answer to the problems of the earth and to build the kingdom of heaven on earth. He awaits the Word that is born from the supreme Silence.

Towards the end of Aswapati's journey, in Book III, Sri Aurobindo gives us the most poignantly luminous and inspired revelation of the Divine Mother. Here,

Aswapati partakes of the Truth, Beauty and Bliss of this highest plane, but he feels himself powerless to help his brethren below on earth. He therefore appeals to the Divine Mother to send down upon earth a ray of Her consciousness embodied in a human form. A Voice speaks to him:

O son of strength who climbst
creation's peaks...
...but ask no more....
All things shall change in God's
transfiguring hour....
I ask thee not to merge thy heart of
flame
In the Immobile's wide uncaring bliss...
Aloof from beings, lost in the Alone.
Thy soul was born to share the laden
Force;
Obey thy nature and fulfil thy fate....

The Divine Mother tells him that man is not yet ready for such an event: 'Man is too weak to bear the Infinite's weight. Truth born too soon might break the imperfect earth.... All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.' Aswapati boldly replies:

'I know that thy creation cannot fail.'
But 'How shall I rest content with
mortal days[?]
How long shall our spirits battle with
the Night[?] ...
Where in the greyness is thy coming's
ray?
Where is the thunder of thy victory's
wings? ...

He pleads earnestly with a powerful cry from his heart:

O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the
universe,
Creatrix, the Eternal's artist Bride,
Linger not long with thy transmuting
hand
Pressed vainly on one golden bar of
Time,
As if Time dare not open its heart to
God....
Incarnate the white passion of thy
force,



Mission to earth some living form of thee....
Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.

The Mother hears his ardent prayer and grants him this boon:

One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power....
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come....
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.

Savitri, a portion of the Divine Mother, is born as Aswapati's daughter. We go through the period of her growth and youth. She searches for a partner equal to herself among her companions, but in vain:

They could not keep up with her tireless step;...
For even the close partners of her thoughts
Who could have walked the nearest to her ray,
Worshipped the power and light they felt in her
But could not match the measure of her soul....
Her greater self lived sole, unclaimed, within.

Then, her father, Aswapati, king of Madra, sends her out to different countries to find her soul-mate. Finally, she finds Satyavan cutting wood in the forest. The meeting of Satyavan and Savitri is described beautifully with a short discourse on love.

Erect and lofty like a spear of God
His figure led the splendour of the morn....
The joy of life was on his open face.

His look was a wide daybreak of the gods,
His head was a youthful Rishi's touched with light,
His body was a lover's and a king's....
...the god touched in time her conscious soul....
Her soul flung wide its doors to this new sun....

He turned to the vision like a sea to the moon....
He met in her regard his future's gaze,
A promise and a presence and a fire,
Saw an embodiment of aeonic dreams....
A spell to bring the Immortal's bliss on earth....

To live, to love are signs of infinite things,
Love is a glory from eternity's spheres....
He is still the Godhead by which all can change....
The mist was torn that lay between two lives;
Her heart unveiled and his to find her turned; ...
A moment passed that was eternity's ray,
An hour began, the matrix of new Time."

When she returns home radiant and happy, the heavenly sage Narad is present. Savitri reveals her choice to her father who asks Narad for his blessings. Narad praises Satyavan but when pressed, reveals that he is destined to die at the end of twelve months of their marriage. The queen, perturbed by this revelation, asks Savitri to choose once more. Irrevocably, Savitri replies:

Once my heart chose and chooses not again....
My heart has sealed its troth to Satyavan....
Its seal not Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve....
Let Fate do with me what she will or can;
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate....

Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will.

The queen tries to reason with Savitri:

Only the gods can speak what now thou speakest.
Thou who art human, think not like a god....

But Savitri replied with steadfast eyes:

My will is part of the eternal will,
My fate is what my spirit's strength can make,
My fate is what my spirit's strength can bear;
My strength is not the titan's, it is God's....

Only now for my soul in Satyavan
I treasure the rich occasion of my birth:..
I have seen God smile at me in Satyavan;
I have seen the Eternal in a human face.

Here in the 'Book of Fate' Sri Aurobindo gives us, through the discussion that takes place between the Queen, Aswapati and Narad, an excellent insight into the problem of Fate and how it can be resolved. Through Narad's words of wisdom to the queen who feels herself to be 'a wanderer in this beautiful sorrowful world', where everything seems to her 'Illusion's reign', the soul 'only a dream' and 'Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance', we receive Sri Aurobindo's insight:

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?
Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives:..
O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face....
Thy mind's light hides from thee the Eternal's thought,
Thy heart's hopes hide from thee the Eternal's will,
Earth's joys shut from thee the Immortal's bliss....



Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
The soul would have laid down, content, at ease.
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun....
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould....
O mortal who complainst of death and fate...
Thou art thyself the author of thy pain.

Narad continues his discourse on Fate, answering Aswapati's query whether the Power Savitri is born with is not 'the high compeer of Fate':

A greatness in thy daughter's soul resides
That can transform herself and all around,
But must cross on stones of suffering to its goal....
O King, thy fate is a transaction done
At every hour between Nature and thy soul
With God for its foreseeing arbiter....
Sometimes one life is charged with earth's destiny,
It cries not for succour from the time-bound powers.
Alone she is equal to her mighty task....
O queen, stand back from that stupendous scene....
God-given her strength can battle against doom....
Intrude not twixt her spirit and its force
But leave her to her mighty self and Fate.

Then Narad leaves, chanting in 'a high and far imperishable voice... the anthem

of eternal love'.
Finally, Savitri is married to Satyavan and goes to live in the simple dwelling with Satyavan, son of Dyumatsena, the blind and exiled king. The word Dyumatsena literally means a "master of light" and "lord of the shining hosts." Here significantly, his luminous mind, encased in the ignorant mental consciousness of man, has lost the vision of the celestial kingdom.
Savitri performs all her duties gracefully and lovingly, keeping the knowledge of her fate secret to herself and happily spends her days with Satyavan, inwardly preparing to meet her destined fate.

Still veiled from her was the silent
Being within
Who sees life's drama pass with unmoved eyes,
Supports the sorrow of the mind and heart
And bears in human breasts the world and fate.
A glimpse or flashes came, the Presence was hid.

First, she thinks that if Satyavan dies, she too will die with him. What need is left for her to live? The human part of Savitri was still unaware of her inner strength.
And when she is sitting silent, a Voice touches her and her body becomes a 'rigid golden statue of motionless trance, a stone of God lit by an amethyst soul.' It is as if the spirit seated within questions her:

"Why camest thou to this dumb deathbound earth...
Tied like a sacrifice on the altar of Time,
O spirit, O immortal energy,
If 'twas to nurse grief in a helpless heart
Or with hard tearless eyes await thy doom?
Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death."

Savitri answers like any ordinary woman:

"My strength is taken from me and given to Death,

Why should I lift my hands to the shut heavens,
Or struggle with mute inevitable Fate
Or hope in vain to uplift an ignorant race
Who hug their lot and mock the saviour Light...."

Savitri is ready to forget man and life, forget even Eternity's call, and forget God. The Voice questions her:

"Is this enough, O spirit?
And what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows
The work was left undone for which it came? ...
Cam'st thou not down to open the doors of Fate,
The iron doors that seemed forever closed,
And lead man to truth's wide and golden road
That runs through finite things to eternity?"

She is awakened to the power within which answers to the still voice:

"I am thy portion here charged with thy work,
As thou myself seated forever above,
Speak to my depths, O great and deathless Voice,
Command, for I am here to do thy will."

A silent communion takes place within her. She hears the command of the Voice:

"Remember why thou cam'st:
Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self,
In silence seek God's meaning in thy depths,
Then mortal nature change to the divine.
Open God's door, enter into his trance.
Cast Thought from thee, that nimble ape of Light:
In his tremendous hush stilling thy brain
His vast Truth wake within and know and see.



Cast from thee sense that
veils thy spirit's sight:
In the enormous emptiness of
thy mind
Thou shalt see the Eternal's
body in the world,
Know him in every voice
heard by thy soul:...
All things shall fold thee
into his embrace.
Conquer thy heart's throbs,
let thy heart beat in God:
Thy nature shall be the
engine of his works,
Thy voice shall house the
mightiness of his Word:
Then shalt thou harbour
my force and conquer
Death."

She looked into herself and
sought for her soul....
There are greatnesses within
in our unseen parts
That wait their hour to step
into life's front:
We feel an aid from deep
indwelling Gods:
One speaks within, Light
comes to us from above.



First creation. (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

Then, we move with Savitri
discovering the inner countries of
sense life, life force and the mental region,
'the home of cosmic certainty'. Savitri sees
the enormous powers of the mind. But she
presses forward crying out to the powers
to reveal to her 'the birthplace of the oc-
cult Fire'. One of the powers answered her:
'Follow the world's winding highway to its
source. There in the silence...thou shalt see
the Fire burning...and the deep cavern of
thy secret soul.'

Savitri meets the triple soul-forces of
Sympathy, Pity and Love, Might or Power
and Light, who give a temporary relief to
the problems which besiege humanity, but
cannot resolve them permanently. Savitri
recognises them as parts of herself, though
incomplete. She promises that one day she
would return with the perfect force of
consciousness to help them.

Onward she passed seeking the soul's
mystic cave.
At first she stepped into a night of
God.
The light was quenched that helps the
labouring world,
The power that struggles and
stumbles in our life;
This inefficient mind gave up its
thoughts,
The striving heart its unavailing
hopes....
In a simple purity of emptiness
Her mind knelt down before the
unknowable....
Her self was nothing, God alone was
all,
Yet God she knew not but only knew
he was....
At last a change approached, the
emptiness broke...

There was no step of breathing
men, no sound,
Only the living nearness of the
soul.
Yet all the worlds and God
himself were there...
She felt herself made one with
all she saw.
A sealed identity within her
woke;
She knew herself the Beloved
of the Supreme:
These Gods and Goddesses
were he and she:
The Mother was she of Beauty
and Delight...
Then through a tunnel dug in
the last rock
She came out where there
shone a deathless sun.
A house was there all made of
flame and light
And crossing a wall of doorless
living fire
Then suddenly she met her
secret soul.
A being stood immortal in
transience...
The Spirit's conscious repre-
sentative,
God's delegate in our humanity,
Comrade of the universe, the
Transcendent's ray,
She had come into the mortal body's
room
To play at ball with Time and Cir-
cumstance....
There was no wall severing the soul
and mind,
No mystic fence guarding from the
claims of life.
In its deep lotus home her being sat
As if on concentration's marble seat,
Calling the mighty Mother of the
worlds
To make this earthly tenement her
house.

A transformation of her being was
achieved by which 'every act of Savitri
became an act of God'. Thus her body be-
came a firm ground for the descending
light and bliss of God. And the mind cries



out victoriously: 'A camp of God is pitched in human time.'

Then, once when she was trying to make her joy a bridge between earth and heaven, suddenly she experienced an abyss beneath her heart, saying: 'I am Death... I am Kali...I am Maya....' This was the voice of the Abyss. Then, she hears a greater voice from the heights:

But not for self alone the self is won...
Adventure all to make the whole
world thine...
Thou hast come down into a struggling world
To aid a blind and suffering mortal
race...
The day-bringer must walk in darkest
night...

'...be God's void...And the miraculous world he has become... Annul thyself that only God may be.' Then only can the transformation of Matter be achieved.

Savitri passes through the experience of Nirvana. Most of the spiritual realizations stop here. Forsaking the world and its struggles, one desires to live in the peace of this union and opts for Nirvana or the merging of the soul in the divine Source. But for Savitri, who has come upon earth to bring God into the lives of men in order to lead the earth from Darkness to Light, from Falsehood to Truth, from Death to Immortality, the choice is different. Savitri therefore decides to pass through the black Void and journeys in an Eternal Night, unafraid of the voice of the Darkness. As she finds her soul and the strength within, she is fully prepared to meet her adversary, Death.

Now we must bear in mind that the Book of Death was not revised by Sri Aurobindo. It is reported by Amal from the conversation that took place between Nirod-da and Sri Aurobindo when He was recasting Savitri to bring it to the state of perfection in the light of His consciousness: "Some months before passing, Sri Aurobindo as if in foreknowledge of the event, said: 'I want to finish Savitri soon.' There seemed a race with time." After revising the second canto of the Book of

Fate, when He inquired what remained to be looked into, He was told about the Book of Death, the Epilogue and The Return to Earth. He simply remarked: 'Oh that? We shall see about that afterwards.'

On the day when Satyavan is to die, she takes the permission of her mother-in-law to accompany Satyavan to the forest. Satyavan happily shows her the wonders of this green kingdom, unaware of his fate. Then, suddenly she sees him flinging away his axe like an instrument of pain. She came to him. He cried to Her:

"Such agony rends me as the tree
must feel
When it is sundered and must lose
its life.
Awhile let me lay my head upon thy lap
And guard me with thy hands from
evil fate:
Perhaps because thou touchest, death
may pass."

Savitri rests his head on her lap. She knows that Death is inevitable and is prepared, griefless and strong. Suddenly, 'an awful hush had fallen upon the place.' She knew that visible Death was standing to take away the soul of Satyavan. Yama asks her to release him from her grasp, but Savitri is determined to follow him wherever Yama takes him.

There follows a long, detailed and enlightening dialogue between Yama and Savitri in the Canto entitled: 'The Debate between Love and Death', which one must read. One finds all the arguments of the worldly-wise and of those who cannot see beyond the frontiers of their mind by which Death tests the strength of Savitri. It is a sheer delight to read Savitri's answer to them:

Thou speakest Truth but Truth that
slays,
I answer to thee with the Truth that
saves.

Yama questions her motives, calls her love transitory, beguiles her in many ways, and forces her to fight the great battle with the inborn strength of her awakened Spir-

it. Savitri outwits all the stratagems of her adversary and finally Death is dissolved into the Light by the power of Her Truth-Consciousness.

Savitri is now given the supreme choice to return to the eternal peace and bliss of life in the Supreme. But she chooses to return to earth with Satyavan and says:

I climb not to thy everlasting Day,
Even as I have shunned thy eternal
Night...
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest
souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
The forge where the Arch-mason
shapes his works.
Thy servitudes on earth are greater,
king,
Than all the glorious liberties of
heaven.

Then, the godhead of Death persuades this 'too compassionate and eager Dawn' to abandon the task of raising the earthly race to a greater Light. For,

Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart
that heeds;
The doors of light are sealed to common mind...
O miracle where thou beganst there
cease...
Cast off the ambiguous myth of
earth's desire,
O immortal, to felicity arise.

It is the most captivating dialogue that follows, filled with the power of Truth and the indomitable will of Savitri to win back Satyavan from Death. She answers with courage and conviction all the arguments of Death that come in the guise of truth which looks at an unfinished world. Sri Aurobindo makes it so convincing and powerful that one is filled with her invincible courage, beauty of true love and the delight of the battle. The text is full of memorable lines and must be read in full to be filled with its power of beauty and truth.

Savitri asks for that peace, oneness and bliss in the midst of the heroic battle on earth and power to fulfil God in life



by invading mortality with the immortal beatitude of Sat-Chit-Ananda and thus become a luminous centre of its conscious expression in the world to build a bridge between earth and heaven, harmonising Matter and Spirit.

This yearning of Savitri is beautifully described in the concluding stanza of her soul's choice:

Thy embrace which rends the living
knot of pain,
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures
breathe,
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,
Thy sweetness give to me for earth
and men.

The epic *Savitri* is a spiritual adventure, revealing mystery after mystery of the creation of the universe, its purpose and its glorious destiny. The Mother once said to Mona Sarkar that to read *Savitri* is to find help and guidance in one's yoga. For, it is the description of Sri Aurobindo's own experiences revealed with the mantric force of His most clear, lucid and powerful language. *Savitri* is replete with all philosophies, knowledge of occultism and descriptions of the hidden realities of forces in all the typal worlds of different planes of Consciousness which influence us.

There is a seeking in each aspiring soul for absolute and perfect love, for infallible light of Truth and everlasting Bliss. Blindly we search for the invariable bliss of existence. But trivial amusements distract man and waste the energy given to him to grow and transcend his egoistic consciousness. When can we realise this? Sri Aurobindo warns us in clear terms:

In moments when the inner lamps
are lit
And the life's cherished guests are left
outside,
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its
gulfs.
A wider consciousness opens then its
doors...

It is when the Fire of aspiration, the inner Flame is lit and we offer in oblation all that we are and all that we have to the Supreme, invoking the Divine Grace to lift us out of the Darkness of Ignorance to the Light of Knowledge or the Light of the supreme Truth, that we can transcend the egoistic consciousness and realise the unalloyed, invariable bliss of existence.

"A mystic is one who sings of the sunrise in the darkness of the night." And Sri Aurobindo heralds a Dawn of the New Creation with a new consciousness transcending the mental consciousness, when the earth is tired of making its rounds, spinning in vain and refuses to receive even a ray of light. For, man must rise to a higher consciousness if he is to solve the bewildering problems by which he is gripped and lost in utter confusion and chaos.

The epic *Savitri* is a spiritual adventure, revealing mystery after mystery of the creation of the universe, its purpose and its glorious destiny.

In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo gives us the key to find the truth of our being and live according to the Truth, helping us all the way on the path to liberate ourselves from falsehood and ignorance. He shows us how to cross the different planes of consciousness in order finally to climb to the superconscious heights and bring down its truth, power, love, beauty and bliss into our life. One has to read *Savitri* again and again to imbibe its light of wisdom in every sphere of life, its thoughts, feelings and activities so as to remould oneself in the image of its perfection. What I have said is nothing compared to what Sri Aurobindo offers in *Savitri*. He transports us to another world of Love, Light and Bliss to such an extent that we no longer want to belong to any inferior existence.

Sri Aurobindo gives us an insight into the evolution of our consciousness to the next stage:

The Spirit's tops and Nature's base
shall draw

Near to the secret of their separate
truth

And know each other as one deity.
The Spirit shall look out through
Matter's gaze

And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's
face....

A divine force shall flow through
tissue and cell

And take the charge of breath and
speech and act

And all the thoughts shall be a glow
of suns

And every feeling a celestial thrill....

The spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life
divine.

Sri Aurobindo ends the twelfth Book with an Epilogue, which describes 'The Return to Earth' of Savitri with Satyavan. Savitri tells Satyavan:

Our love has grown
greater by that mighty
touch

And learned its heav-

enly significance,

Yet nothing is lost of mortal love's
delight.

Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not
our earth...

The king Dyumatsena gets back his sight as well as his kingdom and comes to the woods with the queen and the royal entourage, looking for Savitri and Satyavan. And finding them radiantly luminous and full of bliss, they wondered what has brought about this change. Then, one among them who 'seemed a priest and sage' asks:

O woman soul, what light, what
power revealed,

Working the rapid marvels of this day
Opens for us by thee a happier age?

To this Savitri replied:

Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live



And this the magic of our golden
change
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage.

Savitri is the most potent expression of the poetic genius of Sri Aurobindo with a rhythm and revelation of his own, expressed in a language of symbols, embodying the spiritual wisdom natural to the mystics. It is the most perfect example of the poetry of the future.

Savitri begins with a magnificent description of Dawn which rises after the impenetrable dense darkness of the inconscient Night and ends with the promise of a greater Dawn after the 'Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven' described in the last canto of *Savitri*:

Night, splendid with the moon
dreaming in heaven
In silver peace, possessed her luminous reign.
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.

There is a significant difference between the night in the first canto of the First Book and that of the last canto of the Twelfth Book. The night before the fateful day when Satyavan must die is opaque with the huge foreboding mind unwilling to receive the light—a mind that is ignorant and obscure, not ready to receive the spiritual light. But the night after *Savitri* brings back Satyavan is 'splendid with the moon.'

The moon is the symbol of spiritual realization and hence Night is dreaming peacefully of a greater light. The splendour of the moonlit night is all-pervasive. It represents a spiritually awakened and enlightened mind which meditates in the stillness of its luminous depths and foresees the Dawn of the divine manifestation which will destroy all darkness and obscurity in a mind ready to abdicate the reign of the ego and ready to receive the light of the Supramental Dawn."

Two biographies and an autobiography

by Mangesh Nadkarni

From a talk at Savitri Bhavan on 5 March 2003, published in Invocation, No. 19, April 2003. A new title has been given by the editor.

We don't realise sufficiently that the goals Sri Aurobindo defined for his yoga were not only revolutionary for his own times, they remain revolutionary even today, since even today very few thinkers dare set such high goals for man's future on earth. Traditionally, spiritual paths have had two kinds of goals: finding one's place in some Vaikuntha or some Kailash, or some special heaven or paradise where you will be waited on by eight damsels, where you will have all the comforts of life and no inconveniences and imperfections, where you will never grow old or fall ill. One is supposed to earn this kind of fulfilment for oneself by doing the right kinds of things and living the right kind of life while one lives one's life here on earth.

Although this goal has received some attention in the Indian spirituality as well, the Indian tradition has shown its preference for another kind of goal, which is merging into Nirvana, getting out of the cycle of death and birth. Almost all the religious and spiritual traditions swear by this goal. If you ask any Indian, whether he is learned or an ignoramus, if you catch him in a spiritual kind of mood and ask him "What is your life's greatest ambition?" he will say, "My life's greatest ambition is to get out of this cycle of birth and death." He hasn't thought about it, but by virtue of being Indian it is in his bloodstream, he is supposed to say it and he says it. This whole attitude is one of negation of life. By implication it means that once you become spiritual you have to regard this life as an error made by God and it is your responsibility to correct him by seeking to withdraw totally into some kind of nameless and featureless existence beyond.



Photo courtesy Anie Nunnally

Sri Aurobindo brought the revolutionary idea that spirituality is not a way to abrogate life, to cancel life, but to bring fulfilment to life. And he defined his spirituality in these terms. He said that spirituality should bring fulfilment not only for man's spirit, but also for the instruments of man's spirit, that is, for the mind, the vital and the body. He defined it as clearly as possible. And secondly he maintains that his aim is not to bring perfection which is limited to an individual or to a few individuals. His aim is to make this perfection accessible to the whole of humanity. What we want is a new consciousness that settles down here and becomes accessible to the whole of humanity. This is something new. This collective aspect is the demand of the Time Spirit. If anything is great and good, you cannot get it just for yourself—if it is good and it is great you must also make sure that everybody else can participate in it. Sri Aurobindo was ahead of his times. And even in those days he kept saying, "I don't want the Supramental consciousness as an individual attainment only. It has to be the gain of the whole earth-consciousness." This was his definition of the aims of his yoga. And his great epic, *Savitri*, is a story of the pursuit of these aims.

In *Savitri*, as you know, there are two biographies and one autobiography. It contains a description of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, which is Aswapati's yoga, so it has a first part that is autobiographical. It is also a spiritual biography of the Mother. So



there are many passages in *Savitri* which remind us of the Mother, and the Mother herself in her *Agenda* and other places has said that much of *Savitri* is a narration of her own personal experiences. Some of these experiences, she says, she had even 30 years before she came to Pondicherry. She never mentioned these experiences to Sri Aurobindo. Yet Sri Aurobindo was able to depict these experiences, write about these experiences in *Savitri*. Then there is a third biography here, and it pertains to you and me—it is our biography, telling us how we got here, from where and through what stages, and where we are supposed to go from here. At this stage, why is our life in such a mess, and after man, who? And what will ensure our passage to the next stage? Sri Aurobindo deals with all such questions in his epic.

To start at the beginning, we find that already in the second canto of Book I, Sri Aurobindo very beautifully summarizes the central issue in *Savitri*'s life:

For this she had accepted mortal breath;
To wrestle with the Shadow she had
come
And must confront the riddle of man's
birth
And life's brief struggle in dumb Mat-
ter's night.
Whether to bear with Ignorance and
death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
To win or lose the godlike game for
man.
Was her soul's issue thrown with
Destiny's dice.
But not to submit and suffer was she
born;
To lead, to deliver was her glorious
part. (p. 17)

This was the issue of her life: "Whether to bear with Ignorance and death." We humans have always made compromises with Ignorance and Death. We have said to Ignorance and Death, "All right, give me some relief from your onslaught while I am here on earth, however temporary it may turn out to be. Let this world belong to you, you can reign here as long as

you like." So we have always sought escape from this world, we have always refused to confront the problem of Ignorance and Death. We have said, "This cannot be changed, this is the ultimate dispensation of God here for man and for earth, who are you and I to challenge this?" But *Savitri* has come precisely to challenge this. This is what these lines tell us.

Then in the following canto, we get the beginning of Aswapati's story. Aswapati's yoga, as you know, takes up about 320 pages, about 12,000 lines. No one can write about anyone else's life or yoga in so much detail. It is very clear that here Sri Aurobindo is writing about his own yoga. In a letter of 1946 he has given us some indications of what this yoga was about and what are the different stages we have to look for in this yoga. In Cantos Three to Five of Book One Aswapati is shown achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as an individual, and this part of his development consists of two yogic movements, first a psycho-spiritual transformation and then a greater spiritual transformation with an ascent to a supreme power.

In Book Two we are shown how Aswapati undertakes an exploration of all the worlds and planes of consciousness, right from the subtle physical, the vital, through the mental and then through the spiritual worlds. He is in search of the creative principle which will help him or show him how to transform the nature of life, how to bring perfection to life. In spite of all this exploration which is contained in the fifteen cantos of Book Two, nearly 200 pages of spiritual experiences in the various worlds, he is unable to find the secret he was looking for. The very dynamics of this upward journey he has undertaken bring him to the doorstep of the Nirvanic experience. This climactic moment is described in Canto Two of Book Three. And this is, I think, a very great moment in the spiritual history of mankind and particularly of India. This is the moment when Aswapati is on the verge of entering Nirvana but something in him says that there is another, a more glorious destiny possible for man.

This moment is in some sense comparable to a similar moment in Amitabha

Buddha's life. Legend has it that when the Buddha was about to enter Nirvana, he stopped and looked back on life and saw the whole of humanity immersed in ignorance and suffering. He decided to turn back to help humanity to liberate itself from ignorance and suffering. Buddha, of course, had great compassion and love for humanity. But I do not think that he had any particular remedy to correct the problems of life. He only thought "I do not want Nirvana only for myself. I would like to take with me as many people as possible." So the only way he had of saving mankind was to try to save each human individual separately, make him realise that this world is transitory and full of suffering and then persuade him to join him in the pursuit of Nirvana. Very laudable indeed, and we must praise him for that, and he has been rightly declared an Avatar for that by the Indian tradition. But how many people can you save like this? Besides, ultimately what is it that you are trying to teach them? You are trying to teach them how to escape from this life. You are not teaching them anything about how to bring perfection to this life.

That is something new about Sri Aurobindo. Like Amitabha Buddha, his compassion for mankind too was boundless but he had something more than compassion. It is not enough to have compassion and love because by themselves they do not go very far. You need something more, you need a power strong enough to transform human consciousness and through it human nature. And Sri Aurobindo had discovered this power. He has written about it in *Savitri* and in his other books such as *The Life Divine*. In *Savitri*, Aswapati finds that this power is not available in any of the realised worlds, so he goes into the Transcendental World, where the past, the present and the future are one, and there he experiences a world of perfection that is waiting to come down. In Book Three we have a wonderful description of this world of perfection which is called the Supramental World:

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-
white Love



Caught all into a sole immense
embrace;
Existence found its truth on Oneness'
breast
And each became the self and space
of all.
The great world-rhythms were heart-
beats of one Soul,
To feel was a flame-discovery of God,
All mind was a single harp of many
strings,
All life a song of many meeting lives;
For worlds were many, but the Self
was one.
This knowledge now was made a
cosmos' seed:
This seed was cased in the safety of
the Light,
It needed not a sheath of Ignorance.
Then from the trance of that tremen-
dous clasp
And from the throbbings of that
single Heart
And from the naked Spirit's victory
A new and marvellous creation rose.
Incalculable outflowing infinitudes
Laughing out an unmeasured happiness
Lived their innumerable unity;
Worlds where the being is unbound
and wide
Bodied unthinkably the egoless Self;
Rapture of beatific energies
Joined Time to the Timeless, poles of
a single joy;
White vasts were seen where all is
wrapped in all.
There were no contraries, no sundered
parts,
All by spiritual links were joined to all
And bound indissolubly to the One:
Each was unique, but took all lives as
his own,
And, following out these tones of the
Infinite,
Recognised in himself the universe.
(p. 322)

Even in the midst of experiencing the
glories of this supramental world, Aswa-
pati is still concerned about the earth.
Even in that new world waiting to be
born, he is aware of the need of the earth.
Even when he is experiencing this blissful

future he is concerned about you and
me, and says, "How do I make this world
accessible to mankind?" At the same time
he sees his own small, pitiable little fragile
body, lying at the edge of the world and
says "What about that body? That is also
part of me. Here, the spirit is all fulfilled,
it has bliss, it has oneness, it has perfec-
tion, but shouldn't my body also be par-
ticipating in this perfection? How can I
make this possible?" These are Aswapati's
concerns because they are the concerns of
Sri Aurobindo's yoga. And finally, since he
cannot figure out any way of bringing this
world down himself, he approaches the
Supreme Divine Mother, the Adishtatri
of this world and of all the worlds, and
prays to her. In the next canto we see what
Aswapati has to do to bring this world on
earth.

When he sees the Supreme Mother,
the first thing that she tells him is that
man is exactly where he is now because
he belongs there: "Don't try to accelerate
the progress, because man is not yet ready
to say goodbye to Ignorance. He likes to
wallow in Ignorance. Let him have a long
enough innings—some day he will begin
to look for this perfection, but not yet."

But Aswapati, being Aswapati, says

"How shall I rest content with mortal
days
And the dull measure of terrestrial
things,
I who have seen behind the cosmic
mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face?
Hard is the doom to which thou
bindst thy sons!
How long shall our spirits battle with
the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of
Death,
We who are vessels of a deathless Force
And builders of the godhead of the
race?
Ever the centuries and millenniums
pass.
Where in the greyness is thy coming's
ray?
Where is the thunder of thy victory's
wings?

Only we hear the feet of passing
gods." (p. 341)

We are all ready to receive gods, we
have kept everything ready; but we hear
only shuffling footsteps, and then some-
body comes and tells us that the gods have
gone away, we must wait for the next time.
Man is reduced to despair and hopeless-
ness. And if you trust his judgment he will
be for ever lost in the labyrinthine mental
consciousness which he has woven around
himself. The only solution to this, O Di-
vine Mother, is for You to come down and
take on the responsibility of bringing this
new consciousness down. Human effort,
human power and strength are inadequate
to do this. Only an Avatar can do this. So
he prays to the Divine Mother:

"Omnipotence, girdle with the power
of God
Movements and moments of a mortal
will,
Pack with the eternal might one human
hour
And with one gesture change all
future time.
Let a great word be spoken from the
heights
And one great act unlock the doors of
Fate." (p. 345)

The Mother listens to this prayer and
agrees to send an emanation, an Avatar
of hers.

"O strong forerunner, I have heard
thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron
Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone
spirit's power.
A limitless Mind that can contain the
world.
A sweet and violent heart of ardent
calms
Moved by the passions of the gods
shall come.
All might and greatnesses shall join
in her;
Beauty shall walk celestial on the
earth,



Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of
her hair,
And in her body as on his homing tree
Immortal Love shall beat his glorious
wings.
A music of griefless things shall
weave her charm;
The harps of the Perfect shall attune
her voice,
The streams of Heaven shall murmur
in her laugh,
Her lips shall be the honeycombs of
God,
Her limbs his golden jars of ecstasy.
Her breasts the rapture-flowers of
Paradise.
She shall bear Wisdom in her voice-
less bosom,
Strength shall be with her like a
conqueror's sword
And from her eyes the Eternal's bliss
shall gaze.
A seed shall be sown in Death's
tremendous hour,
A branch of heaven transplant to
human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchang-
ing will." (p. 346)

This is the promise made by the Supreme Divine Mother.

As you know, in Vyasa's legend of Savitri and Satyavan, Savitri is an exceptionally gifted young woman but there is no reference to her being an avatar. Recent work by Richard Hartz and others has shown that somewhere around the mid 1920s, Sri Aurobindo realised who Mirra Richard really was. His recognition of her as the Mother, as an Avatar of the Supreme Divine Creatrix, became the seed for the revision that Sri Aurobindo undertook on *Savitri* after 1926 or 1928. He clearly saw that it was the Mother's mission in life to bring down the new consciousness. If we look at the description of the birth of Savitri that Sri Aurobindo has given, there can be no doubt at all that Sri Aurobindo means to present her as an Avatar. As we are told in the pages of the *Essays on the Gita*, an Avatar comes down particularly when there is an impasse, some kind of a blockage to

the progress of evolution and only an Avatar can clear this; so the Avatar is needed; but it looks to me that this time we had to have twin Avatars—Sri Aurobindo came as an Avatar, and the Mother also came as an Avatar. I wonder whether there have been any feminine Avatars in the past, although the consciousness of the Mother has been present on earth in some form whenever a breakthrough in evolution was about to take place. But this time the Supreme Divine Mother herself has come down as an Avatar. This is probably because the change now contemplated, the transformation anticipated now, is going to be so radical, so unheard-of in the history of evolution. The work to be undertaken this time is not an ordinary one. The magnitude of the issues involved is such that two Avatars had to come. You should realise that this doesn't happen very often in the history of evolution. Those of us lived in the last century had the enormous good fortune of being contemporaries of the first feminine Avatar on earth. That is something to celebrate, and I thought I should mention this because we are this year celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of the Mother.

This marks the culmination of Aswapati's quest, and from then onwards in the poem it is basically Savitri's story, starting with her birth. It is very clear from the way Sri Aurobindo describes Savitri's birth that he saw her as an Avatar. Consider the following lines:

In this high signal moment of the gods
Answering earth's yearning and her
cry for bliss,
A greatness from our other countries
came.
A silence in the noise of earthly things
Immutably revealed the secret Word,
A mightier influx filled the oblivious
clay:
A lamp was lit, a sacred image made.
A mediating ray had touched the earth
Bridging the gulf between man's mind
and God's;
Its brightness linked our transience to
the Unknown.
A spirit of its celestial source aware
Translating heaven into a human shape

Descended into earth's imperfect mould
And wept not fallen to mortality.
But looked on all with large and
tranquil eyes.
One had returned from the trans-
cendent planes
And bore anew the load of mortal
breath,
Who had striven of old with our
darkness and our pain;
She took again her divine unfinished
task:
Survivor of death and the aeonic years,
Once more with her fathomless heart
she fronted Time. (p. 353)

There are also a number of passages further on in Book Four—if you read them, those of you who were in the Ashram in the 50s and 60s might even begin to hear the footsteps of the Mother; they are so closely modelled after the Mother. We can immediately see that this is the person Sri Aurobindo is describing in these lines. Take these lines, for example,

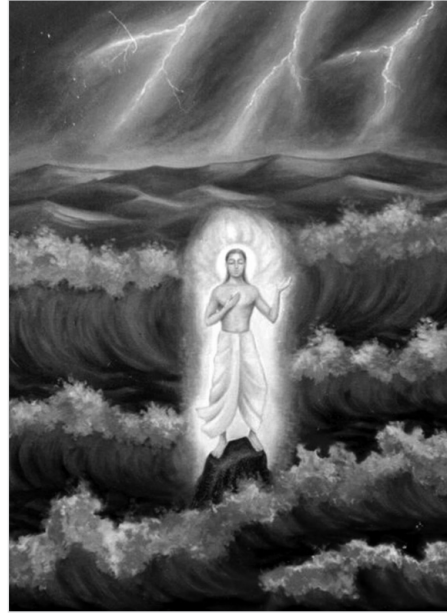
A friend and yet too great wholly to
know,
She walked in their front towards a
greater light,
Their leader and queen over their
hearts and souls,
One close to their bosoms, yet divine
and far.
Admiring and amazed they saw her
stride
Attempting with a godlike rush and
leap
Heights for their human stature too
remote
Or with a slow great many-sided toil
Pushing towards aims they hardly
could conceive;
Yet forced to be the satellites of her sun
They moved unable to forego her light,
Desiring they clutched at her with
outstretched hands
Or followed stumbling in the paths
she made. (p. 363)
Some felt her with their souls and
thrilled with her,
A greatness felt near yet beyond
mind's grasp;



To see her was a summons to adore,
To be near her drew a high commun-
ion's force.
So men worship a god too great to
know,
Too high, too vast to wear a limiting
shape;
They feel a Presence and obey a
might.
Adore a love whose rapture invades
their breasts;
To a divine ardour quickening the
heart-beats,
A law they follow greatening heart
and life. (pp. 363-64)

Some turned to her against their
nature's bent;
Divided between wonder and revolt,
Drawn by her charm and mastered by
her will,
Possessed by her, her striving to
possess,
Impatient subjects, their tied longing
hearts
Hugging the bonds close of which
they most complained,
Murmured at a yoke they would have
wept to lose,
The splendid yoke of her beauty and
her love:
Others pursued her with life's blind
desires
And claiming all of her as their lonely
own,
Hastened to engross her sweetness
meant for all. (pp. 364-65)

After this "Book of Birth and Quest," we come to Book Five, "The Book of Love." I think that this book belongs primarily to the legend of Satyavan and Savitri. It is not directly connected either with the Mother's life or her yoga. Sri Aurobindo develops this into a very beautiful book and I have said in many places that if Sri Aurobindo had written nothing else but The Book of Love he would have still left an indelible mark on English literature. Nowhere else in the world's literature do we find such beautiful poetry based on love fulfilled. We have great poetry on love frustrated, but love fulfilled is hardly



*"Happiest who stand on faith as on a rock."
(Painting by Shiva Vangara)*

regarded as a fit subject for poetry, but in Book Five there is wonderful poetry. We have to move on just now because it does not immediately concern our present frame of reference.

Book Six, the "Book of Fate," is also a very important book and is a testimony to Sri Aurobindo's great gifts as a poet and a thinker. But we need not pause here to take a closer look at this book since, like Book Five, it does not address the central issue we are pursuing here.

We move on to Book Seven, the Book of Yoga. As you know, in the original legend Savitri performs a *vrata*, a vow, a *trirathra vrata*, for three days and nights, close to the day on which that Satyavan is destined to die. Sri Aurobindo has taken this event and transformed it into Savitri's yoga. Just as Aswapati's *yagna* becomes Aswapati's yoga, and gets an expansion of about 12,000 lines—what Vyasa describes in ten lines, Sri Aurobindo describes in 12,000 lines—similarly here the austerities practised by Savitri in the Mahabharata legend get converted into Savitri's yoga. And the description of this yoga, while reminding us in some of its general features of the Integral Yoga developed by Sri Aurobindo, also brings to our mind many of the special features of the Mother's

"psychic approach." Aswapati's yoga is the yoga of a scientist. Very leisurely, very impersonal, he has all the time at his disposal and he observes unmoved whatever is presented to his view, whether he is in the vital worlds of the gods or in the world of darkness and falsehood. His job is to report, his job is to observe, and that is what he does. And he goes like a cone of fire ascending from one level to another level, one level to another level. Savitri's yoga has a different kind of tempo. Hers is a more impassioned, more dynamic, more direct approach. She goes through her psychic being. Through her psychic she makes her way into the Supramental realm. The other difference between the two yogas is that in Aswapati's yoga you have a description of the psycho-spiritual transformation of Aswapati—a psychic transformation, and also a spiritual transformation; there is no description of Aswapati undergoing the supramental transformation. But in my view in Savitri's yoga we have a description not only of the psychic and the spiritual transformation of Savitri, but also of her supramental transformation. And this is to my mind described or indicated in Canto Five of Book Seven, "The Finding of the Soul."

This is my hypothesis, and I won't mind being proved wrong on this. Instead of being evasive, it is good to formulate a hypothesis and leave it for other scholars to contend with and improve upon. I can't believe that Savitri was ready to take on the God of Death as she does in Books Nine, Ten and Eleven without having acquired the supramental consciousness and its powers, that is my first point. The second is that our psychic being, when it meets the soul, meets the jivatman. But for Savitri's psychic being, the jivatman is the Supreme Mother herself. So when Savitri's psychic being meets the jivatman, the soul, it must be merging with the Supreme Divine Mother. And once you merge with the Supreme Divine Mother, your consciousness merges with the Supramental because the Supreme Divine Mother stands for the Supramental. And the descriptions given in this canto suggest this extraordinary happening. I will just read a little bit to illustrate what I have just now said:



At last a change approached, the
emptiness broke;
A wave rippled within, the world had
stirred;
Once more her inner self became her
space.
There was felt a blissful nearness to
the goal;
Heaven leaned low to kiss the sacred
hill,
The air trembled with passion and
delight.
A rose of splendour on a tree of dreams,
The face of Dawn out of mooned
twilight grew.
Day came, priest of a sacrifice of joy
Into the worshipping silence of her
world;
He carried immortal lustre as his robe,
Trailed heaven like a purple scarf and
wore
As his vermilion caste-mark a red
sun. (p. 523)

Another passage which describes this
scene is equally suggestive:
A sealed identity within her woke;
She knew herself the Beloved of the
Supreme:
These Gods and Goddesses were he
and she:
The Mother was she of Beauty and
Delight,
The Word in Brahma's vast creating
clasp,
The World-Puissance on almighty
Shiva's lap,—
The Master and the Mother of all lives
Watching the worlds their twin regard
had made,
And Krishna and Radha for ever
entwined in bliss,
The Adorer and Adored self-lost and
one.
In the last chamber on a golden seat
One sat whose shape no vision could
define;
Only one felt the world's unattainable
fount,
A Power of which she was a straying
Force,
An invisible Beauty, goal of the
world's desire,

A Sun of which all knowledge is a
beam,
A Greatness without whom no life
could be. (p. 525)

There are other descriptions here
which are extraordinary in their impli-
cations. At the end of this canto, we are
shown the mahakundalini descending
into Savitri, and opening up each of her
chakras. This descent of the mahakun-
dalini is the descent of the Supramental
Force into Savitri—that is how I under-
stand these lines.

There is one more thing I would like
to mention about Savitri's yoga, and that
pertains to the most interesting Canto
Four, where Savitri is met by three ma-
donnas—the Madonna of Compassion
and Love, the Madonna of Might, and
the Madonna of Wisdom. Each of these
madonnas comes to Savitri and says that
she is her soul. What is interesting is that
after each madonna finishes whatever she
has to say to Savitri, an egoistic perva-
sion of each madonna complains to Savitri
about how the world has ill-treated that
particular being. Now it seems to me that
these madonnas, who are godheads like
Durga and Lakshmi and Kali and so on,
are overmental godheads. And if Savitri
after meeting these godheads goes beyond
them, it can only be into the Supramental
realm.

The other interesting implication of
this is equally important. The overmen-
tal gods and goddesses have been with us
for a very long time. To these gods and
goddesses we have been praying, we have
been offering our adoration and worship.
Yet these gods and goddesses have proved,
by and large, ineffectual in remedying the
basic inadequacies of human conscious-
ness. They have been able to give to their
chosen devotees money, fame, success,
long life, health, progeny, etc.; that is why
they are honored as gods. But I don't think
that these overmental godheads have been
effective in cleansing the human heart of
things which have darkened human exist-
ence here—namely, jealousy, greed, lust,
pride, hatred, and egoism of all kinds that
have made our world such a miserable

place. For that to happen, we need stronger
gods, more powerful gods. Sri Aurobindo
says in one place that the battle between
the asuras and the devas has always been
taking place in the quivering theatre of
the human consciousness. Since the hu-
man consciousness has emerged from the
inconscious it still has on it a large stamp
of the unconscious. It is in the arena of this
consciousness that gods and divine influ-
ences, as well as the hostiles and asuric
forces descend and a struggle has been
going on for the control of the human
consciousness. In spite of our mental al-
legiance to the gods, it seems that most
often it is the asuras who are winning. As
a result, our world is in such a big mess in
spite of the gods we worship. Either there
must be something lacking in the gods
we worship, or there must be something
wrong in the way we receive these gods
within us. It doesn't matter which gods
we worship, what is important is which
gods we incarnate in our own life. And
so a time has now come, not to discard
the overmental gods, but to invoke more
powerful gods. Somebody once asked the
Mother, "Mother, once we are in this new
yoga, should we still be worshipping old
gods?" And the Mother gave a reply which
is simple and yet very subtle. She said,
"Once you are in this yoga and you start
getting the real experiences of this yoga,
you will never be satisfied by worshipping
all the old gods, either individually or all
of them put together." So a time has now
come for us to focus on new gods, because
we need a new consciousness to come
down. And ultimately the gods will not
be able to destroy the asuras around us.
We have to do it ourselves and the godly
forces that we receive now are too weak to
accomplish this task.

The Mother makes a very interesting
comment in one place. She says, "Durga,
Mahishasuramardini, comes down and
slays the demon Mahishasura. But then
she has to come again the following year to
do the same thing. She has to come down
and do this every year." Why does she have
to come every year? Once she comes and
destroys the demon, we get busy; after she
has destroyed it, we ourselves recreate or



resuscitate the demon. It is something in us that feeds these asuric propensities. And that is why the Buddha once said that when a vibration of evil comes to the human heart, the human consciousness does not have the capacity to convert it into its opposite.

It only strengthens it and sends it back. Buddha did not know how to avoid doing this; the remedy he suggested was that we should sever all relationship with the world. Then only will we be safe. But we don't want to do that. Our aim is to continue to live in this world and to bring perfection to life here. So all this indicates that a time has come for us to take a new step if we want to ward off all the asuric and hostile forces that manifest themselves in Hitlers or Stalins, or Idi Amins or in Osama Bin Ladens. They are all fed on the life-blood of our own consciousness, we are all responsible for them in some sense. It is no use thinking "I am very pure, I am very holy, I have nothing to do with them." We all connected from within. And if we want really to get rid of them, we need to be able to receive the new gods, we need to receive into our consciousness the victorious power of the supramental consciousness. That is what I see as the message of this particular canto, Canto Four of Book Seven, "The Triple Soul Forces."

Savitri has then, after Canto Five, still a long journey ahead of her. She is asked to go through an experience of emptying herself. Savitri is reminded that she has not come down on earth to manifest the supramental consciousness only in herself, but to become a channel through which this new force, its light and power can flow and spread through the whole world. For this Savitri had to undergo the discipline of emptying herself. This is described in Canto Six and the word Nirvana in the title of this canto refers to this process of emptying oneself, of surrendering one's siddhis to the Divine. There are two kinds of nirvana. One is the nirvana of the Advaitic and Buddhist kind, but in Sri Aurobindo's yoga there is a nirvana where after reaching a particular siddhi you offer this siddhi to the Divine and empty yourself. Otherwise, as I said jocularly, as we

see around us, our spiritual track is all full of frozen yogis; there are as it were frozen yogis all over, who don't want to move, who don't want to stir because they are all big with their own siddhis. But at every stage, once you have acquired a siddhi, you have to learn to offer it back to the Divine so that there is space in you for a further siddhi. Savitri therefore goes through this process of emptying herself and finally attains what is called the Cosmic Consciousness, and then she becomes an effective channel through which the higher force begins to come down on earth.

This completes the description of Savitri's yoga. Then comes Book Eight where we meet the god of Death, and after that, there are Books Nine, Ten and Eleven. These Books describe the confrontation between the God of Death and Savitri. We studied these three books in some detail in the study camps held during in recent years, so I do not wish to deal with them here except very briefly.

Somewhere there is a reference in the writings of the Mother to these three books as the collective yoga of the Mother. Death is not just the negation or disintegration of physical existence. Death comes to us in many forms. Very often death comes to us in the glorified form of temporarily captivating intellectual philosophies which hold us spellbound and do not let us move into the higher regions. They blind us with the light they bring with them, and as a result we can't see beyond them. They say, "You have reached here, you are high enough." The intellect has a way of fascinating the human mind because man is primarily manomaya, a mental being. When the intellectual solution comes we feel thrilled. We do not even ask what purpose such solutions serve. So there are various philosophies: idealism, pragmatism, realism, nihilism and so on. And then we see in Savitri that Death can profess any philosophy to badger Savitri with—Buddhist philosophy, Advaita philosophy, etc. None of the philosophies he professes is completely false, but each one of them is incomplete. And Savitri completes each of the philosophies he professes. The integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, as you know,

does not negate or ignore any of the other philosophies. Take for example Marxism. Sri Aurobindo says that Marxism is not all wrong, the only problem with Marxism is that it is incomplete. Similarly Freud's psychology—it is not wrong but it is incomplete. Similarly Darwin's biology and all the theories based on it—they are not wrong, but they are one-sided and therefore suffocatingly incomplete. This is the stance of Sri Aurobindo: that every one of these philosophies contains a kernel of truth, but that there is a tendency to exaggerate things. And for each one Sri Aurobindo brings the completion for it. The same thing Savitri does again and again with the arguments of Death until finally all his philosophies are exhausted.

There are many wonderful passages in this part of the epic poem, and if I begin to read those passages the organizers will begin to feel jittery and start thinking "Oh dear, probably all these people will stay on for dinner tonight, and we haven't organised any dinner!" I won't go that far. But one or two passages must be read. Otherwise it would be an injustice to a book like this in a place like this.

One of the favourite debating points the God of Death uses is the fickleness and physicality of much that goes in the name of human love. He says that love is just a glandular disorder, it is a physical attraction embellished with imagination. Savitri does not deny this at all. But she says that it is only partly true. Love has other more refined, sublime, and less physical expressions. In one of these passages, she asserts the great value of love in these words:

For Love must soar beyond the very
heavens
And find its secret sense ineffable;
It must change its human ways to
ways divine,
Yet keep its sovereignty of earthly bliss.
O Death, not for my heart's sweet
poignancy
Nor for my happy body's bliss alone
I have claimed from thee the living
Satyavan,
But for his work and mine, our sacred
charge.



Our lives are God's messengers
beneath the stars;
To dwell under death's shadow they
have come
Tempting God's light to earth for the
ignorant race,
His love to fill the hollow in men's
hearts,
His bliss to heal the unhappiness of
the world.
For I, the woman, am the force of
God,
He the Eternal's delegate soul in man.
My will is greater than thy law, O
Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of
Fate:
Our love is the heavenly seal of the
Supreme.
I guard that seal against thy rending
hands.
Love must not cease to live upon the
earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth
and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent's angel
here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.
(p. 633)

I don't think that even Shakespeare has comparable lines on love although he is supposed to be a great poet of love.

There is another equally wonderful passage. Often people ask, "How do you know that the supramental will come? So far it has not come." That's a very profound argument isn't it? "So far it hasn't come, so how do you know that it will come in future? How do you know?" Death is asking that question, and Savitri's answer is very simple.

How sayst thou Truth can never light
the human mind
And Bliss can never invade the
mortal's heart
Or God descend into the world he
made?
If in the meaningless Void creation rose,
If from a bodiless Force Matter was
born,
If Life could climb in the unconscious
tree,

Its green delight break into emerald
leaves
And its laughter of beauty blossom in
the flower,
If sense could wake in tissue, nerve
and cell
And Thought seize the grey matter of
the brain,
And soul peep from its secrecy
through the flesh,
How shall the nameless Light not leap
on men,
And unknown powers emerge from
Nature's sleep?
Even now hints of a luminous Truth
like stars
Arise in the mind-mooned splendour
of Ignorance;
Even now the deathless Lover's touch
we feel:
If the chamber's door is even a little
ajar,
What then can hinder God from
stealing in
Or who forbid his kiss on the sleeping
soul? (pp. 648-49)

Finally, Death is vanquished. At this point something very significant happens. Savitri does not conquer her own death. Savitri conquers death for Satyavan. Who is Satyavan? We have been told by Sri Aurobindo that Satyavan is the Earth-Soul, Man's soul in evolution. So in granting Satyavan freedom from death what Savitri has done is to grant to the whole of mankind the potential for immortality. We have all been rendered potentially immortal by this great gift of Savitri.

Well, we have now reached the final stage of this drama. The God of Death is vanquished, but he comes back as the Supreme Divine himself, and once again tests Savitri, offering her a special world, a special heaven of peace and bliss to live in with Satyavan. Savitri rejects that offer saying "I have come down with Satyavan to help mankind reach perfection. I don't want any solitary happiness for just the two of us." When Savitri passes this last test as well, the Supreme Lord is very pleased with Savitri and says to her, "Savitri, you have fulfilled all my expecta-

tions of you." He predicts that because of what she has done, one day everything will change, a new world will be born, and this life will turn into the life divine. Savitri then returns to earth with Satyavan's soul clutched to her heart.

All then shall change, a magic order
come
Overtopping this mechanical universe.
A mightier race shall inhabit the
mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the
Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of
life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer
of heaven,
And lead towards God and truth
man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality,
A power released from circumscribing
bounds,
Its height pushed up beyond death's
hungry reach,
Life's top shall flame with the Immor-
tal's thoughts,
Light shall invade the darkness of its
base.
Then in the process of evolving Time
All shall be drawn into a single plan,
A divine harmony shall be earth's law,
Beauty and joy remould her way to
live;
Even the body shall remember God.
(pp. 706-707)

Nature shall live to manifest secret
God,
The Spirit shall take up the human
play.
This earthly life become the life
divine. (p. 710)

It is extremely difficult to summarize this immense and magnificent epic in 50 minutes, but I have been foolish enough to try it. I hope I have achieved what I set out to do in some small measure. Hasn't it been said of the Divine's Grace that it can make the dumb eloquent and the lame scale the top of a mountain? Thank you very much.



'A god come down and greater by the fall'

by Arabinda Basu

Based on the talk given at Savitri Bhavan on 9 August 1998, and published in *Invocation*, No. 2, February 1999.

Children of the Mother, this morning I would like to talk about one single line. This line occurs in the canto entitled "The Vision and the Boon". The passage runs:

This strange irrational product of the
mire,
This compromise between the beast
and god,
Is not the crown of thy miraculous
world.
I know there shall inform the incon-
scient cells,
At one with Nature and at height with
heaven,
A spirit vast as the containing sky
And swept with ecstasy from invisible
founts,
A god come down and greater by the
fall. (p. 343)

This last line is a very very significant one, which seems to me to turn the whole history of spirituality upside down. The ideal of spiritual pursuit that is expressed in this particular line has never been expressed before. This morning I will attempt to explain this startlingly original idea: "A god come down and greater by the fall."

The entire history of spirituality has asserted that as a human being you are a fallen creature, whatever explanation may be given for the fall, and that you have to get back to where you came from.... whether from God or Brahman or whatever. You have to regain union with your source. All spirituality has aimed at getting back to the source from which we came.

But here Sri Aurobindo speaks of "A god come down." It seems to me that this



Photo courtesy Savitri Bhavan

phrase indicates a deliberate choice. This suggests that we have voluntarily exiled ourselves from our true Self, deliberately, by choice. Why? And how is it that we are greater by the fall? Sri Aurobindo seems to say that because you have fallen you have become greater, at least potentially. So the question is not about getting back to where you came from, but of doing something here. This is absolutely fresh and original. Our greatness consists not in rebecoming what we were before we fell, but in doing something here, on this earth. As far as I know, this does not exist in any other spiritual discipline or philosophy or yoga.

This idea occurs already in the first canto of *Savitri*, where Sri Aurobindo speaks of "The godhead greater by a human fate." Here also he uses the word "greater," and in connection with "a human fate." So a god has become greater, or perhaps potentially greater, by becoming human.

And yet all yoga insists upon the human not remaining forever human; its aim is to become more than human, superhuman, superman. How do we combine these two ideas? Sri Aurobindo insists that unless you know the Self which is one in all, you cannot attain to the Supermind. And if you cannot attain to the Supermind, you cannot transform life here on earth. So all these ideas have to be combined together.

Nevertheless, this line suggests that eventually we will become greater by the

fall, because in the fall itself there is a significance, a meaning, a purpose, which is not there in the higher worlds, not even in the highest. This is a very challenging statement.

The sentence where this line occurs says: "I know there shall inform the inconscient cells,..." Not in the supramental world, if there is such a thing, but "in the inconscient cells," here on the earth, in the body, the material physical frame. "At one with Nature and at height with Heaven"—implying: Don't abandon Nature, don't renounce Heaven, but bring the two together in the inconscient cells, making them superconscient.

Sri Aurobindo also says that "We live self-exiled from our heavenlier home." (p. 262) The normal idea is that man has fallen because he has disobeyed God's command. Or in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism we find the idea that one has karma from previous lives, and has come down to exhaust that karma. Judaism doesn't insist so much on the idea of the original sin, but Christianity does. And because of this original sin of pride, hubris, disobedience towards God, we have fallen. But here there is no such idea at all: We are "self-exiled"—we have come down deliberately, voluntarily. There must be some purpose in this, for nobody would by choice come down to a life which, as Sri Aurobindo says, is condemned to an imperfect body and mind, living in the inconscient with all the indignities of the physical life. Yes, there is indignity, there is dishonour, there is a lack of bliss, even of pleasure: we are all born into a world of division and discord, ambition and frustration, failure and futility; of knowledge ringed by ignorance, and pleasure by pain. This is our life. How can it be greater than the existence that we had before we fell? We will find the answer in the poem itself.

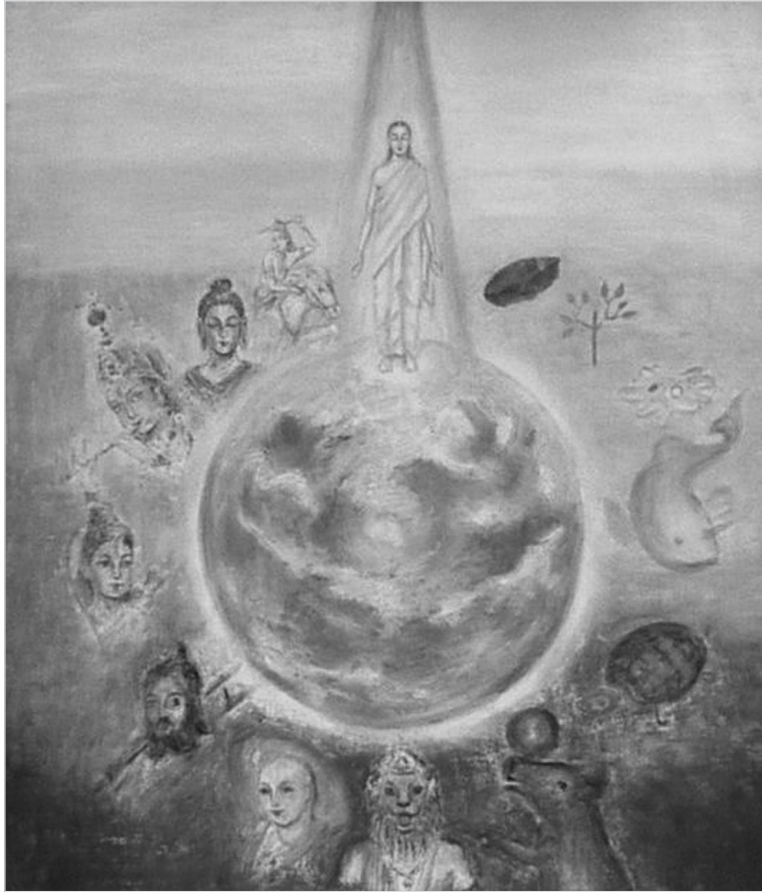
Can God be incomplete? The Upanishad tells us that he is full there and here, and that if we subtract fullness from that fullness, what remains is still full. So God in himself is complete, full, fulfilled. And yet Sri Aurobindo dares to say: "A god come down and greater by the fall." We shall see that this is because God has a def-



inite purpose in descending into matter.

This means that in the light of what Sri Aurobindo says, the ancient Indian concept of Maya appears to be an incomplete knowledge. Taking his terms from Indian spiritual thought Sri Aurobindo says that we can look at creation from three points of view: as Prakriti, Maya and Lila. Prakriti, in the Sankhya philosophy, refers to inconscient Nature, a creative power without any trace of consciousness in it at all. There is Purusha, or pure consciousness, which is static, and there is Prakriti who is unconscious but dynamic. You can see the world as the evolution of Prakriti—which it is, to a very great extent. Then there is the concept of Maya, which says that the world isn't really there—it only seems to be there. According to this philosophy, Brahman is purely static, it has no creative power, no quality, no feature, no nothing as Americans would say. So the world is Maya, the world doesn't exist, it only seems to exist. This too is a truth of a certain plane of experience—even for those who are trying to practice Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo says that every integral yogin must go through this experience sooner or later. At some time in your sadhana, you must know that the world is nothing, absolutely nothing. Only when you know that the world is nothing at all, can you be utterly and completely free of attachment.

But this is not a complete experience. Because later you find that where you felt there was nothing, the Divine pours into every atom. This was Sri Aurobindo's Vasudeva vision in the jail. The Gita says "*Vasudeva sarvam iti.*" Vasudeva means all-pervasive, ubiquitous, omnipresent—that is the meaning of the word *vasu*. One



Evolution. (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

who knows Vasudeva as all, such a great soul is very very very rare. And Sri Aurobindo in the jail became one of those very very rare great souls because he was seeing the divine reality everywhere. This was after his experience of Nirvana, please remember—Nirvana which showed him, in his own language, that everything was materialised shadows: no essence, no reality, just floating material shadows. Those material shadows became instinct, informed with reality in each core of them.

In this view, the universe is called Lila—a play. It is a free act. God is not compelled to create, he is not compelled to manifest himself. He does it as a free act, as a play of delight and bliss. The Bhagavata Purana says it is the dance of a child who just dances because he sees his own shadow. It is a shadow, but a shadow of a reality, a shadow of a light.

Sri Aurobindo adds to this idea of Lila: he says that this play has a purpose.

Yes, you have to become liberated, for you are like a prisoner, so you must come out of the prison, and you go out into the open market or the open field and you say, "Yes! I am free—what a lovely life now!" But what about the prison? You have left it in the lurch, you have condemned all the other prisoners to the conditions they live in, which are less than human. What if I take the mission of becoming free, in order to go back into the prison and make it into a palace? This is god's mission in the world.

The canto called "The Pursuit of the Unknowable" shows Ashwapati shooting vertically up to the Absolute. Life is too much with him, the world is too imperfect, life is not worth living in the world. He wants his self, the Self in all, and the Absolute. So he tries to realise the Absolute, forgetting the world, renounc-

ing it, abandoning it. There is a magnificent description of the outcome of this pursuit:

Thought falls from us, we cease from
joy and grief,
The ego is dead; we are freed from
being and care,
We have done with birth and death
and work and fate. (p. 310)

But the Mother accosts him, asks him, "What are you doing? where are you going?" There are other things to do which Ashwapati does not know about. She tells him:

O soul, it is too early to rejoice!
Thou hast reached the boundless
silence of the Self
Thou hast leaped into a glad divine
abyss;



But where hast thou thrown Self's
mission and Self's power? (p. 310)

So the Self has a mission. And that
mission can be accomplished by a very
special kind of power,

But where hast thou thrown Self's
mission and Self's power?
On what dead bank on the Eternal's
road?
One was within thee who was self and
world,
What hast thou done for his purpose
in the stars? (p. 310)

There is a purpose in the stars. The
constellations were not created without
any purpose. So this is the Mother's scold-
ing, if you like: "Where are you going?
What are you doing? Losing yourself in
the Absolute? What about the purpose of
God in the world? Who will accomplish
it? I have not sent you down here just to
go back to where you came from, to lose
yourself in the Absolute, forgetting your
own individuality, your potentiality, your
possibility of divine life. You can't do that."

Escape brings not the victory nor the
crown! (p. 310)

This is an escape—escape from the
obligation, the responsibility, the duty of
"a god come down." So Ashwapati is asked
to turn back to the world, and he accepts
the mission with the Mother's command;
and he is the one who is debating with the
Mother in the Canto of "The Vision and
the Boon." And please note the end of the
name of the Canto—the Boon. The Boon
is: "One will descend, to break the iron
law"—the iron law of subjection to Death.

A high and blank negation is not all,
A huge extinction is not God's last word,
Life's ultimate sense, the close of be-
ing's course,
The meaning of this great mysterious
world. (p. 311)

There is a meaning of this great mys-
terious world. It is not without signifi-

cance, without meaning. It is meaningful,
full of significance, full of possibility and
potentiality because the Divine himself
has a purpose in the world. We have to
understand this meaning and to make it
manifest. This is the mission the Supreme
Mother gives to Ashwapati. What is this
meaning? What is God's purpose?

In absolute silence sleeps an absolute
Power
Awaking, it can wake the trance-
bound soul
And in the ray reveal the parent sun:
It can make the world a vessel of
Spirit's force,
It can fashion in the clay God's perfect
shape.
To free the self is but one radiant
pace; (pp. 311-12)

Yes, you have to realise the Self, it is an
absolute necessity, it is one radiant pace,
but what else is there?

Here to fulfil himself was God's
desire. (p. 312)

To fulfil himself. We think of God be-
ing fulfilled in his own scheme of existence
eternally, but how does he fulfil himself
in the world, what does that mean? God
also has a desire: not that every creature,
every child of his will find salvation or lib-
eration or moksha or whatever you call it.
No. Each child will become God. This is
his mission and that is his purpose in the
world. And he wants it to happen here on
earth, not on the highest plane of heaven.

Recently I read a sentence where Sri
Aurobindo says that we certainly have to
realise God and embrace Him, but what
is far more important is to become that
reality. And although that can be achieved,
and has been achieved, even by numerous
devotees and yogis and saints and mystics,
on the plane of God, nobody has yet done
it on this plane, where God has become
matter—deliberately, by choice, in order
to fulfil his mission and purpose.

Those who will fulfil this desire of God
will do it here on earth, not somewhere
else, they are the gods who have come

down, and they are "greater by the fall."

Now this fall: Why is it a fall? It is a fall
in the sense that we have lost our native
spiritual status in God. We are no longer
united with him. Nevertheless, Sri Auro-
bindo says, very daringly, "No more exist-
ence seemed an aimless fall." There is an
aim, a purpose, a goal.

No more existence seemed an aimless
fall
Extinction was no more the sole
release.
The hidden Word was found, the
long-sought clue,
Revealed was the meaning of our
spirit's birth. (p. 313)

Again we come across the words
'meaning' and 'purpose'. "Revealed was
the meaning of our spirit's birth." At pre-
sent, because of assuming birth in the
world, the spirit is:

Condemned to an imperfect body
and mind
In the inconscience of material things
And the indignity of mortal life.
(p. 313)

The body is subject to disease and ul-
timately to death, the mind is ignorant,
seeking after knowledge and hardly ever
reaching it. This is what the Spirit is born
into. But this is not the last chapter of the
drama, the last act. The curtain hasn't
fallen yet. Creation is not yet a finished
product. It still goes on. This ongoing pro-
cess is the one by which God's desire will
be fulfilled.

When earth was built in the uncon-
scious Void
And nothing was save a material
scene,
Identified with sea and sky and stone
Her young gods yearned for the
release of souls
Asleep in objects, vague, inanimate.
They cried to Life to invade the sense-
less mould
And in brute forms awake divinity.
(p. 129)



What does it really mean in practical terms—"In brute forms awake Divinity"? Don't abandon the forms in order to get back to Divinity. No—awake Divinity in the forms, where it is concealed, sleeping, dormant, involved. That is where we have to awake divinity. Not only to achieve divinity in soul and space, but even externally, superficially, on the surface, in brute forms we have to awake divinity. This is one of Sri Aurobindo's favourite ideas and it comes in many places. For example on page 121, in the same Canto:

Our human ignorance moves towards
the Truth
That Nescience may become omni-
scient...

The spiritual attempt has always been to leave ignorance and get knowledge. Here we have a new idea. Nescience will become omniscient. And this is possible because nescience is nothing but a formation of the omniscient. The lowest is nothing but a formation of the highest. What Sri Aurobindo is now trying to do is to make the lowest into the highest. This is the challenge.

Our human ignorance moves towards
the Truth
That Nescience may become omni-
scient
Transmuted instincts shape to divine
thoughts
Thoughts house infallible immortal sight
And Nature climb towards God's
identity. (p. 121)

Don't leave Nature in the lurch: make it divine—because Nature is concealed divinity.

We would expect a fall to be debasing, but the poet says: "No fall debased the godhead of her steps." (p. 128) Where is our share in this? In a brilliant line, Sri Aurobindo says: "In her gold liberty of divinity all had a share." As we take to Savitri as a refuge, we will share in her golden-coloured splendour. "No fall debased the godhead of her steps"—the godhead has come down to what is fallen, but it is not

itself fallen. It always keeps its nature of spirituality and divinity, and yet it has assumed, deliberately, all the limitations of the material physical life. How is this possible?

In her nature housing the Immortal's
power
In her bosom bearing the eternal
Will. (p. 128)

This tells us how. And it means that it is possible for the creature to house the immortal's power and bear the eternal will. Each of us can do it, through Savitri's work in the world. Through the unsparing distribution of her grace. Through them we can receive it. The Grace is here, it is doing its work, but we don't pay any heed to it. We are so busy getting our salvation that we have forgotten about God's mission in the stars.

A spirit ignorant of the world it made,
Obscured by Matter, travestied by Life
Struggles to emerge, to be free, to
know and reign; (p. 329)

To reign over what? This world, this physical life, which is at the moment most awful. Therefore we want to escape. We want to escape for our own benefit, to get out of this trouble, this tribulation. But who listens to God? What does he want us to do? Am I ready to give what He wants? Because Sri Aurobindo tells us, "A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme." (p. 67) God has assumed humanity, it is humanity's obligation to assume divinity. We must become as he is, as perfect as he is. This is the mutual debt.

He has not assumed humanity without a purpose, just as a joke—no. He has done it with a very serious purpose—a joyful, blissful one, but nevertheless a very serious purpose. He means business, says a colloquial phrase, and God's business in assuming humanity was to make humanity divine. And humanity is here on earth, not in heaven. In this mutual interchange between God and man, God descending, man ascending, the meeting point is a new creation, a marvellous new world.

Elsewhere he tells us that we can't leave unfulfilled the world's miraculous fate. The world has a fate. It is going to be a new creation, something marvellous that has never happened before.

As yet thought some high spirit's
dream,
Or a vexed illusion in man's toiling
mind
A new creation from the old shall
rise... (p. 330)

Here, on this earth. This is the creation. In God there is no creation. Sri Aurobindo tells us over and over again that in God there is no progression. But then where is progression, where is evolution, where is movement? Where God has limited himself.

As you know, philosophically speaking, this world is a result of God limiting himself. If the Absolute remained Absolute always, there would be no relative. If God did not give up his unity, there would be no Many. If the Divine did not renounce his divinity there would be no humanity. So this is the holocaust of the soul, the Supreme Soul, a self-sacrifice that is made for the sake of a result and a fruit. And that fruit is the world becoming a new world, the creation assuming a novelty, a freshness, a spiritual fulfilment.

Merged into the Unknowable's
mystery
Lay unfulfilled the world's miraculous
fate.
As yet thought only some high spirit's
dream
Or a vexed illusion in man's toiling
mind
A new creation from the old shall rise,
A Knowledge inarticulate find speech,
Beauty suppressed burst into paradise
bloom
Pleasure and pain dive into absolute
bliss.
A tongueless oracle shall speak at last
The Superconscient conscious grow
on earth
The Eternal's wonders join the dance
of Time. (p. 330)



The earthly creature is not supposed to become superconscient where the Superconscience is, on the superconscient planes... no, it will grow superconscient here on earth, in matter, through the new creation.

The Divine Mother gives Aswapati the vision of the birth of that new creation:

The great world-rhythms were heart-beats of one Soul,
To feel was a flame-discovery of God,
All mind was a single harp of many strings,
All life a song of many meeting lives;
For worlds were many, but the Self was one.
This knowledge now was made a cosmos' seed...

A new cosmos is being created. This knowledge, that worlds are many but the Self is one, is being made the seed of a new cosmos. And:

This seed was cased in the safety of the Light,
It needed not a sheath of Ignorance.
Then from the trance of that tremendous clasp
And from the throbbings of that single Heart
And from the naked Spirit's victory
A new and marvellous creation rose.
(p. 323)

Meanwhile evolution is still going on. Evolution still has to continue because God has not yet fulfilled himself. As Sri Aurobindo says somewhere else, only half God's cosmic work is done. Creation is not a finished product, it is an on-going process. But if, in Sri Aurobindo's vision, only half God's cosmic work is done, it is bound to be done. This is certain because:

The master of existence lurks in us
And plays at hide-and-seek with his own Force;
In Nature's instrument loiters secret God. (p. 66)

In all your instruments, your powers and

abilities, in all of them God's power lurks. But it is hidden, it needs to be brought out, manifested, expressed. In one sense we can say that evolution is really the emergence of the hidden powers of the Divine in man. There is the evolution of the soul, but there is also, parallel to it, the evolution of nature, and nature means all the physical, vital, mental powers and abilities or potentialities.

All-knowing he accepts our darkened state,
Divine, wears shapes of animal or man;
Eternal, he assents to Fate and Time,
Immortal, dallies with mortality.
The All-Conscious ventured into Ignorance
The All-Blissful bore to be insensible.
Incarnate in a world of strife and pain,
He puts on joy and sorrow like a robe
And drinks experience like a strengthening wine. (pp. 66-67)

All experience can be turned into this strengthening wine, if we know the magic of it.

He whose transcendence rules the pregnant Vasts
Prescient now dwells in our subliminal depths
A luminous individual Power, alone.
(p. 67)

Where is he? In our subliminal depths. In order to bring him out, express him, manifest him for all to see, all experience is there to be endured and enjoyed. This is a magnificent passage and one can keep reading it over and over again.

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,
One who is in us as our secret self
Our mask of imperfection has assumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh his own,
His image in the human measure cast
(p. 67)

Why?

That to his divine measure we might rise;
This transfiguration is earth's due to heaven:
A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God, and must be even as he;
His human portion, we must grow divine. (pp. 66-67)

He has become human, we humans must become divine. This is the Secret Knowledge.

Then he talks of the seeker:

Late will he know, opening the mystic script,
Whether to a blank port in the Unseen
He goes or, armed with her fiat, to discover
A new mind and body in the city of God.... (p. 72)

Earlier on we read that he is condemned to an imperfect body and mind. But here we have a transfiguration. What will happen to the body and mind? He goes on to discover a new mind and body in the city of God. So we will have a new mind and a new body, to embody the divine here on earth—

And enshrine the Immortal in his glory's house
And make the finite one with Infinity.
(p. 72)

Again the emphasis is on the finite becoming one with Infinity—not leaving the finite to go into infinity. The finite itself has to put on infinity. Therefore, since this is God's own vision and purpose, the seeker cannot rest. He has no refuge until he finds his goal.

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 over-
taken his night.
As long as Nature lasts, he too is there,
For this is sure that he and she are
one; (p. 72)

(That is, the Divine and his force are one.)

Even when he sleeps, he keeps her on
his breast:
Whoever leaves her, he will not
depart...

For there is a deep purpose in all this:

There is a plan in the Mother's deep
world-whim,
A purpose in her vast and random
game.
This ever she meant since the first
dawn of life,
This constant will she covered with
her sport,...

Right from the beginning, when he
first thought of creation, of expressing
himself, there was this intention:

To evoke a Person in the impersonal
Void,
With the Truth-Light strike earth's
massive roots of trance,
Wake a dumb self in the inconscient
depths
And raise a lost Power from its python
sleep
That the eyes of the Timeless might
look out from Time
And the world manifest the unveiled
Divine.
For this he left his white infinity
And laid on the spirit the burden of
the flesh,
That Godhead's seed might flower in
mindless Space. (pp. 72-73)

This is the mission of God.

I will end by reading from a letter of
Sri Aurobindo where he states in very



*Aditi—the Divine Consciousness. (Photo
courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)*

clear and unambiguous words all that I
have been talking about rather vaguely and
imperfectly. He is talking of the different
planes and worlds, from the subtle physi-
cal up to the highest. He says that each of
them has its own distinctive character-
istics, so that there are qualities in those
worlds which are not here, and which can't
be reproduced here. He says in the letter
that there is an idea in God's mind, that is
in the Supermind, the world of real ideas
that is rooted in Reality; and that is a real
idea which God wants to express, to mani-
fest, and in and through it ultimately to
manifest himself, and he gives the example
of the subtle physical plane, which is clos-
est to the physical and most like it, but still
has a lot of things that this world of ours,
the physical world, has not: He says it has:
"a freedom, plasticity, intensity, colour,
wide and manifold play... of which, as yet,
we have no possibility on earth. And yet
there is something here, a potentiality of
the Divine which the other, in spite of its
greater liberties, has not, something which
makes creation more difficult, but in the
last result justifies the labour." That is what
makes the creation worthwhile. That is
what he says. He talks about a supramental
creation, and asks, rhetorically so to speak:
"What would be the utility of a supramen-
tal creation on earth if it were just the same
thing as a supramental creation on the
supramental plane? It is that in principle,
but yet something else, a triumphant new

self-discovery of the Divine in conditions
that are not elsewhere." (*Letters on Yoga*,
pp. 254-55) When all God's cosmic work is
done, that will be the result of his mission
and desire being fulfilled: a triumphant
new self-discovery of the Divine, in condi-
tions which are here and nowhere else.

Please note the phrase "a self-discov-
ery of the Divine." This is not a matter of
man discovering the Divine. It is a self-
discovery of the Divine, the Divine dis-
covering himself. And where? In matter.
In the physical being. In the Inconscience.
The Superconscient grows aware in the
inconscient.

All of these concepts come together
in one. Each is a facet of the one central
notion. It means that God is trying to do
something here on the earth, in the physi-
cal being, in the inconscience: a self-dis-
covery. On the divine plane where he is,
he doesn't know that he is material. This
is why Sri Aurobindo speaks in another
place of God knowing himself as the ma-
terial divine. God still has something to
discover, to know: another facet of his
own being, his own power, his personality;
and what is that? It is the material divine.
The Divine that is in matter. Not trying to
get out of matter and back to where it be-
gan, where it was divine... No. Discovering
himself as the material divine in matter.

This cannot be done unless matter is
spiritualized, supramentalized, divinized.
How is this to be done? The answer to this
is the main theme of the whole epic, of the
legend and the symbol which is *Savitri*,
and it can be summed up in a few lines
from page 314:

A burning Love from white spiritual
founts
Annulled the sorrow of the ignorant
depths;
Suffering was lost in her immortal
smile.
A Life from beyond grew conqueror
here of death;

This conquering Life and this burning
spiritual Love that can achieve the trans-
formation of the material world is *Savitri*
incarnate.



The everlasting Yes: Savitri, the epic of affirmation

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by Richard Hartz

Much of the world's great literature dwells on the tragic aspect of human experience. Normally we try to keep our contact with this unhappy side of existence to a minimum. Yet it has always attracted poets, dramatists, novelists and their audiences. In Western culture, the choice of a tragic theme has often been regarded as a sign of seriousness of purpose, as if tales of fate, suffering and death revealed the true nature of things in a way that is missed by a more optimistic use of the imagination. Most critics would agree that Aeschylus sounded depths unknown to Aristophanes, and that Shakespeare's genius expressed itself more powerfully in Macbeth than in *Much Ado about Nothing*. In India a supposedly pessimistic worldview produced no comparable tradition of tragic drama, but we find tragedy in works as central to the culture as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Thinkers everywhere have pondered over the appeal of tragedy. Why should the presentation of catastrophic events be conducive to the highest art? Various answers were given in ancient times, from Aristotle's theory of katharsis to the rasa concept of Sanskrit poetics. More recently, Schopenhauer reflected his Vedantic and Buddhist affinities when he wrote: "What gives to everything tragic . . . the characteristic tendency to the sublime, is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them."¹ Nietzsche, deeply influenced by Schopenhauer though he rejected his asceticism, saw tragedy as pointing "to the eternity of true being

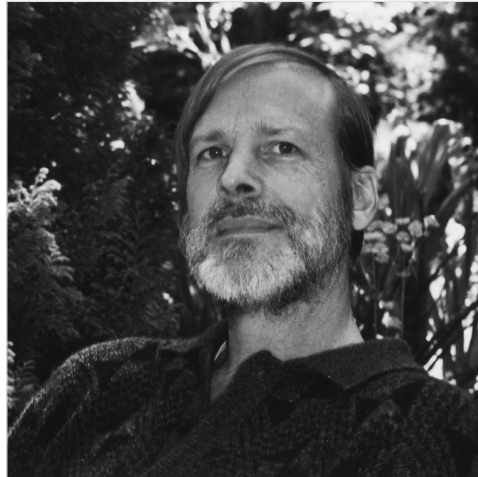


Photo courtesy Richard Hartz

surviving every phenomenal change"² and as "tending toward the shattering of the individual and his fusion with the original Oneness."³ Keenly aware of the "tragedy at the heart of things, . . . the contrariety at the center of the universe,"⁴ Nietzsche found the Dionysian key to the psychology of tragic literature in the act of "saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types."⁵

In India, from the global vantage point of the early twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo drew on several past views, Eastern and Western, in order to explain "why the poet is able to transmute pain and sorrow and the most tragic and terrible and ugly things into forms of poetic beauty."⁶ Greek and Indian aesthetics, Vedantic philosophy and Nietzschean affirmation meet in Sri Aurobindo's account of the secret of poetry:

The mental and vital interest, pleasure, pain of thought, life, action is not the source of poetic delight and beauty and can be turned into that deeper thing only when they have sunk into the soul and been transmuted in the soul's radiant memory into spiritual experience,—that perhaps was what the Greeks meant when they made Mnemosyne the eternal mother of the muses; the passions can only change into poetic matter when they have

been spiritualised in the same bright sources and have undergone the purification, the katharsis, spoken of by the Greek critic. . . .

The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa* and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis, the soul's pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. The memory of the soul that takes in, broods over and transmutes the mind's thought, feeling and experience, is . . . only a common way by which we get at something that stands behind, the spiritual being in us which has the secret of the universal delight and the eternal beauty of existence.⁷

Tragic fate in *Iliad* and *Savitri*

When this passage in *The Future Poetry* was published in 1920, Sri Aurobindo had been working for a number of years on the two epics, *Iliad* and *Savitri*, which are his most substantial contributions to the poetry of the English language. In both epics he came to grips with the tragic dimension of life, collective or personal, represented in one case by the fall of Troy and in the other by the death of Satyavan. But the sense of the inescapability of fate that overshadows *Iliad* is overcome in *Savitri*.

In *Iliad*, Sri Aurobindo depicts life with all its vicissitudes as a divine Lila or cosmic game in which something in us takes an irrepressible delight. Listen, for example, to Helen's words to Paris:

"Yes, it is good," she cried, "what the gods do and actions of mortals; Good is this play of the world; it is good, the joy and the torture. . . . Never can Death undo what life has done for us, Paris. Nor, whatsoever betide, can the hour be un-lived of our rapture. This too is good that nations should meet in the shock of the battle, Heroes be slain and a theme be made for the songs of the poets, Songs that shall thrill with the name of Helen, the beauty of Paris."



Well is this also that empires should
fall for the eyes of a woman;
Well that for Helen Hector ended,
Memnon was slaughtered,
Strong Sarpedon fell and Troilus
ceased in his boyhood.
Troy for Helen burning, her glory,
her empire, her riches,
This is the sign of the gods and the
type of things that are mortal. . . .”⁸

Ilion pulsates with the Nietzschean and Dionysian “Yes” to life even at its strangest and hardest. But this, even in a Vedantic form, was far from being the whole of Sri Aurobindo’s message. Ananke, the Greek personification of adamant Necessity, has the final word in Ilion. But the story of Troy’s downfall could not provide a framework for Sri Aurobindo to convey what he was ultimately seeking, the discovery of a “greater luminous spiritual Necessity and its sovereign imperative” which “alone can displace or entirely penetrate, transform into itself and so replace the blind Ananke of the Inconscience.”⁹ Consequently he turned from Greek to Indian legend. There he found the symbol of a more integral affirmation in the myth of Savitri, the young woman who follows the god of death into the realm of eternal darkness in order to win back the life of her husband, Satyavan.

“The knot of matter” and the genesis of *Savitri*

The opening of the first known manuscript of *Savitri* is dated the 8th and 9th of August, 1916. Sri Aurobindo must have just completed the chapter of *The Life Divine* entitled “The Knot of Matter,” which was published in that month’s issue of the *Arya* (scheduled to come out on the 15th). In this chapter he probes the nature of matter to understand why life in the physical world is “stricken with death and pain” and whether it could be different. He concludes that indeed it could be, if certain conditions were fulfilled. These are explained in the remainder of the thousand and more pages to which his major philosophical work eventually grew, justifying the possibility of a transformed life

on earth as a natural and logical outcome of the continuing evolution of consciousness.

It seems significant that, as far as we can ascertain, Sri Aurobindo began *Savitri* immediately after writing a chapter that is so directly relevant to the fundamental issues at the heart of the poem. In “The Knot of Matter,” he approaches the problem created by matter’s apparent denial of the spirit by first setting out to state the difficulty “entirely, trenchantly, with exaggeration, if need be, rather than with diminution.” In so doing, he temporarily sets aside the detachment of the philosopher and resorts to language whose intensity is closer to that of poetry than metaphysics. Identifying himself with the plight of half-conscious beings in an unconscious world, he writes:

For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind . . . minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible.¹⁰

In the midst of a seemingly abstract philosophical exposition, here is the voice of the poet who three years earlier, in “The Meditations of Mandavya”, had entertained a vision of the world as

...only a dumb Void that belches forth
Numberless larvae and phantasmal
shapes
Into a void less happy than itself
Because this feels. O if this dream
were true,

This iron, brute, gigantic helpless toy
They call a world, this thing that
turns and turns
And shrieks and bleeds and cannot
stop, this victim
Broken and living yet on its own wheel,
And if a Will created this, what name
Shall best blaspheme against that
tyrant God?¹¹

To be sure, this Promethean outburst against the notion of an extra-cosmic Creator expressed only the mood of a moment; for the poet goes on to affirm the “One, multitudinous, nameless, yet a Name”¹² and the poem ends in ecstasy. But we see that, whether in poetry or prose, Sri Aurobindo had the dramatist’s gift for taking opposite viewpoints, affirmative and negative, and expressing them with equal force.

The Debate with Death

We see this method employed with the greatest power in the epic debate of Savitri and Death. A sketch of parts of that debate can be found in the draft of the poem, consisting of a few hundred lines, begun in August 1916 and revised and recopied by November of that year. At this stage much of the eventual epic is only in an embryonic form. But even in this comparatively undeveloped version, Savitri is as much an incarnation of the spirit of affirmation as Death is a personification of the negation of things.

After Satyavan is struck down by Death’s invisible hand, the contest of wills gets under way with the appearance of the god of death himself in a form perceptible to Savitri’s inner sight. In Sri Aurobindo’s fair copy of the first manuscript this passage is shorter than the final text, but we find much of it already in its definitive form. Here Death’s entry is described in these imposing lines:

Something stood there unearthly,
sombre, grand,
A limitless denial of all being
That wore the wonder of a shape. The
Form



Bore the deep pity of destroying gods
In its appalling eyes. Eternal Night
In the dire beauty of an immortal face
Pitying arose, receiving all that lives
Into its fathomless heart for ever. Its
limbs
Were monuments of transience and
beneath
Brows of unwearying calm large god-
like lids
Silent beheld the writhing that is life.
The two opposed each other with
their eyes,
Woman and universal god.¹³

In an age when the gods are normally dismissed as old wives' tales, the god of death as depicted by Sri Aurobindo has few of the trappings of mythology. The suspension of disbelief demanded of the modern mind is minimal. Moreover, Death is represented as the archetypal materialist with whom today's materialist is often likely to agree, as when he describes man's proclivity for creating gods in his own image:

He sees above him with a longing
heart
Bare spaces more unconscious than
himself
That have not even his privilege of
mind,
And empty of all but their unreal blue,
And peoples them with bright and
merciful powers.
For the sea roars around him and
earth quakes
Beneath his steps, and fire is at his
doors,
And death prowls baying through the
woods of life.¹⁴

Any lingering suspicion of anthropomorphism in the representation of Death as a being with whom Savitri can interact—though a cosmic being, whose “shape was nothingness made real” and whose voice “seemed the whole adverse world’s”¹⁵—is dispelled when Death says:

I have no body and no tongue to
speak,

I commune not with human eye and
ear;
Only thy thought gave a figure to my
void.
Because, O aspirant to divinity,
Thou calledst me to wrestle with thy
soul,
I have assumed a face, a form, a voice.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo exercised his poetic abilities to the utmost in evoking the formidable figure of Death, as much as in portraying Death's indomitable antagonist, Savitri. Death's ironic critique of human hopes and ideals is devastating. His arguments, whether drawn from scientific materialism or life-negating mysticism, often seem unanswerable. He makes a plausible case against the whole project of evolution championed by his opponent:

When all unconscious was, then all
was well.
I, Death, was king and kept my regal
state,
Designing my unwilled, unerring
plan. . . .
Then Thought came in and spoiled
the harmonious world:
Matter began to hope and think and
feel,
Tissue and nerve bore joy and agony. . . .
A trouble rocked the great world's
blind still heart
And Nature lost her wide immortal
calm.
Thus came this warped incomprehen-
sible scene. . . .¹⁷

A certain tragic grandeur in the materialistic vision is conveyed in several of the speeches Sri Aurobindo has put in the mouth of Death. At times the picture of the human condition painted in these speeches brings to mind the most moving passages in Bertrand Russell's celebrated essay, “A Free Man's Worship.”

In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, . . . there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of the vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence

. . . In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for the little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour; . . . all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul, which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. . . . Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. . . .¹⁸

While Sri Aurobindo dissented from the pessimism of the materialistic worldview and its limited assessment of human possibilities, he did not underestimate the aspect of life on which it takes its stand. The central question raised in his epic is whether that discouraging aspect is the whole picture, or whether there is after all something in us that is not as isolated, transient and powerless as our surface consciousness—something that, as it struggles for survival in an inhospitable universe, not only can feel the mystery of existence, but whose inner strength is potentially a match for matter's seeming omnipotence. The presence of this incalculable factor is what Sri Aurobindo suggests through his heroine's response to her husband's doom:

Across the awful march no eye can see,
Barring its dreadful route no will can
change,
She faced the engines of the universe;
A heart stood in the way of the driv-
ing wheels:
Its giant workings paused in front of
a mind,
Its stark conventions met the flame of
a soul.¹⁹



The two negations

Though there is an archaic element in *Savitri* that links it to an ancient tradition, Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied with contemporary realities as much as with timeless truths. The challenge to spirituality posed by rationalistic materialism was a reality that could not be ignored. Sri Aurobindo was concerned not merely with refuting the materialist position, however, but with disengaging the truth from which it derives its force and incorporating that in a larger synthesis. In his poetry, furthermore, intellectual truth had to be transfigured into artistic revelation. In *Savitri*, the materialist's denial of the spirit is voiced by Death with all the inspired force of language and image at the poet's command. At the same time, the truth and attraction of the ascetic refusal which is the mirror image of that denial are given an equally compelling statement, as in Death's admonition to Savitri:

The One lives for ever. There no
Satyavan
Changing was born and there no
Savitri
Claims from brief life her bribe of joy.
There love
Came never with his fretful eyes of
tears,
Nor Time is there nor the vain vast
of Space. . . .
If thou desirest immortality,
Be then alone sufficient to thy soul:
Live in thyself; forget the man thou
lov'st.
My last grand death shall rescue thee
from life;
Then shalt thou rise into thy unmoved
source.²⁰

The two negations, materialistic and spiritual, contradictory though they appear to be, agree in ruling out the possibility of the fulfilment of the spirit in matter. By splitting reality into incompatible parts that reject each other, both serve the purpose of Death, the great divider. As he points out,

Where Matter is all, there Spirit is a
dream:
If all are the Spirit, Matter is a lie. . . .

The mutual exclusion of the two poles of existence makes the problem of life insoluble and leaves extinction, physical or spiritual, as the only way out:

Two only are the doors of man's
escape,
Death of his body Matter's gate to
peace,
Death of his soul his last felicity.
In me all take refuge, for I, Death, am
God.²¹

Remaking the universe

Convincing as Death's nihilism may be to the logical mind and however tempting to the disillusioned and the world-weary, there is something deep within us that can hardly fail to leap up at Savitri's response. Remaining silent at first, when she finally speaks it is to assert the unconquerableness of the human soul in a world where Death seems all-powerful:

"I bow not to thee, O huge mask of
death,
Black lie of night to the cowed soul of
man,
Unreal, inescapable end of things,
Thou grim jest played with the im-
mortal spirit. . . ."²²

Sri Aurobindo anticipates here the tone of a talk given years later, after his passing, by the Mother who was undoubtedly his model for the character of Savitri. Calling death a "macabre joke of Nature," she commented on the reactions that the first contact with it arouses in individuals with a somewhat awakened consciousness:

In persons who are sensitive, it produces horror; in others, indignation. There is a tendency to ask oneself: "What is this monstrous farce in which one takes part without wanting to, without understanding it? Why are we born, if it is only to die? Why all

this effort for development, progress, the flowering of the faculties, if it is to come to a diminution ending in decline and disintegration?..." Some feel a revolt in them, others less strong feel despair and always this question arises: "If there is a conscious Will behind all that, this Will seems to be monstrous."

The Mother acknowledged that this process of perpetual destruction and new creation can be looked at as a game that Nature enjoys, even if we do not. But she believed that it is possible "to convince Nature that there are other methods than hers." She added: "This looks like madness, but all new things have always seemed like madness before they became realities."²³

Madness or not, there is an epic sublimity in Savitri's defiance of Death for which one could not easily find a parallel in recent poetry. When he warns her of the divine retribution awaiting those who violate the law of things, she replies:

"Who is this God imagined by thy
night,
Contemptuously creating worlds
disdained,
Who made for vanity the brilliant
stars?
Not he who has reared his temple in
my thoughts
And made his sacred floor my human
heart.
My God is will and triumphs in his
paths,
My God is love and sweetly suffers
all. . . .
A traveller of the million roads of life,
His steps familiar with the lights of
heaven
Tread without pain the sword-paved
courts of hell;
There he descends to edge eternal joy.
Love's golden wings have power to fan
thy void:
The eyes of love gaze starlike through
death's night,
The feet of love tread naked hardest
worlds.
He labours in the depths, exults on
the heights;

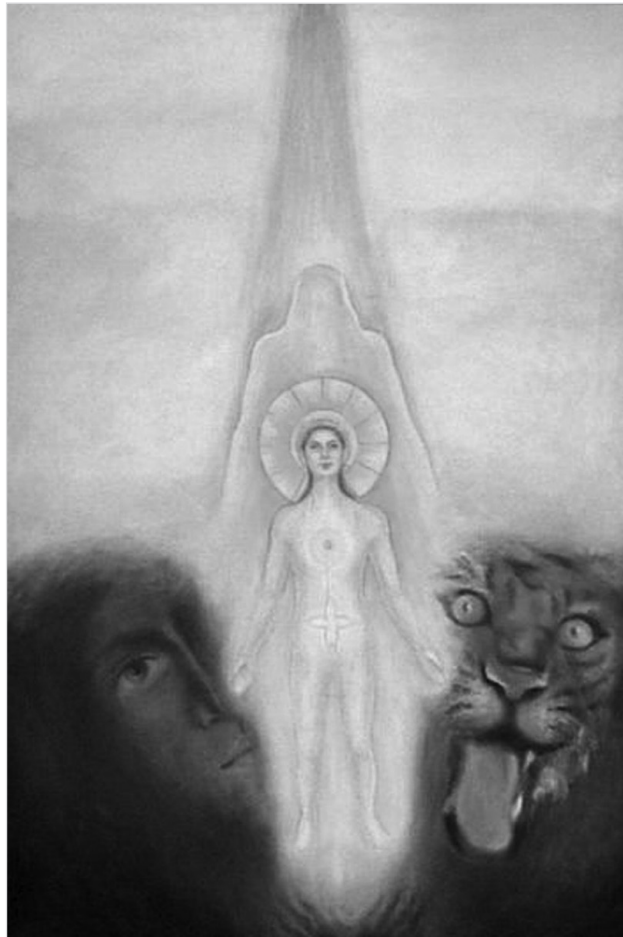


He shall remake thy universe,
O Death."²⁴

The remaking of the universe would seem to require divine intervention in the cosmic process, but what individuals can do is to remake themselves. By the time Sri Aurobindo took up *Savitri*, this self-refashioning had been his principal occupation for several years. We cannot begin to understand his epic without an idea of the spiritual practice and realizations that led to its composition and make it something more than a work of literature. Some of his prose writings, his other poetry, his letters and especially his diary, the *Record of Yoga*, give glimpses of the Yogi's inner life. They confirm the largely autobiographical nature of *Savitri*, his final self-revelatory masterpiece, which complements and completes these other sources.

Affirmations of the developing God

Sri Aurobindo's sadhana followed an inner guidance rather than an established tradition, though the Sanskrit terminology he employed shows his indebtedness to the ancient spiritual culture of India. Under this inner guidance, the formulation of his personal system of Yoga took a significant turn in June 1914. This was a little over two years before he started to write *Savitri* and two months before the publication of the first issue of the *Arya*, the monthly philosophical review in which for the next few years he would present his thought and vision to the world in works such as *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In fact, the introduction of what he called the "affirmations" into his sadhana coincided with the beginning of his work for the *Arya*. This development in his Yoga was to influence perceptibly some of the writings that appeared in the *Arya*, especially *The Life Divine*, and is relevant to appreciating the spirit of affirmation that is



"Descent of the Truth-Consciousness." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

characteristic of *Savitri*.

On June 10th and 12th, 1914, Sri Aurobindo listed nine items in his diary which he described as "affirmations, stomach, of the developing God."²⁵ We will come back to the precise meaning of the Vedic term *stoma* in connection with *Savitri*. For now let us take a glance at some of these affirmations. They were written down in three groups under the heading "Script." Script in the *Record of Yoga* was a communication, received through a process resembling automatic writing, from a source which was often identified as the Master of the Yoga, Sri Aurobindo's inner guide.

Four affirmations were given first, with an indication that there were more to come; the next three followed on the same day and the last pair two days later. The original grouping into four, three and two was to remain important throughout the coming year, during which the affir-

mations come up repeatedly in the *Record*. In an entry dated a year after they were first received, the three groups are referred to as the "four Brahma affirmations", the "three Krishna affirmations" and the "two Prakriti affirmations."²⁶ Frequently only seven affirmations are mentioned, however, the last two being perceived as dependent on the perfection of the other seven.

The division of the first seven affirmations into those concerned with Brahman and with Krishna, with the impersonal and the personal experience of the divine Reality, is a helpful simplification; but in practice Sri Aurobindo found that these aspects could not be separated. They are combined in the second affirmation of the first group, which was later placed first:

The universal sense of the Anandamaya Lilamaya Krishna in the Brahmadrishhti as the continent of all the conscious activity.²⁷

Here we get a clue to the reason for the prominence of Krishna in the affirmations—for Sri Aurobindo was not a Vaishnava and there was nothing sectarian in his references to Krishna. Krishna is the lord of the Lila, the divine play. The sense of the world as Lila was strong in Sri Aurobindo's consciousness at this time, evidently due to the increasing intensity of his realization of the Brahman as Ananda, the eternal and universal delight of being. This brought with it a heightened awareness of the living Personality behind all things. He explains in *The Life Divine* that the world can be seen in terms of Maya if we regard it "in its relation to pure, infinite, indivisible, immutable Existence" (Sat). Or if we look at it in relation to pure consciousness (Chit), it is natural to view the world as a movement of Force, as Prakriti. But world-existence can also be experienced "in its relation to the self-delight of eternally existent being." In that case,



we may regard, describe and realise it as Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanician's joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation,—Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground.²⁸

When Sri Aurobindo drafted his first version of *Savitri*, he evoked the vision of this Lila using imagery traditionally associated with Krishna. The final text of this passage differs little from what it was in 1916:

One who came love and lover and
beloved
Eternal, built himself a wondrous field
And wove the measures of a marvelous dance.
There in its circles and its magic turns
Attracted he arrives, repelled he flees.
...
His bliss laughs to us or it calls
concealed
Like a far-heard unseen entrancing
flute
From moonlit branches in the throbbing woods,
Tempting our angry search and passionate pain.²⁹

The affirmations in the *Record* are of interest to us here mainly as part of the background of the composition of *Savitri*. For our immediate purpose, therefore, the affirmation of Krishna's Ananda and Lila in the vision of Brahman can be taken to represent the first group of four. We will come back to two other affirmations in this group in connection with The Life Divine. The three Krishna affirmations proper, pertaining to the personal relation with the Lord and Lover, form the second group. A convenient summary of them is found in an entry within a month after the affirmations were initially recorded. On 7 July 1914, Sri Aurobindo noted an instance of what he termed "lipi," or etheric writing seen with the faculty of subtle

vision. The words he saw were "Ecstasy . . . Love . . . God." Later in the same entry he commented: "Love . . . ecstasy . . . God is the formula of fulfilment of the second group of affirmations."³⁰ The last item in this group affirms the acceptance of all experience as "a slave & instrument of the Lover."³¹ When he drafted the first version of *Savitri* in 1916, Sri Aurobindo described this condition of rapturous surrender in a passage near the end, where a divine voice speaks to Savitri:

Thou shalt drink down my sweetness
unalloyed
And bear my ruthless beauty unbridged
Amid the world's intolerable
wrongs . . .
Insistent, careless of thy lonely right,
My creatures shall demand me from
thy heart.
All that thou hast shall be for others'
bliss;
All that thou art shall to my hands
belong.
I will pour delight from thee as from
a jar
And whirl thee as my chariot through
the ways
And use thee as my sword and as my
lyre
And play on thee my minstrelsies of
thought.
And when thou art vibrant with all
ecstasies
And when thou liv'st one spirit with
all things,
Men seeing thee shall feel my siege
of joy,
And nearer draw to me because thou
art. . .
This shalt thou henceforth learn from
thy heartbeats,
That conquering me thou art my captive
made,
And who possess me are by me possessed.
For ever love, O beautiful slave of
God.³²

The affirmations as formulated in June 1914 and restated in December were a

major feature of the *Record of Yoga* only for a year or so. During that period the last pair of affirmations lagged behind the other seven. These two final affirmations implied an expansion of the scope of the Yoga, an acceleration of its pace and a more decisive application to life. Only a preparation for this was possible while the foundation outlined in the other affirmations was being laid. But the twin Prakriti affirmations anticipated subsequent developments in Sri Aurobindo's sadhana that figure prominently in *Savitri*. The eighth affirmation is:

Siddhi must be on the basis of the largeness in the five worlds & not a selective & limited siddhi.³³

This was rephrased six months later in a manner that again brought in the sense of Lila and connected the Prakriti affirmations with the preceding Krishna affirmations:

The field of play of Krishna the five worlds working themselves out in the fifth, Bhurloka.³⁴

A detailed account of the worlds was not part of the original scheme of *Savitri*, but was introduced in the late 1920s into what eventually became the longest of the twelve books of the epic. Sri Aurobindo did not pursue or expound the knowledge of the supraphysical planes in the spirit of an otherworldly mysticism, however. As the reformulated affirmation suggests, what preoccupied him was the worlds of life, mind, supermind and Sachchidananda "working themselves out" in the world of matter represented by the earth ("Bhurloka"). In *Savitri*, the impact on the terrestrial plane of the subtle forces proper to higher grades of substance and consciousness is the subject of much of the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. This interconnectedness is indicated in the opening canto of Book Two, "The World-Stair:"

Our earth is a fragment and a residue;
Her power is packed with the stuff of
greater worlds



And steeped in their colour-lustres
dimmed by her drowse;
An atavism of higher births is hers,
Her sleep is stirred by their buried
memories

Recalling the lost spheres from which
they fell.
Unsatisfied forces in her bosom move;
They are partners of her greater grow-
ing fate
And her return to immortality. . . .³⁵

The final affirmation deals with the question of time. This was crucial if the thoroughgoing transformation envisaged by Sri Aurobindo was to be achieved within the span of a single life. In its original form, the ninth affirmation reads:

Time must be no longer a determina-
tive, but only an instrumental factor
in the siddhi. So also with Space &
Circumstance.³⁶

In Savitri's dialogue with Death, her adversary rebukes her as one of those spirits who

Have come into the narrow bounds
of life
With too large natures overleaping
time.

Death argues for respecting the estab-
lished order and letting time take its me-
andering course:

The wise think with the cycles, they
hear the tread
Of far-off things; patient, unmoved
they keep
Their dangerous wisdom in their
depths restrained,
Lest man's frail days into the un-
known should sink
Dragged like a ship by bound levia-
than
Into the abyss of his stupendous seas.
Lo, how all shakes when the gods
tread too near!
All moves, is in peril, anguished, torn,
upheaved.

But Savitri insists on a dynamic view of the process of time, invoking the lives of heroes and geniuses, prophets and incar-
nations to support her optimism:

Ever to the new and the unknown
press on
The speeding aeons justifying God.
What were earth's ages if the grey
restraint
Were never broken and glories sprang
not forth
Bursting their obscure seed, while
man's slow life
Leaped hurried into sudden splendid
paths
By divine words and human gods
revealed? . . .
I claim from Time my will's eternity,
God from his moments.³⁷

The affirmations of Vedanta

Ten days after writing out the first seven affirmations, Sri Aurobindo noted in his diary: "the first Book of the Life Divine begun (the Vedantic Affirma-
tions)."³⁸ His major philosophical work was thus initiated in the spirit of the principle he had adopted in his personal sadhana, summed up in the third affirmation in the *Record of Yoga*: "The principle of Affirmation to replace the principle of rejection & denial."³⁹ A statement in *The Life Divine* suggests the underlying rationale of this "principle of Affirmation" justifying its inclusion among the "Brahma affirmations:"

All affirmations are denied only to
lead to a wider affirmation of the same
Reality. All antinomies confront each
other in order to recognise one Truth
in their opposed aspects and embrace
by the way of conflict their mutual
Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the
Omega. Brahman is the One besides
whom there is nothing else existent.⁴⁰

When the opening chapter of *The Life Divine* appeared on 15 August 1914 in the first issue of the *Arya*, the heading "Book I / The Affirmations of Vedanta"

was printed above the title of the chapter. In the text itself, significant occurrences of the word "affirmation" begin with the second paragraph:

These persistent ideals of the race are at once the contradiction of its normal experience and the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences. . . .⁴¹

Although Sri Aurobindo later substituted "Omnipresent Reality and the Universe" for "The Affirmations of Vedanta" as the title of Book One, the idea of affirmation and the Vedantic interpretation of it continued to be a persistent feature of *The Life Divine*, found even in passages he added or rewrote when he revised and expanded it to its present dimensions twenty-five years after its serial publication began in the *Arya*. The best explanation of what he meant by "the affirmations of Vedanta" occurs in such a passage, first published in the 1940 edition of Book Two:

In the Upanishads, in the inspired scripture of the most ancient Vedanta, we find the affirmation of the Absolute, the experience-concept of the utter and ineffable Transcendence; but we find also, not in contradiction to it but as its corollary, an affirmation of the cosmic Divinity, an experience-concept of the cosmic Self and the becoming of Brahman in the universe. Equally, we find the affirmation of the Divine Reality in the individual: this too is an experience-concept; it is seized upon not as an appearance, but as an actual becoming. In place of a sole supreme exclusive affirmation negating all else than the transcendent Absolute we find a comprehensive affirmation carried to its farthest conclusion: this concept of Reality and of Knowledge enveloping in one view the cosmic and the Absolute coincides fundamentally with our own. . . .⁴²

In *Savitri*, these "experience-concepts" are affirmed in the evocative language of poetry. In a well-known passage in "The Secret Knowledge," for instance, we meet



first the transcendent Absolute, but not as an “exclusive affirmation negating all else.”

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute
Force
Where she lay in the featureless and
formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile
sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.

This leads to the affirmation of the same Absolute as the cosmic Self that becomes the universe:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has entered with his silence into
space:
He has fashioned these countless
persons of one self;
He has built a million figures of his
power;
He lives in all, who lived in his Vast
alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he.

Finally, the divine Reality in the individual is affirmed:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Im-
mune,
One who is in us as our secret self,
Our mask of imperfection has as-
sumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh
his own,
His image in the human measure cast
That to his divine measure we might
rise. . . .⁴³

The everlasting No and the everlasting Yes

Meanwhile, the mask of our imperfection hides very effectively whatever divinity is within us. This fact has led to two opposite conclusions. At one extreme of the spectrum of thought are those who deny the divinity altogether. At the other extreme are those who, while affirming the divinity, reject not only the mask, but the tenement. These two negations, the

materialist denial and the refusal of the ascetic, are contrasted in the second and third chapters of *The Life Divine*. Each affirms what the other rejects, but both affirmations are radically incomplete and vitiated by their own one-sidedness. As Sri Aurobindo observes:

Liberty pursued by exclusion of the thing exceeded leads along the path of negation to the refusal of that which God has accepted. Activity pursued by absorption in the act and the energy leads to an inferior affirmation and the denial of the Highest.⁴⁴

In place of these limiting alternatives, Sri Aurobindo proposes a complete affirmation. He explains its nature most clearly in “The Problem of Life,” a chapter of *The Life Divine* originally published in the *Arya* in May 1916, three months before he commenced his work on *Savitri*.

“All life,” he writes, “depends for its nature on the fundamental poise of its own constituting consciousness. . . .” Consciousness can take any of four poises. First there is its poise in the unity of Sachchidananda, the infinite existence-consciousness-bliss that is the source of all. At the other end of things, consciousness seems to disappear in the enormous machinery of material nature. Out of this self-oblivion has arisen the third poise, the divided consciousness of mind, “limiting itself in various centres, . . . aware of things and forces in their apparent division and opposition to each other but not in their real unity.” The final possibility is consciousness “in possession of both the diversity and the unity,” whose nature is “the One knowing itself as the Many and the Many knowing themselves as the One.”

Force has a different relation to consciousness in each of these poises. In Sachchidananda they are one. In the material world, characterized by Sri Aurobindo as “the great denial of Sachchidananda by Himself,” we see “the utter apparent separation of Force from Consciousness, the specious miracle of the all-governing and infallible Inconscient.” The third relation describes our own condition. It “is the

poise of being in Mind and in the Life which we see emerging out of this denial, bewildered by it, struggling . . . against the thousand and one problems involved in this perplexing apparition of man the half-potent conscient being out of the omnipotent Inconscience of the material universe.” But this unsatisfactory state of affairs is not the end of the matter. Sri Aurobindo continues:

The fourth relation is the poise of being in Supermind: it is the fulfilled existence which will eventually solve all this complex problem created by the partial affirmation emerging out of the total denial; and it must needs solve it in the only possible way, by the complete affirmation fulfilling all that was secretly there contained in potentiality and intended in fact of evolution behind the mask of the great denial.⁴⁵

This brief summary of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy provides a framework in which to interpret *Savitri*. The entire epic can be understood in these terms—not surprisingly, since the whole of existence appears to be encompassed in this all-inclusive scheme. Numerous passages in the poem could be cited pertaining to each of the four poises. But what is symbolized in *Savitri* as a whole is the “complete affirmation” belonging to the poise in Supermind (*Vijnana*) where consciousness and force are reunited as inseparable equals. This integral affirmation is not envisioned as an exit from the manifestation and a return to the starting-point in undifferentiated Sachchidananda. Rather, it corresponds to the “*Vijnanamaya Sachchidananda*” mentioned in a reformulation of the fourth affirmation in the Record of Yoga, which is to bring “the fulfilment of mind, life & body.”⁴⁶

The occurrences of the verb “affirm” in *Savitri* will provide us with a sample of passages illustrating the kinds of affirmation proper to the various poises of consciousness in the universe and beyond. But first it may be observed that, though the noun “affirmation” itself does not occur in the poem, we find its opposites, “denial,”



“negation,” “refusal”—often in connection with Death, who personifies the cosmic opposition to the spirit of affirmation embodied in Savitri herself. We have already seen Death described as a “limitless denial of all being.”⁴⁷ Let us look at a few more of these negative expressions:

Across the fruitless labour of the
worlds
His huge denial’s all-defeating might
Pursued the ignorant march of dolor-
ous Time. ⁴⁸

Immutable, Death’s denial met her
cry . . . ⁴⁹

A great Negation was the Real’s face
Prohibiting the vain process of
Time. . . . ⁵⁰

On all that claims here to be Truth
and God
And conscious self and the revealing
Word
And the creative rapture of the Mind
And Love and Knowledge and heart’s
delight, there fell
The immense refusal of the eternal
No. ⁵¹

As the last phrase suggests, “Yes” and “No” are of course equivalent to affirmation and negation or refusal. Their occurrences should also be included, therefore, in a study of *Savitri* as the epic of affirmation. But here we have to take into account a complexity in the idea of negation which enriches at the same time the concept of affirmation. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo refers to a “superior Negation” as well as an “inferior negation.”⁵² The inferior one evidently corresponds to the “great denial” and the “immense refusal” we have already encountered. With regard to the superior negation, Sri Aurobindo points out that “it is through both a supreme affirmation and a supreme negation that we can arrive at the Absolute.”⁵³ He elaborates on this elsewhere:

The Absolute is in itself indefinable
by reason, ineffable to the speech; it

has to be approached through experi-
ence. It can be approached through an
absolute negation of existence, as if it
were itself a supreme Non-Existence,
a mysterious infinite Nihil. It can be
approached through an absolute affir-
mation of all the fundamentals of our
own existence. . . . ⁵⁴

Consequently there is a certain ambiva-
lence in Sri Aurobindo’s use of the word
“No” in *Savitri*. He describes the all-negat-
ing Absolute as

An endless No to all that seems to be,
An endless Yes to things ever uncon-
ceived
And all that is unimagined and
unthought. . . . ⁵⁵

Nevertheless, as we saw in the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo’s approach was to re-
place the principle of rejection and denial
as far as possible by the principle of af-
firmation. Accordingly, after the canto in
Book Three entitled “The Pursuit of the
Unknowable,” a powerful evocation of the
“stillness absolute, incommunicable” that
“makes unreal all that mind has known” is
followed by the warning:

Only the everlasting No has neared
And stared into thy eyes and killed
thy heart:
But where is the Lover’s everlasting
Yes. . . ? ⁵⁶

The epic of affirmation

After Savitri experiences Nirvana in the
“all-negating Absolute,” she seems to
be on the verge of the “last annulment,”
when a very different spiritual outcome is
suggested:

Even now her splendid being might
flame back
Out of the silence and the nullity,
A gleaming portion of the All-Won-
derful,
A power of some all-affirming Abso-
lute. . . . ⁵⁷

This is one of four occurrences of “affirm-
ing” or “affirmed” in *Savitri*. Interestingly,
these can be correlated with the four
poises of consciousness outlined in *The Life Divine*. The “all-affirming Absolute”
would belong to the first, the poise of
consciousness in the infinity of Sachchi-
dananda.

Another occurrence of “affirming” is
in “The Book of the Divine Mother.” It re-
lates to Sachchidananda’s aspect of eternal
delight, but only as a concealed presence
in the unconscious and insentient uni-
verse where life has evolved. This is the
second poise:

Affirming in life a hidden ecstasy
It held the spirit to its miraculous
course;
Carrying immortal values to the hours
It justified the labour of the suns. ⁵⁸

“Affirming” is found a third time (revers-
ing the order in which these passages oc-
cur in the poem) in “The Kingdoms and
Godheads of the Greater Life,” the sixth
canto of Book Two:

All powers of Life towards their
godhead tend
In the wideness and the daring of that
air,
Each builds its temple and expands
its cult,
And Sin too there is a divinity.
Affirming the beauty and splendour
of her law
She claims life as her natural
domain. . . . ⁵⁹

Sin and evil, as we experience them,
clearly belong to the “partial affirma-
tion” of a consciousness divided against
itself, emerging with its “thousand and
one problems” out of matter’s negation of
Sachchidananda.⁶⁰ But these lines in “The
Book of the Traveller of the Worlds” ex-
press an occult truth explained in *The Life Divine*:

Those life impulses which are to earth-
nature inordinate and out of measure
and appear here as perverse and ab-



normal, find in their own province of being an independent fulfilment and an unrestricted play of their type and principle. . . Here on earth these things exist in an unsatisfied and therefore unsatisfactory and obscure state of struggle and mixture, but there reveal their secret and their motive of being because they are there established in their native power and full form of nature in their own world and their own exclusive atmosphere.⁶¹

Every aspect of existence in this and other worlds finds a place in Sri Aurobindo's epic. In a sense, all is affirmed because behind all there is a truth, however partial. By itself this might lead only to a Nietzschean "Yes" to life even at its strangest and hardest. The aesthetic appreciation of tragedy gives a kind of meaning to reality as it is. But Sri Aurobindo goes on to posit a fourth poise of consciousness, where the reaffirmation of Sachchidananda in Supermind—the "Vijnanamaya Sachchidananda" of the *Record of Yoga*—is expected to solve the myriad problems that have arisen in the third poise.

The introduction of a supramental consciousness into the scheme of things is grounded in experience as well as philosophy. This factor distinguishes *Savitri* from *Ilion*. It also justifies the story's happy ending as something more than a fairy tale; for the Supermind would heal the division between consciousness and force, enabling the illumined and empowered will to override the decrees of Ananke. The result of this Siddhi is symbolized by the victory of Savitri over Death. The poem's climactic event is anticipated at the end of the second canto, "The Issue." Here, significantly, is the remaining occurrence of the verb "affirm:"

A living choice reversed fate's cold
dead turn,
Affirmed the spirit's tread on Circum-
stance,
Pressed back the senseless dire revol-
ving Wheel
And stopped the mute march of
Necessity.⁶²

The passage concludes a few lines later with the bursting of "the bounds of consciousness and Time." We are reminded of the last affirmation in the *Record of Yoga*, which insists that time, space and circumstance must be no longer "determinative", but only "instrumental."⁶³

Much of what we find in *Savitri* is explained in Sri Aurobindo's prose writings in ways that may seem more accessible to the logical mind. Undoubtedly a comparison with these writings is helpful for understanding the meaning of *Savitri*. But in the end, it is not to convey logical ideas that it was written. In the first chapter of the work that was originally called *The Psychology of Social Development* and later revised and published as *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo spoke in passing of the higher function of poetry in ancient times. It is worth noting that along with "The Knot of Matter," quoted earlier, this appeared in the *Arya* in the month when he began to draft what we now know as *Savitri*:

To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy, imagination a plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch-girl of the mind. But to the men of old the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination no dancing courtesan but a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but to image difficult and hidden truths. . . .⁶⁴

It was as "a revealer of hidden truths," like the Rishis of the Vedic age, that Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri*. But besides the disclosure of mystic truth, Vedic poetry had a closely related intention. The Vedic *sūkta* was also called a *stoma*, translated by Sri Aurobindo as "hymn of affirmation."⁶⁵ Incidentally, as we have seen, he applied the same word, *stoma*, to the affirmations which played an important role during a substantial period of his sadhana as recorded in his diary. During this period he began to write and publish, in monthly instalments, several of his major works including *The Secret of the Veda*. In one of the first commentaries on selected Vedic hymns which

accompanied that work, he explained the meaning of *stoma* as he understood it:

By expression then we create and men are even said to create the gods in themselves by the mantra. Again, that which we have created in our consciousness by the Word, we can fix there by the Word to become part of ourselves and effective not only in our inner life but upon the outer physical world. By expression we form, by affirmation we establish. As a power of expression the word is termed *gīh* or *vacas*; as a power of affirmation, *stoma*. In either aspect it is named *manma* or mantra. . . .⁶⁶

Affirmation of the truth—in the sense of fixing or establishing it in our consciousness—was, then, part of the function of the Vedic mantra according to Sri Aurobindo. This idea also enters into his broader concept of the Mantra as extended to poetry in general, where it designates "the highest power of the inspired word."⁶⁷ It was probably in 1950, when he was occupied with the final revision of *Savitri*, that Sri Aurobindo dictated a paragraph on the Mantra for *The Future Poetry*. The Mantra, he says here, "is the word that carries the godhead in it or the power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute."⁶⁸

In this sense we can speak of *Savitri* as the epic of affirmation, a Vedic *stoma* on a grand scale. Affirming our divine potential, it can bring the godhead into our consciousness and "fix there it and its workings," yet it does not reject or disparage our humanity, which is a mask but also a tenement of God. Sri Aurobindo's epic, like its heroine, is "the living body of his light." Like her, the poem houses the Name and the Nameless, "the Word or Name vibrating out of the nameless Silence."⁶⁹ Challenging Death's power over aspiring humanity, *Savitri*'s words epitomize the spirit of affirmation she represents—the everlasting Yes:



“Yes, I am human. Yet shall man by me,
 Since in humanity waits his hour the
 God,
 Trample thee down to reach the im-
 mortal heights,
 Transcending grief and pain and fate
 and death.
 Yes, my humanity is a mask of God:
 He dwells in me, the mover of my acts,
 Turning the great wheel of his cosmic
 work.
 I am the living body of his light,
 I am the thinking instrument of his
 power,
 I incarnate Wisdom in an earthly
 breast,
 I am his conquering and unslayable
 will.
 The formless Spirit drew in me its
 shape;
 In me are the Nameless and the secret
 Name.”⁷⁰

Notes

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 433–34.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 53.
- 3 Ibid., p. 56.
- 4 Ibid., p. 64.
- 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 562.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry, with On Quantitative Metre* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 259
7. Ibid., p. 262. First published in *Arya: A Philosophical Review*, vol. 6, no. 8 (March 1920), pp. 506–7.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2009), p. 397.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005), p. 997.
10. Ibid., p. 258. First published in *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), pp. 6–7.
11. *Collected Poems*, p. 513.
12. Ibid., p. 515.
13. “Sri Aurobindo’s First Fair Copy of His Earliest Version of Savitri”, *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture*, vol. 33, no. 11 (November 1981), p. 622. Cf. *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1993), p. 574.
14. *Savitri*, pp. 586–87.
15. Ibid., pp. 574–75.
16. Ibid., p. 593.
17. Ibid., p. 617.
18. Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship”, http://www.skeptic.ca/Bertrand_Russell_Collection.pdf.
19. *Savitri*, p. 20.
20. Ibid., pp. 593–94. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 696.
21. *Savitri*, p. 635.
22. Ibid., p. 588.
23. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957–1958* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), pp. 33–36.
24. *Savitri*, pp. 591–92. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 695.
25. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 485.
26. Ibid., p. 880.
27. Ibid., p. 484.
28. *The Life Divine*, pp. 109–11. First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 12 (July 1915), pp. 706–8. In a summary of the state of his sadhana at the beginning of the month in which this chapter (“Delight of Existence: The Solution”) appeared in the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo observed: “The Anandam Brahma is now fixed in the vision of all things and only occasionally goes back for a moment into the Anantam Jnanam Brahma. Along with this finality there is also the finality of the Lilamaya darshana in all existences. . . .” (*Record of Yoga*, p. 883)
29. *Savitri*, pp. 613–14. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 699.
30. *Record of Yoga*, pp. 535–36.
31. Ibid., p. 485.
32. *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 2 (February 1982), pp. 82–83. Cf. *Savitri*, pp. 700–702.
33. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
34. Ibid., p. 766.
35. *Savitri*, pp. 99–100.
36. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
37. *Savitri*, pp. 650–52. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 5–6.
38. *Record of Yoga*, p. 504.
39. Ibid., p. 484.
40. *The Life Divine*, p. 38.
41. Ibid., p. 4. First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1914), p. 2.
42. *The Life Divine*, pp. 661–62. This passage is the revised version of the following sentence in the *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 8 (March 1917), p. 452: “On the other hand in the Isha Upanishad we find the tendency of comprehensive affirmation carried to its farthest conclusion and a point of view arrived at which coincides with our own.”
43. *Savitri*, p. 67.
44. *The Life Divine*, p. 46.
45. Ibid., pp. 223–25.
46. *Record of Yoga*, p. 765.
47. *Savitri*, p. 574.
48. Ibid., p. 643.
49. Ibid., p. 654.
50. Ibid., p. 600.
51. Ibid., p. 583.
52. *The Life Divine*, p. 53.
53. Ibid., p. 663.
54. Ibid., p. 493.
55. *Savitri*, p. 547.
56. Ibid., p. 310.
57. Ibid., p. 549.
58. Ibid., p. 313.
59. Ibid., p. 185.
60. *The Life Divine*, pp. 224–25.
61. Ibid., pp. 813–14.
62. *Savitri*, p. 21.
63. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
64. *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 9. First published in *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), p. 30.
65. *The Secret of the Veda, with Selected Hymns* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), p. 270.
66. Ibid., p. 271. First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 2 (September 1914), p. 34.
67. *The Future Poetry*, p. 240.
68. Ibid., p. 313.
69. *The Life Divine*, p. 165.
70. *Savitri*, p. 634.



Vision of the future: supramental transformation

by Kalpana Bidwaikar

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The seer-vision of Sri Aurobindo comprehends that “Man is a transitional being; he is not final, for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood. The step from man towards superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth’s evolution.”¹ The terrestrial manifestation is progressive and evolutionary and the present condition of man with its heavy load of miseries of pain and suffering cannot be the last act of manifestation. Sri Aurobindo points out in *Savitri*,

Since God has made earth, earth must
make in her God;
What hides within her breast she
must reveal. (p. 693)

This world is a creation of God and must reveal the god himself. The spiritual transformation turns the mental man wholly to the consciousness of a spiritual being but even this is the middle step. The consciousness is joyously freed, uplifted and illumined through the spiritual transformation of the being. After this transformation one is united with the Cosmic Divine; and enjoys a universal Peace, Light, Power, and Bliss but even all these cannot entirely transform and conquer the ignorant nature. The Spirit is free but the nature remains in bondage and is full of imperfections. The cosmic consciousness is able to liberate but does not have the dynamic power which will bring down the highest knowledge to change the outer actions of life. The inner being is full of higher Knowledge and Power and Bliss after this change, but the outer being is not



(Photo courtesy Kalpana Bidwaikar)

adequately able to express it in its external activities. This can be made possible only after a further ascent towards the Supermind and its descent bringing about the supreme perfection. At that level of consciousness, one attains a true identity with God and fully possesses the spirit and its power in the outer person and nature for a perfect living in the Divine. In order to achieve this perfect perfection one has to ascend into the gnostic (truth-consciousness) plane and bring down its greatness and glory into the terrestrial life for its supreme fulfillment. Sri Aurobindo says, “As the psychic change has to call in the spiritual to complete it, so the first spiritual change has to call in the supramental transformation to complete it.”² This is his famous triple transformation about which he has also written in *Savitri*,

But first the spirit’s ascent we must
achieve
Out of the chasm from which our
nature rose.
The soul must soar sovereign above
the form
And climb to summits beyond mind’s
half-sleep;
Our hearts we must inform with
heavenly strength,
Surprise the animal with the occult
god.
Then kindling the gold tongue of
sacrifice,
Calling the powers of a bright hemi-
sphere,

We shall shed the discredit of our
mortal state,
Make the abyss a road for Heaven’s
descent,
Acquaint our depths with the super-
nal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the
mystic Fire. (p. 171)

But what is the supramental transformation? Sri Aurobindo says, “the supramental transformation [is that] in which all becomes supramentalized in the divine gnostic consciousness. It is only with the last that there can begin the complete transformation of mind, life and body—in my sense of completeness.”³ Supramental connotes the Truth-Consciousness and this transformation means that the entire being, the inner and even the most outer being receives the descent of the Supermind and there is no place for inconscience or obscurity or falsehood in any part of the being. However, for the descent of the Supermind one has to ascend towards the higher planes.

The Supermind is the dynamic principle and infinite Wisdom and of the Supreme Sachchidananda through which the creation came into being. The Supermind is a perfect “Truth-Consciousness” that is in possession of the integral knowledge of both Self and the world. Here the seeming opposites of matter and Self, finite and infinite, the One and the Many appear as different aspects of the same reality. The truth of the Divine is no more hidden in manifestation but realized as an expression of the One and the Infinite in his many forms. The Supermind has a complete and indivisible knowledge which is not affected by the principle of division of the lower mental planes.

Sri Aurobindo through his yogic realizations found that the mind cannot ascend directly to the Supramental consciousness. This change would be too vast for man to bear, and he “cannot by his own effort make himself more than man; the mental being cannot by his own unaided force change himself into a supramental spirit. A descent of the Divine Nature can alone divinize the human receptacle.”⁴



Overmind is an intermediary level of consciousness for the spiritual seeker when one moves from mind to Supermind. The spiritual transformation achieves the universalization of human consciousness and widens and illumines the human nature. However, the union and communion with the Cosmic Divine at the level of Overmind consciousness cannot transform the whole human nature into the supranature. The human mind may consider the achievement of the spiritual transformation to be exceptionally high and rare, but it is inadequate to the fulfillment of the ideal that Sri Aurobindo has placed before us. He says, "A Divine life in a divine body is the formula of the ideal that we envisage."⁵

Sri Aurobindo discovered that there is an omniscient power which he calls the Supermind and which he wanted to bring down onto earth as it alone could bring a decisive change in the evolution of the earth consciousness. He says,

In order to approach, realize and attain the supramental, man must first consent to be spiritualized. He must have a true attitude, a psychic realization, open only to the Divine...

I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness; I see it above and know what it is—I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution.⁶

The Supermind while transforming and divinizing the lower principles of mind, life and body effectuate their perfect integration with one another. The different parts of our being which govern the will and action, knowledge, thinking being, life attain their perfect harmony in the gnostic plane. The action of the Supermind helps the soul to realize the divine bliss, the mind regain its divine light, the life

its divine power and the body possess its divine essence and liberty. All the parts of the being undergo a change which is powerfully expressed. The psychic expresses its originality of true and pure love. The mind no more dwells in ignorance but becomes luminous with the Supreme Light. The life also attains a larger significance and becomes vast, calm, intense, powerful and sheds its old narrow self of petty impulse and desire. The body no longer adheres to its animality and tamasic nature and becomes a conscious and a willing servant of the Spirit. When one ascends into the Supermind one is raised in consciousness of the divine gnosis and the descent of Light and Truth brings about a divine integration and perfection of the dynamic nature. The power of the Supermind is described in Savitri thus,

An Immeasurable cast into many forms,
A miracle of the multitudinous One,
There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.
It has no home on earth, no centre in man,
Yet is the source of all things thought and done,
The fount of the creation and its works, (p. 705)

The one essential condition of the ascent to the Supermind is the emergence of the psychic or the inner being. There should be the psychic development and the change of nature first, because then, it will be safe for one to receive the descent of the higher consciousness and the spiritual transformation without which the supramental realization would not be possible. It is of utmost importance that

the consciousness should shift its position from the outer to the inner self and all the actions should be guided from the inner self and its will and action. The psychic should take over the mental being and exercise its full control over the nature. This control of the psychic over the inner and outer being should increase with a conscious participation in the action of the Universal Nature. "The individual purusha would become the master of his executive energy and at the same time a conscious partner, agent, instrument of the Cosmic Spirit in the working of the universal Energy."⁷

Sri Aurobindo says that one cannot overleap any of the intermediary stages to reach the supramental. All the planes of consciousness have to be attained. The Overmind descent is indispensable for

bringing about the supramental change. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo was aware of the difficulty to bridge the gap between earth and heaven,

How shall earth-nature and man's nature rise
To the celestial levels, yet earth abide?
Heaven and earth towards each other gaze
Across a gulf that few can cross, none touch, (p. 689)

In order to approach, realize and attain the supramental, man must first consent to be spiritualized. He must have a true attitude, a psychic realization, open only to the Divine and his whole being should live only in the Divine. He should be open to the Intuition and the Overmind so that his whole nature is ready for the supramental change. But how many are ready to give up the human nature that is grounded in the Inconscient base? Sri Aurobindo explains how man likes to cling to his human type,

Human I am, human let me remain
Till in the Inconscient I fall dumb and sleep. (p. 520)



Man does not consent to be changed as he is contented to live in ignorance although his inner being strives for the glory of the heaven. He is so caught up by the activities of the outer mind, life and body that he does not pay any attention to the call of his soul and keeps on ignoring it.

Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart
that heeds;
The doors of light are sealed to common mind
And earth's needs nail to earth the
human mass,
Only in an uplifting hour of stress
Men answer to the touch of greater
things: (p. 689)

When there is a call from the higher regions the human nature acts as a resistance that impedes the action of transformation. The human nature refuses to offer itself for the change. "Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call."⁸ Nevertheless, man has to resolve this difficulty of his and give his consent to rise to the higher levels of consciousness for his betterment. The mind of man works as an instrument of the soul to drive it out of ignorance. In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo says,

Mind the thought-driven chariot of
the soul
Carrying the luminous wanderer in
the night
To vistas of a far uncertain dawn,
To the end of the Spirit's fathomless
desire,
To its dream of absolute truth and
utter bliss. (p. 704)

The actual role of the mind is to show man the road towards divinity. Due to this influence of the mind there is a hidden urge, an aspiration in man which is a sure sign of conscious evolution and there is a natural inner will for a higher way towards its fulfillment. This is why it is so important that he should shift his consciousness

from the outer to the inner and prepare himself for the higher consciousness.

When man proceeds towards a further evolution from Nature to Supernature he will feel the working of the Divine Shakti more and more in himself. As a result, the being would emerge and put on a Divine nature; at the same time the higher nature would emerge in and descend into the being. The psychic would then be conscious of its work and become an instrument participating in the transformation of the nature, while as a person he would be one with his universal and supreme Self. This opening of the psychic being and its participation in the higher transformation is indispensable for the transition from Nature to Supernature.

One should not rest content with the spiritual realization but aspire to ascend further towards the higher levels of consciousness because,

There is a fire on the apex of the
worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's light,
There is an infinite truth, an absolute
power.
The Spirit's mightiness shall cast off
its mask;
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the
world's course: (p. 704)

Mind is not the summit of man's consciousness. It is not able to grasp the infinite Truth and the absolute Power. And hence, he has to ascend from the spiritualized mind to the Supermind by rising through a series of ranges or planes of consciousness. He rises through the four main degrees of consciousness, namely the higher mind, illumined mind, Intuition and the Overmind, each with its own intrinsic light and power.

The Overmind is the last in the gradation. It is more original and dynamic than the lower planes. One opens here to the cosmic consciousness and becomes aware of the play of the cosmic forces. When the Overmind descends, the ego is abolished and is replaced by a cosmic perception and a feeling of boundless universal Self. The thoughts, feelings, actions and sensa-

tions do not seem to originate in the body, but are felt as the waves from the vast cosmic existence. As the ego dissolves, one is not limited to the individual person and is free from separative thoughts and feelings that create conflict. A divine harmony and an infinite oneness pervades in the being. There is a feeling of an overpowering peace, silence, joy and bliss that is beyond expression, as well as a sense of immortality and eternity.

The knowledge of the Overmind is an inner experience that can bring liberation but cannot achieve the transformation of nature. As one ascends the higher planes one finally discovers the vastness of the truth in the realm of the Supermind.

Ascending out of the limiting
breadths of mind,
They shall discover the worlds huge
design
And step into the Truth, the Right,
the Vast. (p. 704)

Sri Aurobindo promises that the level of the Overmind also will be transcended; this is his affirmation for the future. In order to enter the realm of the Supermind, the inner knowledge is not sufficient because the Supermind works on the principles of both Knowledge and Will for dynamic change and perfection. In the long ascent to Supermind, the truths of the Intuition and the Overmind must be allowed to rule the active life and they should take hold of our relations with the outward world. The external life and activities must be fully governed by the power of the consciousness of these higher planes. The Overmind change is the penultimate stage in the dynamic spiritual transformation. It heightens the workings of the previous grades and also adds to them a wideness of consciousness and force and a greater harmony of knowledge and a delight of being. However, the Overmind does not have the supreme unity and the harmony of knowledge of the Supermind. It cannot rise altogether beyond the ignorance which is the result of the separation of mind, life and matter from the Supreme origin. Secondly, the Overmind



descent cannot wholly transform the inconscience. The original darkness of the inconscient and the subconscious levels would still remain and would invade and even expel the newly evolved light and truth from its very kingdom. A last transition from the Overmind to the Supermind is therefore indispensable for an integral transformation.

The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,
Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,
The Immense that calls to man to expand the Spirit,
The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,
A channel for the little he tastes of bliss. (p. 705)

The Supermind is the divine gnosis that is the all-seeing and all-powerful wisdom and will of the Divine. It is the infinite and eternal Knowledge-Will of the divine Consciousness-Force. It is the Power and Light of the divine Will and the divine Consciousness. The Supermind is the realm of all knowledge; it has the complete, perfect and infallible truth of the Self and the world, about all actions, things and persons. As Sri Aurobindo says, "Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops."⁹ Supermind is the very truth-consciousness which is absolutely free from the ignorance and it is also the foundation of the present evolutionary existence. Its knowledge is a spiritual identity with the truth, with the object of knowledge. The object seen here is not something outside the Self but is contained in its consciousness.

Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought
A high proximity to Truth and God.
(p. 707)

The integral Truth is seen in the Self and by the Self and therefore it is self-



"Aspiration-Answer." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

evident, faultless and absolute. The knowledge contains spiritual sight that is able to see the invisible truth of all things and even the force behind them. The gnosis thus discloses all the truths of the same reality and also the phenomenon by a direct contact and vision. The experience of the Supermind is therefore a positive, direct and a living experience of the Supreme Infinite, the Brahman which is the culmination of divine knowledge and the source of all divine delight and all divine living.

The Supermind not only has the full consciousness of the truth but also a will and a force that can make the consciousness effective. The supramental will is 'a conscious force of the eternal knowledge' that acts and creates as well as knows. It has the power and vision to create and execute all things faultlessly. The will of the

mental mind is often involved in the conflict with the ideal of right or the intellectual knowledge. The mind is aware of what is good and right but it is often found to lack power to make it effective in active life. There may be an incapacity to work out in living form and action the ideal that inspires the mind or the truth that one feels in his consciousness. In the lower creation the will of the individual is not always in harmony with the Universal Will. It often deviates and asserts itself against the Universal Will, but in the supramental plane the will is in complete harmony with the Universal Will.

The supramental change is the ultimate stage in the process of spiritual transformation. The lower planes of consciousness have an inferior power and hence are unable to bring about a radical change in the human consciousness. The power of these higher planes decrease on descending due to the obscurity of the lower nature. The Supermind is the omnipotent power of the divine which alone can act with full power in the obscure physical plane. And Sri Aurobindo declares in *Savitri* that,

The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base. (p. 707)

It is the supramental power that can deal effectively with the unyielding subconscious parts of the human nature. And there is no other power which can penetrate and transform the inconscience that is the base of our existence. The Supermind alone can dispel the ingrained ignorance and bring the higher light down in these nether regions. The Supermind on descending into the adhar would take direct control of the evolving nature. On



account of the descent of the Supermind the process of transformation of the human nature would be accelerated. This would result in a transition from the nature of ignorance to the luminous Supernature of the Divine. As a result of the gnostic change, there will be a complete reversal of the human consciousness. A new being will arrive as a result of this change.

There is a being beyond the being of mind, (p. 705)

But Sri Aurobindo clarifies that the supramental descent will not be experienced by all but will only be received by those who are ready for it. He says,

It is not . . . that all humanity would rise in a block into the supermind; at first those only might attain to the highest or some intermediate height of the ascent whose inner evolution has fitted them for so great a change or who are raised by the direct touch of the Divine into its perfect light and power and bliss.¹⁰

It is vain to think that even while clinging to ignorance the common man with his ordinary consciousness will also experience the supramental descent. In order to receive this descent it is indispensable to rise to the highest summits of one's consciousness and reject the demands and desires of the lower nature. The one who has undergone this evolution of consciousness will only be able to bring about the supramental descent. The seer-poet says in *Savitri*,

Some shall be made the glory's
receptacles
And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.
These are the high forerunners, the
heads of Time,
The great deliverers of earth-bound
mind,
The high transfigurers of human clay,
The first-born of a new supernal race.
(p. 705)

Only those who have prepared themselves for the descent shall be able to receive it and they will be the forerunners who will take upon themselves the responsibility to deliver the ignorant human race and lead it towards the new light.

The mind dwells in ignorance and works on the principle of division and does not have the true sense of unity. But the Supermind is a supreme principle that unites and harmonizes everything and sees things in the light of oneness. Therefore, the gnostic being that would emerge after the gnostic change would live in an intimate sense of unity in his inner and outer life or the life of the community. The ideas, feelings and sense of the gnostic being will be based on oneness and his action will proceed from that basis,

Then shall the embodied being live
as one
Who is a thought, a will of the Divine,
A mask or robe of his divinity,
An instrument and partner of his
Force,
A point or line drawn in the infinite,
A manifest of the Imperishable. (p. 706)

The gnostic being would possess the cosmic consciousness and be united with all things and beings in the world. He will see and feel all as himself and constantly live and act in that sense. His individual will would be in perfect harmony with the universal will and his individual action with the universal action. The feeling of oneness would be such that he will feel the whole world in himself and also its forces and movements as part of himself. This will create a better order on earth which will be based on universal love and harmony as the right law of existence. The established mental consciousness and power shapes the race of mental beings and takes up into all the earthly nature that is ready for the mental change. With the establishment of the Truth-Consciousness or the Supermind on earth, a race of gnostic spiritual beings will take shape in the form of a new race. The new supramental consciousness will take over the earth nature

that is ready for the new transformation.

When superman is born as Nature's
king
His presence shall transfigure Matter's
world:
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's
night,
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's
greater law;
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's
call. (p. 708)

The emergence of the gnostic individual would be the fulfillment of the spiritual man. Not only in his inner life he would realize the Individual, Universal and the Transcendent which are the three aspects of the Spirit, but the whole being will be intimately one with this integral reality. He would be a conscious being finding its self-expression in Nature. The whole of his life, with its thoughts, feelings, actions would be based upon that consciousness which constitutes the truth of the being. Sri Aurobindo mentions that, "The gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his Self of transcendence above it; he would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separative individuality."¹¹ The gnostic being would not be allured by personal joys, griefs and desires but would be above them and yet share the joys and sorrows of others. Nothing would be able to disturb or hinder his intimate communion and supreme identity with the "supracosmic reality." There will be a radical change in his consciousness from that of ignorance to knowledge which will result in a dynamic unity with the Supreme.

Another result of the gnostic change will be that the ignorant nature will be delivered from the incessant flux of its different elements. The different elements of nature bind us down to the inferior nature. The separation of the soul from the nature helps in delivering us from the lower nature. The soul draws back from the nature and observes the action of the different modes but does not accept or interfere with their course, and thereby remains



untouched by the actions of the nature. In this way, the soul regains its natural spiritual freedom, but the nature remains in bondage due to the workings of the different modes of the lower nature. In order to liberate the nature, the inferior unequal lower modes must pass into the greater modes of the divine nature. The lower nature has to transcend and uplift itself in order to be transformed into a higher divine supernature. This can only be achieved by the descent of the Supermind which alone can deliver the nature by uplifting and remoulding it into a higher spiritual status. The descent of the Supermind will raise the lower nature from its dense obscurity towards eternal calm, light, force and bliss of the divine nature.

Here the soul is free and a dynamic transformation of the nature takes place. The body receives directly the spirit's force and responds to its demands. The vital power consents to tireless action, and the mind opens to the new light and consciousness and the self-existent bliss. There is a free play of action and knowledge as the inertia is replaced by peace and tranquility. The desire for possession will not exist and there will be no impulsive drive for action. One can experience a limitless power of action based on unshakable calm, peace and bliss. The mind will no more dwell in the inferior light and will not seize and imprison the truth by its limited knowledge. It will experience a direct knowledge that comes straight from its source. There will always be the living presence of the Supreme Divine Shakti and one shall become a part of her eternal light, force and bliss as a result of the new creation. The descent of the Supermind will result in the illumination of the mind, the heart and life and these will become an expression of the Divine. The rule of the inconscience will disappear as the inconscience will be changed by the Supermind into "a sea of the superconscience." Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri* that due to the descent of the Supermind,

The Immanent shall be the witness God
Watching on his many-petalled lotus-
throne
His actionless being and his silent
might
Ruling earth-nature by eternity's law,
A thinker waking the Inconscient's
world,
An immobile centre of many infin-
itudes
In his thousand-pillared temple by
Time's sea. (p. 706)

With the advent of the Supermind, the being will not only be transformed into a higher Divine consciousness but into a larger divine existence. The elements of the lower nature will undergo a complete transformation and also attain to their utmost perfection. The mind will become a luminous channel for the Divine Knowl-

of the unlimited force of the Supreme. The will of the individual would be united with the Divine Will and act for the manifesta-
tion of his glories on earth. Then even the most insignificant actions would become a movement of truth and become part of the integral perfection. The result of the advent of the Supermind and its impact on nature is described in *Savitri* thus,

The supermind shall be his nature's
fount,
The Eternal's truth shall mould his
thoughts and acts,
The Eternal's truth shall be his light
and guide.
All then shall change, a magic order
come
Overtopping this mechanical uni-
verse. (p. 706)

The being would be filled with the divine Ananda
and rapture even in the very cells of the body.

The descent of the Supermind would release the body from its obscurity and inertia. The movements of the body would

edge and will know the inner as well as the outer phenomenon through intuitive vision and identity.

For knowledge shall pour down in
radiant streams
And even darkened mind quiver with
new life
And kindle and burn with the Ideal's
fire
And turn to escape from mortal
ignorance. (p. 710)

The sense mind will directly perceive and receive the thoughts and sensations and the physical and subtle senses would be illumined so as to perceive the true sense of things. The Supermind delivers the feelings and emotions from their errors and perversions. They would be turned into the forms of love and delight and feelings of devotion. As a result of the integral transformation the vital being would be delivered from its desires and lower elements and would become an instrument

not be directed by the ignorant nature but would be governed by the spirit. The body will become supple due to higher spiritual power and also experience a fuller life-force and a diviner strength and ease. There would be a greater control of the higher consciousness and also a greater equality of the spirit. The being would be filled with the divine Ananda and rapture even in the very cells of the body.

The greatest achievement of the descent of the Supermind will be the transformation of the gross matter which is the most undivine. The supramental change of this gross physical is the most difficult and it is the ultimate stage in the supramental transformation. The physical is a storehouse of obscure forces which act as a bar for the inner progress. This obstruction towards the true movement will disappear as the light and power of the Supermind will grow in one's being. When the power of the Supermind penetrates into the physical it will integrate the experiences and the developments of



the mind and vital. With the descent of the Supermind the gross physical would be divinized and would become aware of the divine and also feel its concrete presence. The body consciousness will be filled with the Divine consciousness and there will be the feeling of the concrete presence of the divine in the body consciousness. The higher Peace, Light and Ananda will pour through the whole being and take possession of the whole nature: "... we shall feel the light, power or Ananda flowing through the body, the limbs, nerves, blood, breath and, through the subtle body, affecting the most material cells and making them conscious and blissful and we shall sense directly the Divine Power and Presence."¹² The supramental transformation which will not only affect the mind but also the gross body has been explicitly described in *Savitri* thus,

A divine force shall flow through
tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and
speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow
of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill.
(p. 710)

The action of the Supermind will deal radically with the physical nature. The physical being in man today labours under the inconscience and the ignorance but with the coming of the Supermind the body will cease to be gross and inert. The very cells of the body which are the most inconscient part of the system would be illumined. Before Sri Aurobindo came on the scene, the established idea was that the body could never be organized or divinized by the action of a higher Consciousness and Will from above as the cells are in a state of constant flux and movement. But Sri Aurobindo asserts that this can be achieved with the supramental transformation. Even the very cells, having come from the Divine, are essentially conscious of the divine Presence and eagerly aspire for it. The cells allow the force to act without intervening and also yield to the persistent pressure, in order to be divin-

ized. Consequently, the cells would obey the higher conscious spiritual will. When the very cells of the body are transformed, they will be fully conscious of the Presence and in obeisance to the divine Will and will live in the divine Bliss.

The supramental transformation which results in the transformation of the body will be the final stage in the spiritual evolution. It implies a complete change of the ordinary human consciousness into the divine and supramental. "The mental man that we are is changed into the gnostic soul, the truth-conscious godhead."¹³ The human being would be transformed into a superman, a divine man. With a divine life in a divine body man would attain perfection with a transformed mind, life and body free of the obscurity, falsehood, death and suffering of the present worldly existence. As Sri Aurobindo says,

Then shall the earth be touched by the
Supreme,
His bright unveiled Transcendence
shall illumine
The mind and heart and force the life
and act
To interpret his inexpressible mystery
In a heavenly alphabet of Divinity's
signs. (p. 705)

The light and power of the Supermind will affect not only the life of the individual but also the collective life on earth. A gnostic evolution will result in a new kind of being that is the gnostic being and a new collective life with a new consciousness. There will be a new race of supramental beings which will inhabit the earth with a fuller Light, Love and Power. These beings of the new race will lead a life that is guided by an inner spiritual force of love and sympathy for others. The supramental consciousness will be the governing principle of the inner and the outer individual and collective life. Their action will be an expression of the Divine and the victory of the divine Will upon the earth. The advent of the new race is described in *Savitri* thus,

A mightier race shall inhabit the
mortal's world.

On Nature's luminous tops, on the
Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of
life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer
of heaven,
And lead towards God and truth
man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality. (p. 706)

Sri Aurobindo described this supramental race in *The Life Divine* as follows.

A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the Supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order.¹⁴

He says that there will be variation in the new race and individuals would not be of a single type. They would be different from each other and unique in their own way.

As a result of the manifestation of the Supermind, there will be an emergence of immortality. Death would become alien for the Superman who has risen to the supramental consciousness, but would remain for the man who lives in ignorance. The coming of the new race or the Superman will influence the man living in ignorance and lead him towards God because he would then be a channel of the divine Force. The power and light of the Supermind will thereby invade the subconscious and the inconscient on earth. In the due course of time, one would witness miraculous changes on earth. Disharmony will no more be earth's governing law, but will be replaced by a greater law of harmony,

All shall be drawn into a single plan,
A divine harmony shall be earth's law,
Beauty and joy remould her way to live:
Even the body shall remember God,
(p. 707)



There will be a greater and profounder truth that will reign supreme on earth which will lead the thought and govern the life and act. An immortal fire will be experienced by the aspiring soul.

A soul shall wake in the
Inconscient's house;
The mind shall be God-
vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instru-
ment,
And life a channel for
God's visible power.
(p. 707)

The mind in the future will become the temple of God and the body will have its own intuitive strength. The life itself will have a new meaning. With his enigmatic sense of the future, Sri Aurobindo conveys that, the god shall himself reside on this earth and as a result of that man shall not consent to mortality. The occult world would manifest itself on earth. Even the process of evolution would then change. Presently in the process of evolution the inconscience is in front, but in the future there will be the release of the wisdom that is hidden below. The Superconscient and not the Inconscient will rule the world. The nature hides the Spirit behind the mind, life and body but in the future nature itself will reveal the hidden godhead. Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*,

The outward world disclose the Truth
it veils;
All things shall manifest the covert
God,
All shall reveal the Spirit's light and
might
And move to its destiny of felicity.
(p. 708)

The advent of the Supermind will bring unimaginable change on earth. "One result of the intervention of Supermind in the earth's nature, the descent of the supreme creative Truth-Power, might well be a change in the law of evolution, its method and its arrangement—a larger element of the principle of evolution through knowl-



"Conquest of inertia." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

edge might enter into the forces of the material universe... evolution would itself evolve, but it would not be perturbed or founder."¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo does not rule out the possibility of a resistance caused by the anti-divine forces, but affirms that the secret truth shall manifest itself in its fullness. The anti-divine forces have to give way to the full manifestation of the greater truth. Sri Aurobindo emphatically says that the advent of the Supermind cannot be stopped by anything whatsoever because "the supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit."¹⁶ However, he states that the greater truth must first establish itself on earth and there should be a strong aspiration in man for the change. He should strive for the higher power and also find his inner being. Even though he gives this as a precondition, yet he promises with full certainty that this too shall take place and a new life shall be there on earth. Not only is the supramental advent decreed, but even the end of death and ignorance is sure to follow,

The hour must come of the
Transcendent's will:
All turns and winds towards
his predestined ends
In Nature's fixed inevitable

course
Decreed since the beginning of the
worlds
In the deep essence of created things:
Even there shall come as a high crown
of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance. (p. 708)



The ignorance and falsehood is presently the high crown of nature but the future will belong to the Truth. It will be an ocean of Light, Ananda and Bliss in which the forms and beings would be suffused with the greater Light and Truth. Sri Aurobindo is certain that the Superconscious truth will establish itself on earth and

It shall make earth's nescient ground
Truth's colony,
Make even the Ignorance a transparent robe
Through which shall shine the brilliant limbs of Truth
And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head
And Truth shall be the guide of
Nature's steps
And Truth shall gaze out of her
nether deeps. (p. 708)

When the Superman arrives on earth his presence will have its influence on matter itself. He will guide humanity and help man progress towards Light. The higher truth from above will wake up the truth embedded below. The Superman shall be a channel to connect the Inconscious and the Superconscious so that

Even the dumb earth become a
sentient force.
The Spirit's tops and Nature's base
shall draw
Near to the secret of their separate
truth
And know each other as one deity.
(p. 709)

The Spirit is luminous and its luminosity would be there but matter also will become luminous, transparent and full of consciousness. There would be no antagonism between Matter and Spirit. The form would change according to the character of the consciousness it embodied. It is noteworthy that this change would not be limited to one individual, but would affect the collectivity in general. This is the major difference between the man of the past and the man of the future. In the future, as prophesied by Sri Aurobindo,

The Spirit shall look out through
Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face.
Then man and superman shall be at one
And all the earth become a single life.
(p. 709)

The ordinary human being shall grow into the spiritual being because of the supramental consciousness pervading the earth. The great knowledge of the Superconscious will be known to them and the collectivity will bear the splendour of the divine's rush. All shall feel as if lifted up in consciousness. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo clarifies that,

All touched by it might not be able to embody it fully, but each would give some form to it according to his spiritual temperament, inner capacity, the line of his evolution in Nature: he would reach securely the perfection of which he was immediately capable and he would be on the road to the full possession of the truth, of the Spirit and of the truth of the Nature.¹⁷

Sri Aurobindo affirms and declares that the life of man has to become a manifestation of the Spirit. The secret intention of the evolutionary nature is to manifest the Spirit involved in it. The coming of the new race is the harbinger of the divine life in a perfected consciousness in the form of first the gnostic being and then the higher supramental being. Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future culminates in *Savitri* in the following lines,

Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide
uplift,
Illumine common acts with the
Spirit's ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret
God,
The Spirit shall take up the human
play,
This earthly life become the life
divine. (p. 710)

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7. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL 19. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 924.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA 12. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997) p. 146.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL 18. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 128.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL 16. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 22.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL 19. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 972.
12. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL 22. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 351.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL 20. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 456.
14. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL 19. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 971.
15. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL 16. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 52.
16. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, SABCL 25. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 40.
17. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL 16. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) p. 52.



Some key symbols in *Savitri*

by Larry Seidlitz

In this essay I consider some of the central symbols in *Savitri*. Let me begin by quoting Sri Aurobindo's Author's Note, printed at the beginning of most editions of the poem:

The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. 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; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

Sri Aurobindo refers to the tale as belonging to one of the symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Sri Aurobindo spent a considerable time delving into the ancient Vedas and deciphering its symbolism. Results of this work were published in two books, *The Secret of the Veda*, and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. The first work concen-



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trated on deciphering the main symbols of the Vedas, and the second work was an English translation of much of the Rig Veda in a form that reveals its spiritual and psychological significance. There are many similarities between the Vedas and *Savitri*, especially their common central theme of the battle between the forces of Light and Darkness. In addition to the symbolism associated with the main characters, there are other symbols in *Savitri* that allude back to the Vedas that I will touch on in this essay.

But first I would like to emphasize the last point of this passage. Sri Aurobindo says that this is not a mere allegory, these characters are not simply personified qualities, but emanations or incarnations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch; they even take human bodies in order to help humankind rise to a divine consciousness and immortal life. This suggests something of the real power behind this epic. The characters can inspire us not only through the depiction of their magnificent courage and heroism in the story; but by putting us into contact with divine Beings and Powers that can help us in our spiritual endeavor.

Although not a mere allegory, the psychological and spiritual significances Sri Aurobindo attaches to these characters points to a level of meaning in the overall story that should not be overlooked. The tapasya or spiritual endeavor of the soul, represented by Aswapati, and its complete surrender to the Divine, calls down the grace of the Divine Consciousness into the darkness of the outer consciousness. The

human soul, like Satyavan, even though inwardly free, is subject in its expression in the outer life to ignorance and death. The forces of ignorance and the inconscient basis of the material body resist, deny and oppose the growth of consciousness. But the tie of love between the Divine Consciousness and the human soul draws the divine Light and Power down into the depths of the Inconscient, eventually enlightening it and vanquishing death.

The many symbols in *Savitri* do not refer simply to intellectual abstractions. Sri Aurobindo said, "To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event." ("Letters on *Savitri*," in *Savitri*, 1973 edition, p. 736). He said that "Savitri is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences." (p. 794) He added, "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; if for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience." (p. 794)

The Dawn

The epic begins, interestingly enough, with a canto named "The symbol Dawn." Dawn here seems to signify the dawn of a new, momentous day in the life of Savitri, and the dawn of creation, the first awakening of the universe out of inconscience:

A wandering hand of pale enchanted
light
That glowed along a fading moment's
brink,
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent
hinge



A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's
verge.
One lucent corner windowing hidden
things
Forced the world's blind immensity
to sight.
The darkness failed and slipped like a
falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god.
Then through the pallid rift that
seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the
suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the
flame.
The brief perpetual sign recurred
above.
A glamour from unreach'd tran-
scendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
A message from the unknown im-
mortal Light
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent
hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the
hours.
An instant's visitor the godhead shone
On life's thin border awhile the Vision
stood
And bent over earth's pondering
forehead curve.
Interpreting a recondite beauty and
bliss
In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic
sense,
It wrote the lines of a significant myth
Telling of a greatness of spiritual
dawns,
A brilliant code penned with the sky
for page. (pp. 3-4)

"Dawn" is also an important symbol in the Vedas, and it is in this context that we can bring out some of its associations. Of course, dawn is the rising of the sun, and in the Vedas, according to Sri Aurobindo, the sun was a symbol of the Divine Truth. In a section on symbols in his *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo writes, "The sun is the symbol of the concentrated light of Truth," and in another letter he says, "The Sun is the Truth from above, in the

last resort the supramental Truth." (p. 957) In the *Secret of the Veda*, he writes, "Dawn comes as a bringer of the Truth, is herself the outshining of the Truth. She is the divine Dawn and the physical dawning is only her shadow and symbol in the material universe." (p. 125).

What we can take from this is that the dawn in this first canto of *Savitri* is not only the start of a new day or even the start of the creation, it is the breaking out of the Divine Light of Truth in the world of darkness and ignorance. It concerns not only a dawn of the past, but the outpouring of divine Light into the world today. It concerns not only the coming of Savitri, an incarnation of the Divine Mother in remote Indian history, but the incarnation of the Divine in our own time. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have emphasized that their avataric mission was to bring down the supramental consciousness upon earth. As in the story, so in the present, it is an incarnation of the Divine that comes to manifest and bring the divine Light here and to conquer ignorance and death and found a divine life on earth.

The dawn also carries a personal significance, the revelation of divine Light in the individual consciousness that occurs through yoga. At present, for most of us, our consciousness is only half-lit. There remain dark shadows, aspects of our nature still obscure, areas not yet open to the Truth that follow their own unconscious routines. We should read *Savitri* with an eye toward experiencing the dawning of the divine Light within our own life and consciousness.

To more deeply understand this psychological significance of the symbol dawn, of this inner opening to the spiritual Light, it may be useful to turn to Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda*. In the Veda, Usha is the goddess of the dawn. Sri Aurobindo says that Usha is a form or power of the Supreme Light, of the supreme Consciousness, of Aditi, the Divine Mother. This connection helps us tie together the symbols of this first canto—specifically, the symbol of the dawn and the descent of the Divine Mother at the beginning of creation, later as an incarnation in *Savitri*, and

in our present era, as the incarnation of the Divine Mother bringing the supramental Light and Force to earth. It is also interesting from a psychological perspective to note the distinction in the Vedas between Aditi, the undivided Infinite consciousness, and Diti, the divided consciousness, who is the mother of Vritra—an enemy of the gods and of man in his progress. The spiritual Light is a power of the undivided Divine Consciousness.

In the Veda there are connections of Usha, the Dawn, with various psychological and spiritual qualities. There is a close connection between the Dawn and the Truth. For example, in Sri Aurobindo's translations in *Secret of the Veda*, Usha is described as "following effectively the path of the Truth," (p. 131) and "She moves according to the path of the Truth and, as one that knows..." (p. 132) She is also associated with the Vast. For example, one Vedic verse reads, "Dawn true in her being with the gods who are true, vast with the Gods who are vast." (p. 133) Dawn is also associated with an "awakening to vision, perception, right movement." (p. 128). For example, one verse reads, "the goddess ... fronts and looks upon all the worlds, the eye of vision shines with an utter wideness; awakening all life for movement she discovers speech for all that thinks." (p. 134) Further, in another verse, she represents the perception of Immortality, and in others, of Truth and Bliss. She is constantly put in conflict with the Night, a symbol in the Veda for the obscure consciousness full of ignorance, stumblings of will and action, and consequently of evil, sin, and suffering. For example, there is the line "Dawn comes divine repelling by the Light all darkneses and evils." (pp. 134-135) She is also the bringer of spiritual wealth and happiness. Interpreting several verses of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo writes, "The Dawn is the inner dawn which brings to man all the varied fullnesses of his widest being, force, consciousness, joy; it is radiant with its illuminations, it is accompanied by all possible powers and energies, it gives man the full force of vitality so that he can enjoy the infinite delight of that vaster existence." (p. 136)



The connection between the character Savitri and the spiritual Light is inherent in the name itself. Sri Aurobindo translated the word Savitri in his Gayatri mantra as the Light of the Supreme. The mantra as a whole is translated as: "Let us meditate on the most auspicious form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme, which shall illumine us with the Truth." Traditionally, the masculine form of the word is used in the mantra to refer to the Sun-god. The feminine form, Savitri, used for the character in the Mahabharata legend and Sri Aurobindo's epic, refers to his female descendent.

In the first canto of the poem, the connection between the dawn and the character Savitri is made through a rather abrupt juxtaposition. After describing the dawn, and then the absorption of the Light by the Inconscient turning it into the "light of common day," and "man lifting up the burden of his fate," comes the abrupt transition, "And Savitri too awoke among these tribes," and the description of her that follows. Later, in Canto 2, the connection is made more explicit, when Savitri is described as having:

A body like a parable of dawn,
That seemed a niche for veiled Divinity
Or golden temple door to things
beyond. (p. 15)

Another passage in Canto 2, when Savitri is reviewing her past in memory, also makes reference to the Dawn:

As in a many-hued flaming inner
dawn,
Her life's broad highways and its
sweet bypaths,
Lay mapped to her sun-clear recording
view... (p. 9)

Night and Death

I now turn to the opposite symbol of Night and Darkness. I have mentioned that Night in the Veda is a symbol for an obscure consciousness full of evil, sin, and suffering. We are introduced to the central conflict between these powers of Light

and Darkness in the very first lines of the poem.

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'
marge.
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless
muse
The abyss of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the
world. (p. 1)

On a cosmic level, this primordial Night represents a kind of reverse symbol of the Infinite. Sri Aurobindo calls it an "unbodied Infinite," "a fathomless zero." In a line that follows it is referred to as "A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown," suggesting the notion of an empty, featureless symbol or figure of the Unknown. As the word "Unknown" is capitalized, it seems to refer to the Infinite or Absolute. Shortly afterwards, the words Nought and Nothingness are applied to it, which are also capitalized. And later, in the third line on page 2, as this Nothingness is beginning to awake, Sri Aurobindo calls it by the psychological term, "the Inconscient."

Richard Hartz, in his long, penetrating article titled "the Composition of *Savitri*," which was published serially in the journal *Mother India* (October 1999-November 2003), affirms this view of the Night. He suggests (see the October 2001 issue) that the inconscience and the Void of non-being came about as a consequence of what Sri Aurobindo has called in *The Life Divine* "the great denial of Sachchidananda by Himself." (p. 211) This suggests that this the Spirit of the Night who denies God and soul is ultimately God himself denying His own existence. This connection also helps us to understand the paradoxical twist in Book 11 in which Death was transfigured into a beautiful and luminous god.

Hartz suggests an interesting theory that ties together several of the characteristics surrounding these symbols of the Night. An important piece of the theory is the close connection of the terms Night and Death in the poem. In several places, the terms coincide in a single line suggesting their close identity. For example:

The voice of Night that knew and
Death that thought" (p. 586)
One whom her soul had faced as
Death and Night. (p. 678)

Hartz suggests that "mind of Night" in the opening passage refers to Death. He further notes that Death is repeatedly referred to in the poem as a god, with such phrases as "a dreadful god," "a universal god," "the dire god," or simply "the god." Death even claims to be God himself in the line, "In me all take refuge, for I, Death, am God." (p. 635) And Savitri grants a certain truth in this claim when she responds,

O Death, thou too art God and yet
not he,
But only his own black shadow on his
path
As leaving the Night he takes the
upward Way
And drags with him its clinging
inconscient Force. (p. 586)

Hartz suggests that Death and Night represent the duality of Purusha and Prakriti at the level of the Inconscient, an opposite reflection of the duality Ishwara-Shakti. Death represents the Purusha aspect and Night the Prakriti aspect. He notes the association of the Inconscient with "God's plunge into the Night." and a suggestive line that follows says, "A Being woke and lived in the meaningless void." (p. 107).

But "mind of Night" implies a consciousness, and Night, we have seen, represents the Inconscient. To reconcile this apparent contradiction, Hartz suggests that the term "mind of Night" may refer to a mental Purusha, a mental being. He supports this possibility with a reference to Death in the poem as a "cosmic mind"



with “its immense destroying thought,” and the names used by Savitri to refer to Death, such as, “Death, who reasonest” and “dark-browed sophist of the universe.” Hartz adds that mind is the faculty of dividing consciousness, and that Death is the “ruling spirit of its oppositions.”

The Dragon and the Sphinx

Hartz, in his analysis of Night and Death in *Savitri*, revealed interesting aspects of two related symbols: the dragon and the sphinx. The following line, Hartz suggested, may best sum up the epic: “Alone her hands can change Time’s dragon base.” (p. 314) The dragon appears in several other places as well.

The Dragon of the dark foundations
keeps
Unalterable the law of Chance and
Death. (p. 336)

There is also this passage from Book I, Canto 5 regarding Aswapati’s rapid ascent:

Opponent of that glory of escape,
The black Inconscient swung its
dragon tail
Lashing a slumbrous Infinite by its
force
Into the deep obscurities of form:
Death lay beneath him like a gate of
sleep. (p. 79)

Regarding the significance of the dragon, Hartz noted the following entry in Sri Aurobindo’s *Record of Yoga*, a diary of his sadhana: “the Dragon of the nether foundations who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested.” Another sentence in the same entry refers to the Dragon as “representing the resistance of the universal inconscience.” (quoted in *Mother India*, June 2001) Hartz also noted the following passage from *The Life Divine*, where Sri Aurobindo writes of the Inconscient as the apparent foundation of mind, life, and matter:

All these three lower powers of being
build upon the Inconscient and seem

to be originated and supported by it: the black dragon of the Inconscience sustains with its vast wings and its back of darkness the whole structure of the material universe; its energies unroll the flux of things, its obscure intimations seems to be the starting-point of consciousness itself and the source of all life-impulse. (pp. 665-666)

Finally, there is one other mention of the dragon in *Savitri* that occurs in Book 10, even as the Light penetrates the Inconscient:

A golden fire came in and burned
Night’s heart;
Her dusky mindlessness began to
dream;
The inconscient conscious grew,
Night felt and thought.
Assailed in the sovereign emptiness of
its reign
The intolerant Darkness paled and
drew apart
Till only a few black remnants stained
that Ray.
But on a failing edge of dumb lost space
Still a great dragon body sullenly
loomed;
Adversary of the slow struggling Dawn
Defending its ground of tortured
mystery,
It trailed its coils through the dead
martyred air
And curving fled down a grey slope of
time. (p. 601)

This last line suggests a retreat of the darkness and obstruction of the Inconscient, a shrinking, but still a survival and perhaps a consolidation of its diminished power for its continued action and future battles. Hartz notes that the phrase “tortured mystery” suggests not only a negation of consciousness, but a perversion of the intrinsic delight of being. In this context, he suggests that it may be the dark shadow of another dragon described in *Savitri*, “The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss.” (p. 684)

Another symbol associated with the Inconscient is the Sphinx. It is mentioned

in the Book of the Divine Mother, referring to the giant powers in league against the human advance towards Light:

On his long way through Time and
Circumstance
The grey-hued riddling nether
shadow-Sphinx,
Her dreadful paws upon the swallow-
ing sands,
Awaits him armed with the soul-
slaying word... (p. 336)

Hartz interprets this dark sphinx as “the power of the Inconscient to withhold and obscure the knowledge of the truth of our being and all being, thus turning life in this world into an impenetrable enigma.” (*Mother India*, July 2001, pp. 516-17)

Hartz suggests that the Night’s resistance to the Light is supported by a will of denial put forth by a fallen spirit or spirits within it. This spirit and will of denial assumes great importance in the epic. There are many references to it in the canto, “The World of Falsehood...”

Opponents of the Highest they have
come
Out of their world of soulless thought
and power
To serve by enmity the cosmic scheme.
Night is their refuge and strategic
base.
Against the sword of Flame, the
luminous Eye,
Bastioned they live in massive forts of
gloom,
Calm and secure in sunless privacy:
No wandering ray of Heaven can
enter there.
Armoured, protected by their lethal
masks,
As in a studio of creative Death
The giant sons of Darkness sit and plan
The drama of the earth, their tragic
stage. (pp. 226-227)

The following passage illustrates the work of these opposing forces in the world at large:

Nature they fill with evil’s institutes,



Turn into defeats the victories of Truth,
Proclaim as falsehoods the eternal
laws,
And load the dice of doom with
wizard lies;
The world's shrines they have occu-
pied, usurped its thrones. (p. 226)

More personal, closer to our individu-
al and human experience, is the following
passage from the same canto. It is refer-
ring to a dark spirit rising from the Void
retarding the human advance:

Arresting the passion of the climbing
soul,
She forced on life a slow and faltering
pace;
Her hand's deflecting and retarding
weight
Is laid on the mystic evolution's curve:
The tortuous line of her deceiving
mind
The Gods see not and man is impotent;
Oppressing the God-spark within the
soul
She forces back to the beast the human
fall. (pp. 223-224)

Fate, sorrow and suffering

Night and Death are also connected in
the poem with the concept "Fate," which
assumes a prominent place in the epic. Of
course, the fate that Savitri confronts and
eventually triumphs over is Death. The
close connection between fate and death
in the poem is brought out in various
places. For example, in the Book of the
Traveler of the Worlds, Aswapati, in the
world of falsehood, sees a being,

Sitting on Death who swallows all
things born.
A chill fixed face with dire and mo-
tionless eyes,
Her dreadful trident in her shadowy
hand
Outstretched, she pierced all creatures
with one fate. (p. 222)

Or, referring to the Divine Mother in-
carnating in the life of Savitri:

She keeps her will that hopes to
divinise clay;
Failure cannot repress, defeat o'erthrow;
Time cannot weary her nor the Void
subdue,
The ages have not made her passion
less;
No victory she admits of Death or
Fate.

Another important facet of the symbol
of Night is suffering. This is also brought
out in the first canto of the poem.

All came back to her: Earth and Love
and Doom,
The ancient disputants, encircled her
Like giant figures wrestling in the
night:
The godheads from the dim Inconsci-
ent born
Awoke to struggle and pang divine,
And in the shadow of her flaming
heart,
At the sombre centre of the dire
debate,
A guardian of the unconsolated abyss
Inheriting the long agony of the globe,
A stone-still figure of high and god-
like Pain
Stared into Space with fixed regard-
less eyes
That saw grief's timeless depths but
not life's goal. (pp. 9-10)

This is a powerful passage that con-
veys the author's sensitivity to the sorrow
and suffering of life with such phrases
as "unconsolated abyss," "long agony," and
"grief's timeless depths." We see here other
powers of the Inconscient: pain, grief, and
doom, the latter signifying a destiny of de-
struction or calamity. It is interesting that
"pain" is put at the "sombre center" of the
"dire debate," of the problem that Savitri
must confront. How is it to be confronted?
Through "love."

The significance of 'love'

Let us consider more deeply then this
symbol of love. We have already alluded to
the notion that the love between Satyavan

and Savitri represents at one level the love
between the human soul and the Divine.
I would now like to expand on this sym-
bolic aspect of the love between Savitri
and Satyavan. Some of these points were
brought out by Themis, a poet and long-
time resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ash-
ram in Pondicherry, in an article on the
internet called "Some rambling thoughts
on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*." ([http://www.
auromusic.org/online%20books/articles/
savitri/OnSavitriByThemis.html](http://www.auromusic.org/online%20books/articles/savitri/OnSavitriByThemis.html))

At the heart of the symbolism is this
notion that the Satyavan's and Savitri's
love represents the love between the hu-
man soul and the Divine. But now I would
like to emphasize the word "human," and
stretch its significance even further to in-
clude the earth and matter. Consider, for
example, this passage from the canto, "The
Destined Meeting Place," where Savitri
first meets Satyavan:

There expectation beat wide sudden
wings
As if a soul had looked out from
earth's face... (p. 389)

And consider how Satyavan first ap-
pears to her, embedded in the earthly
scene.

As might a soul on Nature's back-
ground limned
Stand out for a moment in a house of
dream
Created by the ardent breath of life,
So he appeared against the forest
verge
Inset twixt green relief and golden
ray. (p. 393)

Note the significance of this last line, he is
inset between the earth, or matter, and the
golden ray, the divine Truth.

Then note what Satyavan says when he
first speaks to Savitri, and notice in par-
ticular the repeated use of the word 'earth':

Although to heaven thy beauty seems
allied,
Much rather would my thoughts
rejoice to know



That mortal sweetness smiles between
thy lids
And thy heart can beat beneath a
human gaze
And thy aureate bosom quiver with
a look
And its tumult answer to an earth-
born voice.
If our time-vexed affections thou
canst feel,
Earth's ease of simple things can
satisfy,
If thy glance can dwell content on
earthly soil,
And this celestial summary of delight,
Thy golden body, dally with fatigue
Oppressing with its grace our terrain,
while
The frail sweet passing taste of earthly
food
Delays thee and the torrent's leaping
wine
Descend. Let thy journey cease, come
down to us. (p. 402)

Notice also how he refers to her "golden body." Gold, we may recall, is symbolic of the supramental. Note also the last line, "Descend. Let thy journey cease, come down to us." He repeats this word "descend," about six pages later when he says,

Descend, O happiness, with thy
moon-gold feet
Enrich earth's floors upon whose
sleep we lie. (p. 408)

Note the symbolism here of "earth's floors, upon whose sleep we lie." What is the sleep of the earth's floor? The inconscience of matter. And he continues:

O my bright beauty's princess Savitri,
By my delight and thy own joy
compelled
Enter my life, thy chamber and thy
shrine.
In the great quietness where spirits
meet,
Led by my hushed desire into my
woods
Let the dim rustling arches over thee
lean... (p. 408)

He calls her into to his life, her chamber and shrine, into his woods, beneath the dim rustling arches. And continuing:

Then down she came from her high
carven car
Descending with a soft and faltering
haste;
Her many-hued raiment glistening in
the light
Hovered a moment over the wind-
stirred grass,
Mixed with a glimmer of her body's
ray
Like lovely plumage of a settling bird.
Her gleaming feet upon the green-
gold sward
Scattered a memory of wandering
beams
And lightly pressed the unspoken
desire of earth
Cherished in her too brief passing by
the soil. (p. 409)

Notice the word "soil." Note also the symbolism of the green-gold sward: her moon-gold feet touch the green earth, and it becomes a green-gold sward.

Then down the narrow path where
their lives had met
He led and showed her her future
world,
Love's refuge and corner of happy
solitude.
At the path's end through a green cleft
in the trees
She saw a clustering line of hermit-
roofs
And looked now first on her heart's
future home,
The thatch that covered the life of
Satyavan. (p. 411)

Here we see symbols of the earth: "down the narrow path," that is, the path leading into the depths of matter, "at the path's end through a green cleft in the trees," "the thatch that covered the life of Satyavan." This word "thatch" is repeated two more times in this one-page passage.

Finally, in this same canto, is this wonderful passage where Satyavan and Savitri

wed, or rather unite. It is a beautiful description of the soul of the earth uniting with the Divine, creating a new world.

In a wide moment of two souls that
meet
She felt her being flow into him as in
waves
A river pours into a mighty sea.
As when a soul is merging into God
To live in Him for ever and know His
joy,
Her consciousness grew aware of him
alone
And all her separate self was lost in his.
As a starry heaven encircles happy
earth,
He shut her into himself in a circle of
bliss
And shut the world into himself and
her.
A boundless isolation made them
one;
He was aware of her enveloping him
And let her penetrate his very soul
As is a world by the world's spirit
filled
As the mortal wakes into Eternity,
As the finite opens to the Infinite.
Thus were they in each other lost
awhile,
Then drawing back from their long
ecstasy's trance
Came into a new self and a new world.
Each now was a part of the other's
unity,
The world was but their twin self-
finding's scene
Or their own wedded being's vaster
frame. (p. 410)

This is really the key to the whole puzzle, the solution to the whole problem of the Inconscient, of death and evil: this opening of the finite to the Infinite, this merging into God, this penetration of the soul and life by the divine Light and Bliss. And it is not simply the soul, the inner psychic being, that must surrender—but the whole earth, all our life and mind and body. Thus united with the Divine, we will come into a new world, a transformed world, our "wedded being's vaster frame."

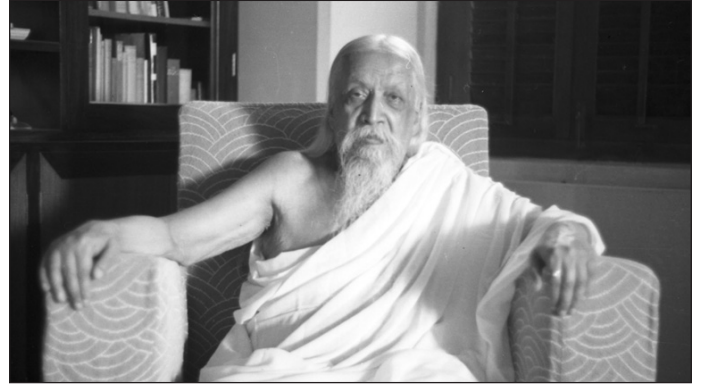


Source Material

The overmind aesthesis

by Sri Aurobindo

Let us ... come back to the overmind aesthesis. By aesthesis is meant a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, which receives a certain element in things, something that can be called their taste, *Rasa*, which, passing through the mind or sense or both, awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, *Bhoga*, and this can again awaken us, awaken even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of the spirit's delight of existence, *Ananda*. Poetry, like all art, serves the seeking for these things, this aesthesis, this *Rasa*, *Bhoga*, *Ananda*; it brings us a *Rasa* of word and sound but also of the idea and, through the idea, of the things expressed by the word and sound and thought, a mental or vital or some-times the spiritual image of their form, quality, impact upon us or even, if the poet is strong enough, of their world-essence, their cosmic reality, the very soul of them, the spirit that resides in them as it resides in all things. Poetry may do more than this, but this at least it must do to however small an extent or it is not poetry. Aesthesis therefore is of the very essence of poetry, as it is of all art. But it is not the sole element and aesthesis too is not confined to a reception of poetry and art; it extends to everything in the world: there is nothing we can sense, think or in any way experience to which there cannot be an aesthetic reaction of our conscious being. Ordinarily, we suppose that aesthesis is concerned with beauty, and that indeed is its most prominent concern: but it is concerned with many other things also. It is the universal *Ananda* that is the parent of aesthesis and the universal *Ananda* takes three major and original forms, beauty, love and delight, the delight of all existence, the delight in things, in all things. Universal *Ananda* is the artist and creator of the universe witnessing, experiencing and taking joy in its creation. In the lower conscious-ness it creates its opposites, the sense of ugliness as well as the sense of beauty, hate and repulsion and dislike as well as love and attraction and liking, grief and pain as well as joy and delight; and between these dualities or as a grey tint in the background there is a general tone of neutrality and indifference born from the universal insensibility into which the *Ananda* sinks in its dark negation in the Inconscient. All this is the sphere of aesthesis, its dullest reaction is indifference, its highest is ecstasy. Ecstasy is a sign of a return towards the original or supreme *Ananda*: that art or poetry is supreme which can bring us something of the supreme tone of ecstasy. For as the consciousness sinks from the supreme levels through various degrees towards the Inconscience the general sign of this



Cartier-Bresson's 1950 photo of Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

descent is an always diminishing power of its intensity, intensity of being, intensity of consciousness, intensity of feeling, intensity of the delight in things and the delight of existence. So too as we ascend towards the supreme level, these intensities increase. As we climb beyond Mind, higher and wider values replace the values of our limited mind, life and bodily consciousness. Aesthesis shares in this intensification of capacity. The capacity for pleasure and pain, for liking and disliking is comparatively poor on the level of our mind and life; our capacity for ecstasy is brief and limited; these tones arise from a general ground of neutrality which is always dragging them back towards itself. As it enters the Overmind planes the ordinary aesthesis turns into a pure delight and becomes capable of a high, a large or a deep abiding ecstasy. The ground is no longer a general neutrality, but a pure spiritual ease and happiness upon which the special tones of the aesthetic consciousness come out or from which they arise. This is the first fundamental change.

Another change in this transition is a turn towards universality in place of the isolations, the conflicting generalities, the mutually opposing dualities of the lower consciousness. In the Overmind we have a first firm foundation of the experience of a universal beauty, a universal love, a universal delight. These things can come on the mental and vital plane even before those planes are directly touched or influenced by the spiritual consciousness; but they are there a temporary experience and not permanent or they are limited in their field and do not touch the whole being. They are a glimpse and not a change of vision or a change of nature. The artist for instance can look at things only plain or shabby or ugly or even repulsive to the ordinary sense and see in them and bring out of them beauty and the delight that goes with beauty. But this is a sort of special grace for the artistic consciousness and is limited within the field of his art. In the Overmind consciousness, especially in the Overmind, these things become more and more the law of the vision and the law of the nature. Wherever the Overmind spiritual man turns he sees a universal beauty touching and uplifting all things, expressing itself through them, moulding them into a field or objects of its divine aesthesis; a universal



love goes out from him to all beings; he feels the Bliss which has created the worlds and upholds them and all that is expresses to him the universal delight, is made of it, is a manifestation of it and moulded into its image. This universal aesthesis of beauty and delight does not ignore or fail to understand the differences and oppositions, the gradations, the harmony and disharmony obvious to the ordinary consciousness; but, first of all, it draws a Rasa from them and with that comes the enjoyment, *Bhoga*, and the touch or the mass of the Ananda. It sees that all things have their meaning, their value, their deeper or total significance which the mind does not see, for the mind is only concerned with a surface vision, surface contacts and its own surface reactions. When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty. Even in form itself, apart from the significance, the Overmind consciousness sees the object with a totality which changes its effect on the percipient even while it remains the same thing. It sees lines and masses and

an underlying design which the physical eye does not see and which escapes even the keenest mental vision. Every form becomes beautiful to it in a deeper and larger sense of beauty than that commonly known to us. The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the thing but the delight of it. It sees also the one spirit in all, the face of the Divine everywhere and there can be no greater Ananda than that; it feels oneness with all, sympathy, love, the bliss of the Brahman. In a highest, a most integral experience it sees all things as if made of existence, consciousness, power, bliss, every atom of them charged with and constituted of Sachchidananda. In all this the overmind aesthesis takes its share and gives its response; for these things come not merely as an idea in the mind or a truth-seeing but as an experience of the whole being and a total response is not only possible but above a certain level imperative.

I have said that aesthesis responds not only to what we call beauty and beautiful things but to all things. We make a distinction between truth and beauty; but there can be an aesthetic response to truth also, a joy in its beauty, a love created by its charm, a rapture in the finding, a passion in the embrace, an aesthetic joy in its expression, a satisfaction of love in the giving of it to others. Truth is not merely a dry statement of facts or ideas to or by the intellect; it can be a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation, a thing of beauty that is a joy for ever. The poet also can be a seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty. He can

feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of the true as well as in the expression of the beautiful. He does not make a mere intellectual or philosophical statement of the truth; it is his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm. If he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light, beauty. On certain levels of the Overmind, where the mind element predominates over the element of gnosis, the distinction between truth and beauty is still valid. It is indeed one of the chief functions of the Overmind to separate the main powers of the consciousness and give to each its full separate development and satisfaction, bring out its utmost potency and meaning, its own soul and significant body and take it on its own way as far as it can go. It can take up each power of man and give it its full potentiality, its highest characteristic development. It can give to intellect its austere intellectuality and to logic its most sheer unsparing logicity. It can give to beauty its most splendid passion of lu-

minous form and the consciousness that receives it a supreme height and depth of ecstasy. It can create a sheer and pure poetry impossible for the intellect to sound

The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the things but the delight of it.

to its depths or wholly grasp, much less to mentalise and analyse. It is the function of Overmind to give to every possibility its full potential, its own separate kingdom. But also there is another action of Overmind which sees and thinks and creates in masses, which reunites separated things, which reconciles opposites. On that level truth and beauty not only become constant companions but become one, involved in each other, inseparable: on that level the true is always beautiful and the beautiful is always true. Their highest fusion perhaps only takes place in the Supermind; but Overmind on its summits draws enough of the supramental light to see what the Supermind sees and do what the Supermind does though in a lower key and with a less absolute truth and power. On an inferior level Overmind may use the language of the intellect to convey as far as that language can do it its own greater meaning and message but on its summits Overmind uses its own native language and gives to its truths their own supreme utterance, and no intellectual speech, no mentalised poetry can equal or even come near to that power and beauty. Here your intellectual dictum that poetry lives by its aesthetic quality alone and has no need of truth or that truth must depend upon aesthetics to become poetic at all, has no longer any meaning. For there truth itself is highest poetry and has only to appear to be utterly beautiful to the vision, the hearing, the sensibility of the soul. There dwells and from there springs the mystery of the in-evitable word, the supreme immortal rhythm, the absolute significance and the absolute utterance. ("Letters on Savitri," in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 809-813)



On several important passages

The Mother

(Mother shows a sketch she has just drawn to illustrate the passage in "Savitri" in which Sri Aurobindo speaks of the "sardonic rictus on God's face.")

I wanted to see this "sardonic laugh" of the Lord! So I looked, and instead of a sardonic laugh, I saw a face ... with such a deep sorrow—so deep, so grave—and full of such compassion.... It's after that that I said (you remember, it was over there, [In the music room, on December 31, 1963.] I was seeing that): "Falsehood is the sorrow of the Lord." It was naturally based on the experience that everything is the Lord—there is nothing that cannot be the Lord. So what is this "sardonic" smile? ... I was looking at that, and then I saw this face.

So, as I am supposed to do sketches for H.'s paintings, I did the sketch: Falsehood is the sorrow of the Lord.

(Mother shows the sketch representing the Lord's sorrowful face. Long silence)

Sri Aurobindo had the feeling or the sensation that what was farthest from the Lord (I always base myself now on that experience, which is very concrete in its sensation, of the "nearness" or "farness"—it isn't a farness in feelings, not that, it's like a material fact; yet it isn't located in space), well, Sri Aurobindo, for his part, felt that the farthest was cruelty. That's what he felt farthest from; that vibration seemed to him the farthest from that of the Lord.

And yet, it sounds bizarre but in cruelty one can still feel, distorted, the vibration of Love; far behind or deep within that vibration of cruelty, there is still, distorted, the vibration of Love. And Falsehood - the real Falsehood that doesn't arise from fear or anything of the sort, that has no reason behind it—real Falsehood, the negation of Truth (the WILLED negation of Truth), is, to me, something completely black and inert. That's the feeling it gives me. It is black, blacker than the blackest coal, and inert—inert, without any response.

When I read that description in *Savitri*, ["A tract he reached unbuilt and owned by none...." II.VI.206 (See conversation of December 31, 1963.)] I felt a sorrow which I thought I had been unable to feel for a long time—a long time. I thought I was (how shall I put it?) cured of that possibility. And last time, when I saw that, I saw it was still there; and while I was looking, I saw this same sorrow in the Lord, in His face, His expression.

The deliberate negation of all that is divine—of all that we call divine.

The Divine, for us, is always the perfection not yet manifested, all the marvels not yet manifested, and which must keep on growing, of course.

The far end of the Manifestation (assuming that there was a



Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram

progressive descent ... there may have been one, I don't know—there have been so many perceptions of what happened, sometimes contradictory, always incomplete and humanized), but if you consider the aspect of evolution, you tend to consider a far end from which you proceed to another far end (it's obviously childish, but anyway ...), or an extreme way of being that grows towards the opposite Extreme Way of Being; well, what seems to me the blackest and most inert, the total negation of "that" to which we aspire, is what constitutes Falsehood.

In other words, this is perhaps what I call Falsehood; because falsehood in the human way is always mixed with all kinds of things—but Falsehood proper is this. It is the assertion that the Divine does not exist, Life does not exist, Light does not exist, Love does not exist, Progress does not exist—Light, Life, Love do not exist. [Mother is not referring to an intellectual and human negation, but to a material fact that one finds at the very roots of life, in the most material consciousness, and which shows itself as an abyss of black and stifling basalt. It is intimately linked with death. It is the very secret of death.] A negative nothingness, a dark nothingness. And it may be this that clung to evolution and made Darkness, which denied Light, Death, which denied Life, and Hatred, Cruelty and all that, which denied Love—but this is already diluted, it's already in a diluted state, there has already been a mixture.

Oh, if we wanted to make poetry (it's no longer a philosophical or spiritual way of seeing, but a pictorial way), we could imagine a Lord who is a totality of all the possible and impossible possibilities, in quest of a Purity and Perfection that can never be reached and are ever progressive ... and the Lord would get rid of all in the Manifestation that weighs down His unfolding—He would begin with the nastiest. You see it?... Total Night, total Unconsciousness, total Hatred (no, hatred still implies that Love exists), the incapacity to feel. Nothingness.

We're on the way. I still have a little bit of it [that total Unconsciousness] left.

Ah, let's get to work. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 5, January 8, 1964, pp. 22-24)



(Mother reads a few lines from "Savitri" which she prepares to translate into French. It is Savitri's heart that speaks:)

The great stars burn with my unceasing fire
And life and death are both its fuel made.
Life only was my blind attempt to love:
Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory. (X. III . 638)

She says, Life and death are the fuel, then, In my blind attempt LIFE ONLY was my attempt to love. [Mother later stressed again, "It's not Life was only, but Life only."] Because my attempt to love was blind, I limited it to life—but I won the victory in death.

It's very interesting. (Mother repeats:)

Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory.

Yet, earth should see the victory? The victory should be on earth, shouldn't it?

Yes, but she couldn't win the victory on earth because she lacked heaven—she couldn't win the victory in life because she lacked death and she had to conquer death in order to conquer life.

That's the idea. Unless we conquer Death, the victory isn't won. Death must be vanquished, there must be no more death.

That's very clear.

(silence)

According to what he says here, it is the principle of Love that is transformed into flame and finally into light. It isn't the principle of Light that is transformed into flame when it materializes: it's the flame that is transformed into light.

The great stars give light because they burn; they burn because they are under the effect of Love.

Love would be the original Principle?

That seems to be what he is saying.

I didn't remember this passage. But I told you, my experience [The experience of the "great pulsations" of divine Love (in April, 1962).] is that the last thing as one rises—the last thing beyond light, beyond consciousness, beyond ... —the last thing one reaches is love. "One," this "one" is ... it's the "I"—I don't know. According to the experience, it's the last thing to manifest now in its purity, and it is the one that has the transforming power.

That's what he appears to be saying here: the victory of Love seems to be the final victory.

(silence)

He said, Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol; it's he who made it a symbol. It's the story of the encounter of Savitri, the principle of Love, with Death; and it's over Death that she won the victory, not in life. She could not win the victory in life without winning the victory over Death.

I didn't know it was put so clearly here. I had read it, but only once.

It's very interesting. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 6, September 8, 1965, pp. 235-238)

(Regarding a passage in "Savitri" in which Sri Aurobindo describes the universe as a play between He and She. "This whole wide world is only he and she," He, the Supreme in love with her, her servitor; She, the creative Force.)

As one too great for him he worships her;
He adores her as his regent of desire,
He yields to her as the mover of his will,
He burns the incense of his nights and days
Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice....
In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;
He makes the hours pivot around her will,
Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:
This whole wide world is only he and she. (I.IV. 62)

What a marvelous work!

He goes into a completely different region, so much above thought! It's constant vision, it isn't something thought out—with thought everything becomes flat, hollow, empty, empty, just like a leaf; while this is full, the full content is there, alive.

It's an explanation of why the world is as it is. At the start he says, He worships her (here again, there are no words in French: *Il lui rend un culte*, but that makes a whole sentence). He worships her as something far greater than Himself. And then you are almost a spectator of the Supreme projecting Himself to take on this creative aspect (necessarily, otherwise it couldn't be done!), the Witness watching His own work of creation and falling in love with this power of manifestation—you see it all. And ... oh, He wants to give Her her fullest chance and see, watch all that is going to happen, all that can happen with this divine Power thrust free into the world. And Sri Aurobindo expresses it as though he had absolutely fallen in love with Her: whatever She wants, whatever She does, whatever She thinks, whatever She wills, all of it—it's all wonderful! All is wonderful. It's so lovely!

And, I must say, I was observing this because, originally, the first time I heard of it, this conception shocked me, in the sense that ... (I don't know, it wasn't an idea, it was a feeling), as though it meant lending reality to something which in my consciousness, for a very long time (at least ... millennia perhaps, I don't know), had been the Falsehood to be conquered. The Falsehood that must cease to exist. It's the aspect of Truth that must manifest itself, it's not all that: doing anything whatsoever just for the fun of it, simply because you have the full power.... You have the power to do everything, so you do everything, and knowing that there is a Truth behind, you don't give a damn about consequences. That was something ... something which, as far back as I can remember, I have fought against. I have known it, but it seems to me it was such a long, long time ago and I rejected it so strongly, saying, "No, no!" and implored the Lord so intensely that things may be otherwise, beseeched Him that his all-powerful Truth, his all-powerful Purity and his all-powerful Beauty may manifest and put an end to all that mess. And at first I was shocked when Sri Aurobindo told me that; previously, in this life, it hadn't even



crossed my mind. In that sense Theon's explanation had been much more (what should I say?) useful to me from the standpoint of action: the origin of disorder being the separation of the primal Powers—but that's not it! HE is there, blissfully worshipping all this confusion!

And naturally this time around, when I started translating it came back. At first there was a shudder (Mother makes a gesture of stiffening). Then I told myself, "Haven't you got beyond that!" And I let myself flow into the thing. Then I had a series of nights with Sri Aurobindo ... so marvelous! You understand, I see him constantly and I go into that subtle physical world where he has his abode; the contact is almost permanent (at any rate, that's how I spend all my nights: he shows me the work, everything), but still, after this translation of *Savitri* he seemed to be smiling at me and telling me, "At last you have understood!" (Mother laughs) I said, "It isn't that I didn't understand, it's that I didn't want it!" I didn't want, I don't WANT things to be like that any more, for thousands of years I have wanted things to be otherwise!

The night before last, he had put on a sari of mine. He told me (laughing), "Why not? Don't you find it suits me!" I answered, "It suits you beautifully!" A sari of brown georgette, lustrous bronze, with big golden braid! It was a very beautiful sari (I used to have it, it was one of my saris), and he was wearing it. Then he asked me to do his hair. I remember seeing that the nape of his neck and his hair had become almost luminous—his hair was never quite white, there was an auburn shimmer to it, it was almost golden, and it stayed that way, very fine, not at all like the hair people have here. His hair was almost like mine. So while I was doing his hair, I saw the luminous nape of his neck, and his hair, so luminous! And he said to me, "Why shouldn't I wear a sari!"

That opened up a whole new horizon.... We're always so closed, you know.

Of course, it [this vision or conception] isn't allowed into action, because when you start accepting everything and loving everything and seeing Glory everywhere—why change!? This is why the Force that had been in me for so long for the world to progress further made me reject precisely all that legitimized things as they are by putting you into contact with the inner joy of living—as he puts it, His Joy is there, everywhere, so nobody wants to leave the world....

In short, I was able to see the situation from above, a little higher than the creative Force—from the other side. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 4, February 15, 1963, pp. 45-47)

Savitri: the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision

- 1) The daily record of the spiritual experiences of the individual who has written.
- 2) A complete system of yoga which can serve as a guide for those who want to follow the integral sadhana.
- 3) The yoga of the Earth in its ascension towards the Divine.
- 4) The experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated. —The Mother

The poetry room

From *Savitri*, "The yoga of the king: The yoga of the soul's release"

Thus came his soul's release from Ignorance,
His mind and body's first spiritual change.
A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,
A new world-knowledge broadened from within:
His daily thoughts looked up to the True and One,
His commonest doings welled from an inner Light.
Awakened to the lines that Nature hides,
Attuned to her movements that exceed our ken,
He grew one with a covert universe.
His grasp surprised her mightiest energies' springs;
He spoke with the unknown Guardians of the worlds,
Forms he descried our mortal eyes see not.
His wide eyes bodied viewless entities,
He saw the cosmic forces at their work
And felt the occult impulse behind man's will.
Time's secrets were to him an oft-read book;
The records of the future and the past
Outlined their excerpts on the etheric page.
One and harmonious by the Maker's skill,
The human in him paced with the divine;
His acts betrayed not the interior flame.
This forged the greatness of his front to earth.
A genius heightened in his body's cells
That knew the meaning of his fate-hedged works
Akin to the march of unaccomplished Powers
Beyond life's arc in spirit's immensities.
Apart he lived in his mind's solitude,
A demigod shaping the lives of men:
One soul's ambition lifted up the race;
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.
The universal strengths were linked with his;
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,
He drew the energies that transmute an age.
Immeasurable by the common look,
He made great dreams a mould for coming things
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's. (pp. 44-45)

From *Savitri*, "The secret Knowledge"

The master of existence lurks in us
And plays at hide-and-seek with his own Force;
In Nature's instrument loiters secret God.
The Immanent lives in man as in his house;
He has made the universe his pastime's field,



A vast gymnasium of his works of might.
All-knowing he accepts our darkened state,
Divine, wears shapes of animal or man;
Eternal, he assents to Fate and Time,
Immortal, dallies with mortality.
The All-Conscious ventured into Ignorance,
The All-Blissful bore to be insensible.
Incarnate in a world of strife and pain,
He puts on joy and sorrow like a robe
And drinks experience like a strengthening wine.
He whose transcendence rules the pregnant Vasts,
Prescient now dwells in our subliminal depths,
A luminous individual Power, alone.
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has entered with his silence into space:
He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;
He has built a million figures of his power;
He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he.
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,
One who is in us as our secret self,
Our mask of imperfection has assumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh his own,
His image in the human measure cast
That to his divine measure we might rise;
Then in a figure of divinity
The Maker shall recast us and impose
A plan of godhead on the mortal's mould
Lifting our finite minds to his infinite,
Touching the moment with eternity.
This transfiguration is earth's due to heaven:
A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine.
Our life is a paradox with God for key. (pp. 66-67)

From *Savitri*, "The descent into Night"

Out of the chill steppes of a bleak Unseen
Invisible, wearing the Night's grey mask,
Arrived the shadowy dreadful messengers,
Invaders from a dangerous world of power,
Ambassadors of evil's absolute.
In silence the inaudible voices spoke,
Hands that none saw planted the fatal grain,
No form was seen, yet a dire work was done,

An iron decree in crooked uncials written
Imposed a law of sin and adverse fate.
Life looked at him with changed and sombre eyes:
Her beauty he saw and the yearning heart in things
That with a little happiness is content,
Answering to a small ray of truth or love;
He saw her gold sunlight and her far blue sky,
Her green of leaves and hue and scent of flowers
And the charm of children and the love of friends
And the beauty of women and kindly hearts of men,
But saw too the dreadful Powers that drive her moods
And the anguish she has strewn upon her ways,
Fate waiting on the unseen steps of men
And her evil and sorrow and last gift of death.
A breath of disillusion and decadence
Corrupting watched for Life's maturity
And made to rot the full grain of the soul:
Progress became a purveyor of Death.
A world that clung to the law of a slain Light
Cherished the putrid corpses of dead truths,
Hailed twisted forms as things free, new and true,
Beauty from ugliness and evil drank
Feeling themselves guests at a banquet of the gods
And tasted corruption like a high-spiced food.
A darkness settled on the heavy air;
It hunted the bright smile from Nature's lips
And slew the native confidence in her heart
And put fear's crooked look into her eyes.
The lust that warps the spirit's natural good
Replaced by a manufactured virtue and vice
The frank spontaneous impulse of the soul:
Afflicting Nature with the dual's lie,
Their twin values whetted a forbidden zest,
Made evil a relief from spurious good,
The ego batten on righteousness and sin
And each became an instrument of Hell.
In rejected heaps by a monotonous road
The old simple delights were left to lie
On the wasteland of life's descent to Night.
All glory of life was dimmed, tarnished with doubt;
All beauty ended in an aging face;
All power was dubbed a tyranny cursed by God
And Truth a fiction needed by the mind:
The chase of joy was now a tired hunt;
All knowledge was left a questioning Ignorance. (pp. 203-205)

From *Savitri*, "The gospel of Death and vanity of the Ideal"

Then pealed the calm inexorable voice:
Abolishing hope, cancelling life's golden truths,
Fatal its accents smote the trembling air.
That lovely world swam thin and frail, most like



Some pearly evanescent farewell gleam
On the faint verge of dusk in moonless eves.
"Prisoner of Nature, many-visioned spirit,
Thought's creature in the ideal's realm enjoying
Thy unsubstantial immortality
The subtle marvellous mind of man has feigned,
This is the world from which thy yearnings came.
When it would build eternity from the dust,
Man's thought paints images illusion rounds;
Prophesying glories it shall never see,
It labours delicately among its dreams.
Behold this fleeing of light-tasselled shapes,
Aerial raiment of unbodied gods;
A rapture of things that never can be born,
Hope chants to hope a bright immortal choir;
Cloud satisfies cloud, phantom to longing phantom
Leans sweetly, sweetly is clasped or sweetly chased.
This is the stuff from which the ideal is formed:
Its builder is thought, its base the heart's desire,
But nothing real answers to their call.
The ideal dwells not in heaven, nor on the earth,
A bright delirium of man's ardour of hope
Drunk with the wine of its own fantasy.
It is a brilliant shadow's dreamy trail.
Thy vision's error builds the azure skies,
Thy vision's error drew the rainbow's arch;
Thy mortal longing made for thee a soul.
This angel in thy body thou callst love,
Who shapes his wings from thy emotion's hues,
In a ferment of thy body has been born
And with the body that housed it it must die..." (pp. 607-608)

From *Savitri*, "The debate of Love and Death"

"O Death, I have triumphed over thee within;
I quiver no more with the assault of grief;
A mighty calmness seated deep within
Has occupied my body and my sense:
It takes the world's grief and transmutes to strength,
It makes the world's joy one with the joy of God.
My love eternal sits throned on God's calm;
For Love must soar beyond the very heavens
And find its secret sense ineffable;
It must change its human ways to ways divine,
Yet keep its sovereignty of earthly bliss.
O Death, not for my heart's sweet poignancy
Nor for my happy body's bliss alone
I have claimed from thee the living Satyavan,
But for his work and mine, our sacred charge.
Our lives are God's messengers beneath the stars;
To dwell under death's shadow they have come
Tempting God's light to earth for the ignorant race,
His love to fill the hollow in men's hearts,

His bliss to heal the unhappiness of the world.
For I, the woman, am the force of God,
He the Eternal's delegate soul in man.
My will is greater than thy law, O Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:
Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme.
I guard that seal against thy rending hands.
Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute." (p. 633)

From *Savitri*, "The eternal day: The soul's choice and the supreme consummation"

"O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose:
All thou hast asked I give to earth and men.
All shall be written out in destiny's book
By my trustee of thought and plan and act,
The executor of my will, eternal Time...
Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and fate
And leaned in pity over earth-bound men
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,
I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine
And lay my splendid yoke upon thy soul.
Now will I do in thee my marvellous works.
I will fasten thy nature with my cords of strength,
Subdue to my delight thy spirit's limbs
And make thee a vivid knot of all my bliss
And build in thee my proud and crystal home.
Thy days shall be my shafts of power and light,
Thy nights my starry mysteries of joy
And all my clouds lie tangled in thy hair
And all my springtides marry in thy mouth.
O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light
And bring down God into the lives of men;
Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,
My garden of life to plant a seed divine.
When all thy work in human time is done
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,
The body of earth a tabernacle of God.
Awakened from the mortal's ignorance
Men shall be lit with the Eternal's ray
And the glory of my sun-lift in their thoughts
And feel in their hearts the sweetness of my love
And in their acts my Power's miraculous drive.
My will shall be the meaning of their days;
Living for me, by me, in me they shall live...." (pp. 698-99)



Apropos

Time's message of brief light was not for her. (*Savitri*, p. 6)

All came back to her: Earth and Love and Doom,
The ancient disputants, encircled her
Like giant figures wrestling in the night;
(p. 9)

She faced the engines of the universe;
A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels:
Its giant workings paused in front of a mind,
Its stark conventions met the flame of a soul. (p. 20)

A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks
Empowered to force the door denied and closed
Smote from death's visage its dumb absolute
And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time. (p. 21)

A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;
His human self like a translucent cloak
Covered the All-wise who leads the unseeing world. (p. 22)

Thus taken was God's plunge into the Night
This fallen world became a nurse of souls
Inhabited by concealed divinity. (p. 107)

The light of God she has parted from his dark
To test the savour of bare opposites. (p. 122)

This huge world unintelligibly turns
In the shadow of mused Inconscience;
It hides a key to inner meanings missed,
It locks in our hearts a voice we cannot hear. (p. 160)

Out of the sorrow and darkness of the world,
Out of the depths where life and thought are tombed,
Lonely mounts up to heaven the deathless Flame. (p. 279)

He stood on a wide arc of summit Space
Alone with an enormous Self of Mind
Which held all life in a corner of its vasts.
(p. 283)

In God's supreme withdrawn and timeless hush
A seeing Self and potent Energy met;
The Silence knew itself and thought took form:
Self-made from the dual power creation rose. (p. 284)

For I know now why my spirit came on earth
And who I am and who he is I love. (p. 435)

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?
Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives:
He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,
A light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross. (p. 442)

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
(p. 443)

This hidden foe lodged in the human breast
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.
This is the inner war without escape.
(p. 448)

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
The world itself becomes his adversary,
His enemies are the beings he came to save. (p. 448)

All the world's possibilities in man
Are waiting as the tree waits in the seed:
His past lives in him; it drives his future's pace;
His present's acts fashion his coming fate.
(p. 482)

Thus man in his little house made of earth's dust
Grew towards an unseen heaven of thought and dream
Looking into the vast vistas of his mind
On a small globe dotting infinity. (p. 486)

Her spirit saw the world as living God;
It saw the One and knew that all was He.
(p. 556)

Easy the heavens were to build for God.
Earth was his difficult matter, earth the glory
Gave of the problem and the race and strife. (p. 653)

A Truth supreme has forced the world to be;
It has wrapped itself in Matter as in a shroud,
A shroud of Death, a shroud of Ignorance. (p. 658)

Around her lived the children of God's day
In an unspeakable felicity,
A happiness never lost, the immortal's ease,
A glad eternity's blissful multitude. (p. 673)

Heaven in its rapture dreams of perfect earth,
Earth in its sorrow dreams of perfect heaven. (p. 684)

Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home.
(p. 685)

All grace and glory and all divinity
Were here collected in a single form;
All worshipped eyes looked through his from one face;
He bore all godheads in his grandiose limbs. (p. 680)

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!
O lasso of my rapture's widening noose,
Become my cord of universal love. (p. 702)

O Savitri, thou art my spirit's Power,
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God. (p. 703)

But when the hour of the Divine draws near,
The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time
And God be born into the human clay
In forms made ready by your human lives.
Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men. (p. 705)