

Śraddhā

*A Quarterly devoted to an exposition of the teachings of
The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñanam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover Design : Dhanavanti's painting 'The White Ordeal'

Editorial

Nolini Kanto Gupta – our beloved Nolinida – once, when asked what was the best way to serve the Mother is reported to have replied in his usual inimitable, laconic style ‘*Love the Mother more*’.

Sri Aurobindo has unambiguously stated ‘*The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence*’. She is the creative Consciousness that has manifested itself in a human body out of her deep and infinite love for her children, ‘*Hoping her greater being to implant/That heaven might native grow on mortal soil*’. Her mission is to bring down into this vale of tears and suffering the Light, the Power, the Wisdom and Love of The Supreme. And this Light we must receive not only through the head, our mind, but more importantly through our heart, through love, through true love that is Divine. And this true love is within our inmost heart, which is our soul, which is the living Presence of the Mother, Her very special gift to all of us. Now is the time of the year to turn our eyes within and look for that golden Presence within our inner heart, to carefully nurture ‘*the flame-child born*’ and build ‘*the golden tower*’. Now is the time to renew our aspiration, to reject evermore the call of our lower nature and place ourselves unreservedly on every plane of consciousness to this Divine Shakti so that she can mould us into her own Nature through the miracle of her love. Such, too, was the mission of Savitri, the embodiment of Divine Grace and Love in human form. We have, therefore, dedicated this special issue of **Sraddha** to that immortal epic, Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, whom the Mother represented in her earthly embodiment.

Ever since the concept of dedicating the Feb’11 issue of **Sraddha** to *Savitri* was floated among potential contributors, the response has been overwhelming. We have received such a huge mass of material that it has become virtually impossible to accommodate them in one single issue. We have, therefore, decided to break up the entire matter and spread them over two successive issues, viz. Feb and April’11.

In keeping with our earlier promise to bring out from time to time, from among the rich archival materials of Sri Aurobindo studies, contributions by eminent writers of yesteryears, we publish in this number the brief but admirably written essay by Sri Krishnaprem which first appeared in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual in 1948. We also take this op-

portunity to announce the beginning of a new series of expository writings on *Savitri* by Debashish Banerjee.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for their kind permission to reproduce two of Mother’s photographs taken from the Ashram Digital Catalogue of photographs with a few lines of *Savitri* appended to one of them. We owe special thanks to Dhanvanti for generously allowing us to use her exquisite painting ‘*The White Ordeal*’ on the cover of the journal and to Robi Ganguly for his ready help in designing the layout. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees.

On *Savitri* — A Talk to a Young Disciple

The Mother

It does not matter if you do not understand it—*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 lines. Every time you try to read and understand, you will see that something is added, something which has 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, rhythms, vibrations will penetrate directly to this white page, will put their stamp upon the brain, will explain themselves without your making any 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 him who wishes to follow this path, it is a concrete 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 its solution herein; 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 divine humility and 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 regions 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 comparable with *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, the Eternal, if it is read with this aspiration for 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 Yoga is noted here, including the secret of all other Yogas. Surely, if one sincerely follows what is revealed here in each line one will reach finally 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 possessed by way of knowledge and, I repeat this, the words are expressed and arranged in such a way 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 all the answers to all your question there. Everything is explained, even the future of man and of the evolution, all that nobody yet knows. He has described it all in beautiful and clear words so that spiritual adventurers who wish to solve the mystery of the world may understand it more easily. But this mystery is well hidden behind the words and lines and one must rise to the required level of true consciousness to discover it. All prophecies, all that is going to come 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 to open the door of the Inconscience so that the light may penetrate there and transform it. He has shown the path, the way to liberate oneself from the ignorance and climb up to the superconscience; each stage, each plane of consciousness, how they can be scaled, how one can cross even the barrier of death and attain immortality. You will find the whole journey in detail and, as you go forward, you can discover things altogether unknown to man. That is *Savitri* and much more yet. It is a real experience — reading *Savitri*. All the secrets that man possesses, He has revealed, — as

well as all that awaits him in the future; all this is found in the depth of *Savitri*. But one must have the knowledge to discover it all, 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 in order to advance integrally in the integral Yoga.

All this is His own experience, and what is most surprising is that it is my own experience also. It is my sadhana which He has worked out. Each object, each event, each realisation, all the descriptions, even the colours are exactly what I saw and the words, 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*. During the night He would write and in the morning read it to me. And I observed something curious, that day after day the experiences He read out to me in the morning were those I had had the previous night, word by word. Yes, all the descriptions, the colours, the pictures I had seen, the words I had heard, all, all, I heard it all, 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 by chance, 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, no, He knew already what I had seen. It is my experiences He has presented at length and they were His experiences also. It is, moreover, the picture of Our joint adventure 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 or sorrow, physically. He walked into the darkness of inconscience, even in the neighbourhood of death, endured the sufferings of perdition, and emerged from the mud, the world-misery to breathe the sovereign plenitude and enter the supreme Ananda. He crossed all these realms, went through the consequences, suffered and endured physically what one cannot imagine. Nobody till today has suffered like Him. He 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. 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 appears now for the first time 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 farther one advances on the path of Yoga, the more does one assimilate and the 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 through the mind, it is in meditation that *Savitri* is revealed.

And men have the audacity to compare it with the work of Virgil or Homer and to find it inferior. They do not understand, they cannot understand. What do they know? Nothing at all. And it is useless to try to make them understand. Men will know what it is, but in a distant future. It is only the new race with the new consciousness which will be able to understand it. 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, 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 uplifted. 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 seen.

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 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 can do with the help of *Savitri*. Try and you will see how very different it is, how new; 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 if *Savitri* were a being, a real guide. I tell you, whoever wanting to practise Yoga tries sincerely and feels the necessity for it, 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. For him *Savitri* alone will be the guide; for, all that he needs he will find in *Savitri*. If he remains very quiet while facing a difficulty, or when he does not know where to turn to go forward and how to overcome obstacles, for all these hesitations and incertitudes which overwhelm us at every moment, he will have the necessary indications, and the necessary concrete help. If he remains very 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 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 and religions. It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga, Tapasya, Sadhana, everything, in its single body. *Savitri* has an extraordinary power, it gives 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.

Blessings 5.11.1967

(The talk was written down by Mona Sarkar from memory after several years. It was not seen by the Mother. We acknowledge with thanks the reproduction of the above extract from *Perspectives on Savitri*, vol.1 ed, by RY Deshpande and published by Aurobharati Trust, Pondicherry)

Savitri

Sri Krishnaprem

Sri Aurobindo's achievement in this great poem is one of which it is not easy for us to grasp the full significance. It is not a mythological poem, an ancient myth—as often as not even believed—used as a back-cloth against which to display poetic virtuosity. Neither is it a philosophical poem, an exposition in verse of doctrines whose more natural vehicle would be prose. Nor, again, is it mere literature, to be evaluated according to the canons of traditional, or even modern, English poetry. Indeed one remembers Sri Aurobindo's explicit rejection of certain criticisms—not of this poem—made by the Irish poet A.E.* The English language has been given to the world and its usages and limits can now no longer be determined exclusively by the ears of the “islanders whose tongue it originally was. Those who would remain sole rulers of their language must abjure empire”. But to return:

The uniqueness of the achievement lies in the fact that Sri Aurobindo has closed a gulf that has yawned in the human psyche for many, many centuries. In the ancient world, poetry, whether in Vedic hymns or elsewhere, was—above all—revelation. Its

* A.E. wrote in a letter to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy (dated 6.1.32): “*English is a great language but it has very few words relating to spiritual ideas. For example, the word ‘Karma’ in Sanskrit embodies a philosophy. There is no word in English embodying the same idea. There are many words in Sanskrit charged with meanings which have no counterpart in English—words like dhyani, sushupti, turiya—and I am sure the language which the Hindus speak today must be richer in words fitting for spiritual expression than English, in which there are few luminous words that can be used when there is a spiritual emotion to be expressed. I found this difficulty myself of finding a vocabulary though English is the language I heard about my cradle.*” To this Sri Aurobindo replied in a letter:

...“*but this seems to me a reasoning from the conventions of a past order which cannot apply to a new poetry dealing with spiritual things. A new art of words written from a new consciousness demands a new technique...Truth first - a technique expressive of the truth in the forms of beauty has to be found if it does not exist. It is no use arguing from the spiritual inadequacy of the English language: it has to be made adequate. It has been plastic enough in the past to succeed in expressing all that it was asked to express, however new: it must now be urged to a farther new progress.*” (A.E. referred to some poems of Sri K.D. Sethna sent to him for opinion by Sri Dilip Kumar Roy.)

subject matter was the eternal truth which dwells in the heart of all life. Of that secret ‘Truth-Consciousness’—to use Sri Aurobindo's own terms—poetry was the essential expression: the poet was the seer, not in some mild Wordsworthian sense, but in the full and ancient meaning of the word. He *saw* in very actuality the ever-living Gods who from within ruled and still rule all life and he used all the magic of the divine Logos to weave garments of sound in which those powers could dwell, as it were, embodied. He was the Seer, the Prophet, the Magician and his speech was mantra and enchantment, not only in India but throughout the world. It was a dim memory of this that remained in the medieval European tradition of Virgil as the great Enchanter.

But this of which we speak was in that archaic world when men were still embedded in the matrix of the universal life—in touch with Gods above and beasts below—the days before the rise of tyrannous, self-conscious, separative mind, that “slayer of the Real.” Gradually, with the rise of this self-arrogating power a separation came about. One became two and head sundered itself, from heart, knowledge from feeling. For itself the head forged the new tool of prose with which to express what it termed the facts of life, while to the more conservative heart was relegated whatever was left of the old magic language, shorn indeed of its prestige and power, but still possessing the glamour which clings to the language of an old but conquered race. Poetry thus became the language of the dispossessed heart, the vehicle of its dreams and misty unfulfilled longings, a glowing many-coloured rainbow arched over the rushing waters of life but existing—as the analytic head is careful to tell us—only in the eye of the beholder.

Perhaps the last great western poet to have made any real attempt to grasp the inner unity was Dante, and even he made use of merely traditional myth—and somewhat degenerated myth at that—for most of his structure, while Milton who came later used even more degenerated myth for purposes which it is not unfair to describe as theological apologetics. Still later, Blake, a genuine but undisciplined seer, attempted to recover the lost unity but lost his way in uncharted private worlds.

After him the venture fails. The best poetry became, more and more, purely lyrical and subjective. The rainbow still gleams above the waters, the magic light still glows within the heart; but, more and more, the fissure widened, polarising, however unspokenly, the *poetic* with the *actual*, poetry with life.

In this poem the fissure has been closed. *Savitri* (and it is no mere coincidence that the name is that of the quintessential verse of all the Vedas as well as that of the wife of Satyavan) is neither subjective fantasy nor yet mere philosophical thought, but vision and revelation of the actual inner structure of the Cosmos and of the pilgrim of life within its sphere — Bhu, Bhuvan, Swar: the Stairway of the Worlds reveals itself to our gaze—worlds of Light above, worlds of Darkness beneath—and we see also ever-circling life (“*kindled in measure and quenched in measure*”) ascending and descending that Stair under the calm unwinking gaze of the Cosmic Gods who shine forth now as of old. This and much more can be seen, not as some theory to be agreed or disagreed with, but as present living fact by any who can open their inner eye. For poetry — all poetry— is evocative. “*Out of discussion,*” says Plotinus, “*we call to*

vision. Far above the plains of prose with their challenge to agreement or disagreement, tower the mountain peaks of poetry calling to vision. Poetry is indeed the full manifestation of the Logos, and when, as here, it is no mere iridescence dependent on some special standpoint, but the wondrous structure of the mighty Cosmos, the 'Adorned One', that is revealed, then in truth does it manifest in its full, its highest grandeur."

Such poetry can only be written either in the early days before the rise to power of self-conscious mind or when that particular cycle has run its course and life establishes itself once more in the unity beyond, this time with all the added range and power that has been gained during the reign of mind. It is an omen of the utmost significance and hope that in these years of darkness and despair such a poem as *Savitri* should have appeared. Let us salute the Dawn.

(This is a reproduction of the article which appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1948)

To *Savitri*, the Wonderful Epic

Ranajit Sarkar

Of this weary world where nothing is what it seems
you show the secret countenance of things.
The deluding scales fall from our purblind eyes:
a vast ocean of reality, lofty mountains,
far-vistaed scenes of truth reveal themselves
and our minds are quickened to a greater thought.
We feel the thrill of venturing into the unknown;
far mysteries come floating in; strange forms
we saw only in dreams, show beauty's craft.
We discover bright icons and symbols that robbers
of light hid in the caverns of ignorance.
Epic of the soul's greatness, truer than
all that the world's myths, sagas and philosophies
have ever dreamed of or conceived! You are
the luminous guide of our spirit's dauntless ascent:
you, O symphony of wide-winged notes!
Because you are, we are free from the fear of death.
We know that the vast shadow thrown across
the sky will dissolve, and man shall see the face
of immortality, and taste its honey-bliss.
Because you are, the hidden eternal flame
has become incarnate here. Your words are fraught
with the effective power of divine Will,
light radiates from your golden syllables.
Because you are, our mother earth, our mother
of sorrow and grief, frail yet courageous,
holds in her trembling heart the promise of love.
Love will prevail, and death's dominion end,
the truth above will embrace the soil below,
darkness forever vanish and God-light
illumine our thoughts. Life will deathless be.
Salutation to the seer-poet who revealed you!

You are the witness of his passionate labour.
He plunged alone, intrepid, in the abyss,
leaving his luminous eternal abode.
He smote the dragon darkness, passed through dense
layers of cosmic existence, from the deepest
inconscious depths to the heights of the Infinite.
You are, great epic, the logbook of his adventure:
a voyage that none had dared to undertake.
Glory to him, and to you, his mighty creation!

You bring the godly afflatus to us, humans;
intuition lights up our bleak life. This earth
which still lies plunged in dire darkness, whose heart
groans in black anguish, assailed, torn apart
by the grim jaws of war, famine and terror,
will one day become divine. Great poem, your message
of light and bliss, of love that does not fail,
will enter into the deaf human heart
and humanity wake up to a diviner birth.
Vast ocean, strewn with archipelagos, shining
in the eternal sun, mystical play of light
rises and falls in your deep and loving breast;
the sky descends in you bringing the glory
that never was on sea and land. From you
ascends the music of the stars, the hymns
vibrating with the splendour of radiant sight.
You sing the magnificent paean of love,
wisdom and force, of the unfailing will
that burns like a high sacrificial fire
on the altars of human destiny.
Your words of power unveil life's hidden meaning;
mortal cells hear the call of immortality,
strong vibrant bliss enthralls our nerves and senses,
our body's tabernacle holds the life divine.
You are the beacon that leads the fearless sailor
voyaging through unmapped seas, facing storms,
volcanic upheavals, dangers unpredicted,
to the safe haven of the eternal day.
You bear in your sunlit symbols the prophecy
and the promise that this earth will become divine
and earthly breath will thrill with inviolate joy.
Revealer of worlds that few have ever seen:
deep worlds of nescience fearful and dark, air

that denies light and life, bewitching skies
that haunt our hapless dreams with nightmare shapes, —
the seeker must go through hell to create in mud
the luminous habitation of the Spirit!
Revealer too of ranges of high thoughts,
of unknown splendours of the Mind that lie
hidden to the human sight, illumined forms
and imaginations that cancel fancy's dreams
and makes the inspired Word real to the inner ear
of the poet, intuitions that like lightning flashes
touch with their fiery knowledge the soul of the seer.
You give the assurance that the supermind
will one day reign supreme and make life
a harmony of truth and creative force.
And we who live in fear and terror, to us
you have given the paradigm of heaven's grace.
But we have poisoned our drinking water,
we have polluted the air we breathe, the food
we eat, the images we see, the thoughts we think.

Absolute annihilation knocks at our doors.
But you are there, and things will change. But when,
oh when? When will we be ready to receive your light
that will dissipate the darkness of our souls,
when will we work for the wonderful advent?

Savitri: The Song of the Infinite

Alok Pandey

Savitri, the mantra of transformation, as the Mother put it so powerfully and so beautifully, is regarded by some as the fifth Veda. In a sense it follows the line of Vedic poetry where revelation mounts upon revelation and intuition is overleaped by intuition. The sounds, words, style, substance all touch a highest intensity of Truth and Beauty and Power whose ultimate result on the hearer and the reader, whether they understand the inner and inmost sense or not, is delight; Delight that is at the background of Creation and at the apex of all things. *Savitri* releases this Delight as the rhythms of a higher hemisphere roll down through the sound symbols and word symbols into the sphere of sorrow and mortality. The result of this meeting is a transmutation of consciousness, a growing out of our present state of darkness and ignorance into Light and Freedom and Immortality. This effect is described so perfectly in *Savitri* itself:

*As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And, musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
Are seized unutterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change;
He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech: (Savitri, 4th ed, 1993, p. 375)*

In a sense all of Sri Aurobindo's writings after his attainment of the silent Nirvanic consciousness in 1907 are mantric. They are the result of a 'spiritual seeing' and not the usual mental analysis through the labouring mind. The mind of the thinker in him

was already transmuted into the mind of the seer and all of *Arya* writings bear witness to this stamp of Light and Fire that courses through the words and sounds as they swim into our ken from a higher sphere of Truth-Light. But in *Savitri* the attempt is to give this higher consciousness and the mantra that descends from there into the mind of the seer a most perfect rhythm and expression. *Savitri* follows the trail of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. As He ascended to higher and higher planes and as the natural instruments underwent the transmutation in the wake of this ascension, Sri Aurobindo wrote and rewrote the divine epic from that newly attained state of ascension. Naturally this continued right up to the very last days of His bodily sojourn. Therefore *Savitri* is special among His writings. It is not just the seeing of the Seer and the revelation that accompanies this seeing but the outpouring of this higher seeing in the most perfect words and sounds that human speech can ever envisage. The expression is as close to perfection as the consciousness experiencing it. Thus it contains within its word-body and sound-body the power to help us not only to come into contact with the state of consciousness that is expressed here but even more to actually ascend into that state. It has not only a revelatory power, the power to change our thoughts and understanding which revelation gives, but the power to transmute us as well; that is to say, to help us grow into that which it embodies, not just in thought and understanding but also in feeling, willing and the very body's sense.

It is a Veda in another sense as well. For the truths revealed here are not those that are ordinarily experienced by our narrow range of senses but those that are beyond the limits of our mortal sight and mortal hearing and yet touch and fill everything that we sense and experience with a diviner experience:

*Releasing things unseized by earthly sense:
A world unseen, unknown by outward mind
Appeared in the silent spaces of the soul.
He sat in secret chambers looking out
Into the luminous countries of the unborn
Where all things dreamed by the mind are seen and true
And all that the life longs for is drawn close. (Ibid, p.27)*

.....
*A reporter and scribe of hidden wisdom talk,
Her shining minutes of celestial speech,
Passed through the masked office of the occult mind,
Transmitting gave to prophet and to seer
The inspired body of the mystic Truth.
A recorder of the inquiry of the gods,
Spokesman of the silent seeings of the Supreme,
She brought immortal words to mortal men.
Above the reason's brilliant slender curve,
Released like radiant air dimming a moon,
Broad spaces of a vision without line
Or limit swam into his spirit's ken. (Ibid, p.39)*

That is why it is idle to understand it with the labouring intellectual mind and clamp its free rhythm to any known rhythms and metre. This does not mean that the Divine poem can neither be understood nor has any rhythm. That would be neither poetry nor truth. It simply means that we have to adopt another method and use other means to ‘understand’ it and enjoy its rhythm. Revelation has to be received, and with the humility and aspiration that one naturally feels when face to face with a great truth. It is this that opens an inner door and the sense of the words and the rhythm of the sounds is revealed to us by the gods and the consciousness of Truth that has brought down the poem and given it a form of human speech and a birth among the mortals. Indeed the mantric poem is a boon to earth that has been brought down through the arduous tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The best we can do is to be grateful to Them for this boon and receive it with a mind open to Light through aspiration and a heart open to Love through a seeking and longing for the Divine. Is this not the book of Love itself, the song of Delight, the message of the Superconscious Fire to which our ears are sealed and our hearts closed to its subtle intimations:

*The skilful Penman's unseen finger wrote
His swift intuitive calligraphy;
Earth's forms were made his divine documents,
The wisdom embodied mind could not reveal,
Inconscience chased from the world's voiceless breast;
Transfigured were the fixed schemes of reasoning Thought.
Arousing consciousness in things inert,
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paean-song of the free Infinite
And the Name, foundation of eternity,
And traced on the awake exultant cells
In the ideographs of the Ineffable
The lyric of the love that waits through Time
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscious Fire.* (Ibid, p.232)

In fact we can see how each time Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the immediate and the outward scene, He placed in the midst of seeking and suffering humanity something that would redeem him and carry him through the dark and perilous passage that one has to pass in the divine dispensation of things. Thus, when he withdrew from the scene of Indian Nationalism, he had kindled and awakened in the heart of a nation the living Presence of Bhavani Bharati, the guardian deity of India's destiny whom He invoked by recharging the mantra Bande Mataram with the strength of his love and sacrifice for the Indian nation in whose resurgence he saw the hope of redemption of all mankind and an important condition for the awakening of the world to a New and higher Light. Having established the settled will for freedom in the soul of a nation, he moved on to establish a settled will for another kind of freedom and another type of revolution

in the soul and mind of humanity. Here too, once he had opened the path and worked out the major lines of advance, he withdrew behind the external scene but not before installing the Divine Mother in the temple of the earth and in the midst of an ignorant yet aspiring humanity. Finally, when the necessities of the work demanded that he withdraw one step further and work from behind the iron curtains of death where our earthly sight reaches not, he placed once again in the hands of the striving human race the magical mantra of *Savitri* to help, to heal, to carry the human march forward with a song of hope in its heart and a ray of the Supreme Light to chase away the darkness that hangs around our earthbound soul.

There is yet another similarity between *Savitri* and the Vedas. The theme of the Vedas is the epic of human ascension from the mind to a higher and Supramental status of being; it is a document that reveals to us the human journey from the dark womb of things to the eternal Light. In *Savitri* too we have a detailed description of this epic climb, not only of the human soul but also of the earth nature since its first insect crawl towards the most glorious of flights that is yet to come. In fact the book starts with this dense veil of Night, this black pall of Inconscience that covers all things. It ends with the dream of a greater dawn for earth and man. So too, the Vedas speak of the Dawn emerging after the battle with the forces of Darkness and Ignorance that hold earth nature in their powerful grip. In *Savitri* these forces are typified in the being of Death whose compelling logic seems to stifle any will and aspiration for a Divine Life upon earth. But She conquers Death not only by the power of Her mastering Omniscient Thought but even more by Her Omnipotent Will. What is foreseen in the Vedas is here fulfilled in *Savitri*, — ‘*The end of Death, the death of Ignorance*’, to use lines from the book itself. Sri Aurobindo reveals in *The Secret of the Veda* about this Dawn, the bringer of illumination for earth and men:

‘Usha is the divine illumination and Dakshina is the discerning knowledge that comes with the dawn and enables the Power in the mind, Indra, to know aright and separate the light from the darkness, the truth from the falsehood, the straight from the crooked vṛṇīta vijānam. The right and left hand of Indra are his two powers of action in knowledge; for his two arms are called gabhasti, a word which means ordinarily a ray of the sun but also forearm, and they correspond to his two perceptive powers, his two bright horses, harī, which are described as sun-eyed, sūracakṣasā and as vision-powers of the Sun, sūryasya keṭū. Dakshina presides over the right-hand power, dakṣiṇā, and therefore we have the collocation dakṣiṇe dakṣiṇāvān. It is this discernment which presides over the right action of the sacrifice and the right distribution of the offerings and it is this which enables Indra to hold the herded wealth of the Panis securely, in his right hand. And finally we are told what is this secret thing that was placed for us in the cave and is concealed in the waters of being, the waters in which the Thought of the Fathers has to be set, apsu dhiyaṁ dadhiṣe. It is the hidden Sun, the secret Light of our divine existence which has to be found and taken out by knowledge from the darkness in which it is concealed. (The Secret of the Veda, pp.194-5, CWSA v. 15)

We have in *Savitri* these marvellous lines that are comparable in their splendour only to the inner Dawn that our forefathers once witnessed in their inner consciousness:

*The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
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 unreached transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
A message from the unknown immortal 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.
Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed (Ibid, pp.3-4)*

The struggle between Darkness and Light, between Evil and Good or as the Vedic sages saw it between the gods and the titans is not the whole truth. It is a passage, an important practical distinction that we can ill afford at our present stage of evolution. Yet, in the end the two seeming opposites stand reconciled in the Vision of the All-Wonderful. The Player of the flute, the divine Beloved of the gopis is also the slayer of Kansa and reveals Himself as Time, the Destroyer on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The great and sole Omnipotent Goddess hiding her heart of Beauty and Love appears before our ego-self as Kali, the fierce and the terrible; Rudra and Shiva are a single god! The Vedic epiphany describes the wonderful vision of the One who stands behind all things, the eternal seed and core of transient things, not only 'things' and objects extended in Space but also 'things' and events that unfold in Time. *Savitri* carries this

vision of the One also to its ultimate grand culmination. There are passages of exquisite beauty and power and grace that bring out this vision of the One to our mist laden eyes ever struggling to make sense of the evil that one sees within and around oneself. Our eyes see only division while Truth is supreme unity and sublime Harmony. God and the World, Soul and Nature, Spirit and Matter are not two eternally separate but are two poles of a single unity:

*One who has shaped this world is ever its lord:
Our errors are his steps upon the way;
He works through the fierce vicissitudes of our lives,
He works through the hard breath of battle and toil,
He works through our sins and sorrows and our tears,
His knowledge overrules our nescience;
Whatever the appearance we must bear,
Whatever our strong ills and present fate,
When nothing we can see but drift and bale,
A mighty Guidance leads us still through all.
After we have served this great divided world
God's bliss and oneness are our inborn right (Ibid, p.59)*

*.....
All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay. (Ibid, p.60)*

*.....
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. (Ibid, p.67)*

In fact the whole canto on *The Secret Knowledge* is a grand synthesis, a tremendous divine reconciliation of the paradox called this world, a reconciliation not only in Knowledge, as attempted by the Vedic mystics and the great seer of the Isha Upanishad in their profound and bold utterance *Isavasyam idam sarvam, yat kincha jagatyam jagat*, but a reconciliation also in Power (as the Tantric yogis attempted). This double reconciliation of the static and dynamic sides of the One Reality is carried to its ultimate possibility wherein the seemingly two, God and the World, Oneness and the Multiplicity of creation, Soul and Nature, Brahman and Maya are reconciled in a grand and

happy marriage of Heaven and Earth:

*He is the Maker and the world he made,
He is the vision and he is the Seer;
He is himself the actor and the act,
He is himself the knower and the known,
He is himself the dreamer and the dream.
There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;
They are married secretly in our thought and life. (Ibid, p.61)*

One is reminded of the great and mysterious message of the Isha Upanishad again:

6. But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

7. He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

8. It is He that has gone abroad—That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.

9. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

10. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

11. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

12. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone.

13. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

14. He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality. (Isha Upanishad, SABCL, vol. 12, pp.65-6)

Savitri brings this greatest of all 'formulas', if formula there can ever be, of Truth, the highest wisdom ever uttered by the human speech even more close to us, not only to the mind but also to the heart and our very body's self::

*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.*

(Ibid, pp.66-7)

Finally we find in the lore of the Vedic seers an effort to grow into the Godhead through the law of sacrifice and mutual giving — the seers offering sacrifice to the gods thereby increasing them and the gods pouring down all their riches in turn upon man to fashion in him a godlike strength and light and joy. Savitri takes this truth too to its greatest and highest possibility. Not just to grow in the likeness of the gods but to grow into the very likeness of the Divine, the Knowledge and Power and Freedom and Glory and Perfection of the Divine, the God who dwells secret within our heart. This is the wisdom that is secret to our mind and the ignorant groping of the senses and yet it is this Transcendent Wisdom that works secretly within all things, within earth and much more so within man, who is meant to serve as a bridge between heaven and earth.

'Pent up behind this ignorance is a secret knowledge and a great light of truth, prisoned by this evil is an infinite content of good; in this limiting death is the seed of a boundless immortality.'

(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA, vol. 15, pp.190-1)

*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.

(Ibid, p.67)

But there is yet something greater, the greatest of all mysteries known to man. It surpasses even the Vedic lore. The Gita speaks of it as a great mystery, *etadbrahmayauttamam*, the mystery of Divine birth in Time, the assumption of a transient mortal body by the Eternal Divine, the Immortal descending amidst our mortality, consenting to pass through the narrow gates of death so as to redeem this sphere of sorrow by the Grace Divine. *Savitri*, above all things, is the story of the Avatara, the Divine becoming human in order to redeem humanity, 'paying here God's debt to earth and man' as Savitri puts it. It is not just about the human ascension and the path of sacrifice that man must undertake to grow into a diviner mould. It is much more about the divine descent, the sacrifice that the Divine undertakes to uplift man and earth. It is the other side of story, as seen by the eyes of God and revealed to our souls by none else but 'the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world'. This is the supreme value of *Savitri*, one that no poetry can surpass, since it has flowed from the authentic experience of none other than the Avatara Himself. It is the story of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's life, of that dimension that the human eyes cannot see. The Mother put it so succinctly:

Savitri, the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision
 (About Savitri)

- 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: CWM, vol.13, p.24)

Thus we see that it is also the story of Earth; the story also of man, the inner story of

the Divine unfolding upon earth and in man. It is the story, the path, of all who have and continue to inwardly struggle and battle for the victory of Divine life upon earth. Many a mystic and saint and yogi and sage will find some of their experiences documented here. In fact, in the very third Canto of the first book one finds a detailed description of almost all the major spiritual experiences that mystic literature has recorded over the millennium. But that is only the starting point of a great and tremendous journey, one that has never been undertaken so far and yet it is the same journey that runs as an undercurrent of every life since creation began, — the journey of the Divine in matter and His progressive revelation through evolution, albeit in terms of matter, assuming many a name and form till at last it reaches that giant point where the Glory hidden in our own depths begins to shine out through the cloak of mortal man and the eyes of God look out through human eyes. But this too only serves for a yet greater start, a leap from one peak of realisation to another till that Reality is found in 'whom the world and self grow true and one'.

This too must now be overpassed and left,
 As all must be until the Highest is gained
 In whom the world and self grow true and one:
 Till That is reached our journeying cannot cease.

(Ibid, p.238)

We see, therefore, that not only in its conception and sense but also in its method and source, *Savitri* is a divine poem. Its power and purpose is not only to acquaint us with diviner things, of the ways divine, but to uplift us through its touch divine into higher and higher states of consciousness. That is why each time we read and re-read it, another and greater meaning begins to dawn upon us. We move as if from dawn to greater dawn. In the ever enlarging circle of our vision, as we climb from hill to hill of an inner sight, we behold the beauty and the wonder of this creation, the deep utility of tears and the apparent justification of death and struggle and error and pain in a world that has issued forth out of the womb, not of some original darkness, but, as Savitri puts it:

All here is a mystery of contraries:
 Darkness a magic of self-hidden Light,
 Suffering some secret rapture's tragic mask
 And death an instrument of perpetual life.
 Although Death walks beside us on Life's road,
 A dim bystander at the body's start
 And a last judgment on man's futile works,
 Other is the riddle of its ambiguous face:
 Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride
 The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
 A grey defeat pregnant with victory,
 A whip to lash us towards our deathless state.
 The unconscious world is the spirit's self-made room,
 Eternal Night shadow of eternal Day.
 Night is not our beginning nor our end;

*She is the dark Mother in whose womb we have hid
Safe from too swift a waking to world-pain.
We came to her from a supernal Light,*

By Light we live and to the Light we go. (Ibid, pp.600-1)

What greater song of hope can there be than this? In a world torn by inner and outer conflicts, collapsing under its own heavy load, there comes in the persona of Savitri the Grace that saves, the Word of Light made flesh, the power of the All-Creative Spirit, the sole Omniscient, Omnipotent Goddess 'of whom the world is an inscrutable mask'. Leaning across the wideness of inner Space which is the home of her birth, she travels through the silence of Space entering the heavy and pain-laden atmosphere of earthly life. The sole purpose of this divine descent is to awaken matter to its spiritual Reality and earth to its supreme goal. Towards this end there is another consenting player — Man, in and through whom this divine destiny of earth has to be realised. Man is the meeting point of the two poles that seem like opposites to our limited and dividing mental vision. On one side, we have the stamp of the Inconscience in every cell of our being. It takes many a hue and colour; the seal of heredity, the defeatist murmur that ever rises to slay the faith, the whispers of the dark denizens that often steal into the chambers of our mind and speech and corrupt all that is good and beautiful and true by their foul breath. Many are the masks of Death, many its entry points into our lives. It can even assume divine-looking masks that allure us to an other-worldly realisation of the Perfection we seek here upon earth as embodied beings. But this is only one side of the story of man's life, not the totality of his being. However much Science and Philosophy may deny or Reason fail to grasp, there dwells within us the One who can create and destroy universes with a single breath. He is the evolutionary Godhead whose secret pressure keeps us moving forward despite ourselves. He is the hope of earthly life, the leader of the human march. It is He who brings down to earth by the power of his one-pointed aspiration and tapasya Savitri, the Light Supreme. He is Aswapati, the human father of Savitri but also the sole seer and the Lord of Yoga who brings *down to earth's dumb need her radiant power*. Man, the meeting point of the two in whom the play of contraries has taken a rather acute turn is Satyavan, the one who holds the truth somewhere in his secret depths. But now he has lost it, outcast from the glory that must be his, he struggles and stumbles upon this earth with his uncertain mind. The mind of man, blind and error prone is not all his earthly climb can reach. There are shining summits of Glory and Wisdom to which Mind can climb and from which Mind itself is born. But entering an earthly embodiment, trapped by the senses that ever condition and limit and blind him rather than reveal the truth, he is ever striving to reclaim and rediscover the glory it has lost. This is Dyumatsena, the human father of Satyavan, the illumined mind that has here fallen blind. It must recover its lost sight and regain its celestial kingdom.

These are the four main characters of the drama of earthly life as it unfolds itself towards the future cycle. The Divine poet reveals this inner truth and symbolism of Savitri to us:

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. (Ibid, Author's Note)

We are clearly told that this is not merely an allegory or a symbol but concrete and immense realities taking on a human shape. Their earthly drama, for which they came down in a particular epoch assuming a certain name and form, does not cease with a single victory. This first victory of which Savitri bears the witness and is a record, paves the way for other similar victories, if we too can surrender our soul and self into the hands and being of Savitri and become the happy recipients of Her Grace. This is the mystic marriage that our being waits for, the marriage of our earthbound soul with the heavenly Grace of which the All-seeing Sun and the gods are the sole witness and the earth itself the ground of the sacred ceremony. This eternal marriage of the Lord and His spouse is to be enacted in many a body and life. But for that our nature must be lifted to its utmost possibility where the eternal Lord and His Shakti are one. Only the power of Aswapati, the Supreme Lord, and the Grace of Savitri, the Divine Mother, can achieve this hoped for miracle in man. When this happens there truly begins a New Age and a new cycle of earthly life. Then is the being of Satyavan fulfilled, and then a new chapter of destiny opens for earth and one master-act changes Fate. This master-act of which Savitri and Satyavan are the living example is the act of luminous faith and surrender, even as Satyavan who recognising in the persona of Savitri the illuminating Grace of an All-transfiguring Divine Love surrenders:

*But thou hast come and all will surely change:
I shall feel the World-Mother in thy golden limbs
And hear her wisdom in thy sacred voice.
The child of the Void shall be reborn in God,
My Matter shall evade the Inconscient's trance.
My body like my spirit shall be free.
It shall escape from Death and Ignorance.*

.....
Even a brief nearness has reshaped my life.

*For now I know that all I lived and was
Moved towards this moment of my heart's rebirth;
I look back on the meaning of myself,
A soul made ready on earth's soil for thee.* (Ibid, p.406)

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

This great act of surrender to the Divine Grace with an absolute trust is only for the great in spirit. This is the supreme wisdom, the wisdom that saves us from many a complication and takes us through the shortest and surest route towards this predestined great end. This is the supreme word of *Savitri*, the greatest and the wisest advice ever given to man, the advice of surrendering all he is and does to the Divine Master within or the Avatara without, the two who are a single being; one unseen and hidden within our depths, the other standing before our eyes as the Leader of the human march through the great battle of life. When we thus surrender ourselves to the Spirit of *Savitri* that is as living and real today as it was yesterday, when we approach her in the spirit of humility as a child would seek his mother not so much through the pride of the intellect but through the door of love in our heart, then *Savitri* herself begins to reveal her mysteries. It is not a book that we read but try to enter into the atmosphere of a living and conscious Deity, the Being of the Divine Mother of whom *Savitri* is an embodiment, then She Herself takes us by the hand through every passage and, carrying us in Her arms helps us understand what we see and hear and sense and feel till the true Knowledge awakens and our soul and mind and body are thrilled by the rapture of the epiphany. She becomes then the Teacher and awakens in us the inner listener, the hearer of the Divine Word who is seated within our soul. Nothing is impossible or difficult for one who has thus opened and given himself to *Savitri*, the living embodiment of Light and Truth and Love Divine.

"Lay all on her; she is the cause of all" (Ibid, p.723)

The Mother reveals:

The direct road is through the heart.....Try and you will see how very different it is, how new; read with this attitude, with this something at the back of your consciousness, as though it were an offering to Sri Aurobindo. You know how it is charged, fully charged with consciousness, — as if Savitri were a being, a real guide. I tell you, whoever wanting to practise Yoga, if he tries sincerely and feels the necessity for it, 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. For him Savitri alone will be the guide; for, all that he needs he will find in Savitri.

(Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes: Conversation with the Mother by Mona Sarkar)

Creation is a divine act. It is as much a spiritual fact as it is a material one. It is moving towards a great divine event, that is the perfect play of the Divine in material terms, His full emergence in earthly life. This spiritual destiny is bequeathed to earth and its

emergence is as certain as tomorrow's sun. Yet this journey is not without its peril and pain. Though inheritors of a divine destiny our life starts from apparent darkness and the clouds of ignorance pursue us through the days and nights. Days collapse into nights and night becomes a passage for a returning Light. This is the opening scene of *Savitri*, this dark beginning of all things; the dark mother or the dark womb of things, *aprakritim salilam*, the ocean of Inconscience. Hidden in the womb of darkness is the Light Supreme. It must emerge with the passage of Time. This emergence in terms of Time and Space is necessarily sequential and creates the law of Cause and effect. In fact there is no such inexorable law but simply patterns thrown out in space and upheld by Time. Repeating themselves, they appear as laws. But all law is simply a habit and of all habits the most obstinate is Death, this unfortunate tendency for all things to collapse into the dark and unconscious base. Yet because of the secret presence of Light within the core of this darkness, nothing can remain for long in this well of unconsciousness. Sooner or later it must be propelled upwards again; it must resume its Godward toil towards Light, Freedom, Bliss, Immortality. This is the journey of life...out of darkness we still grow towards Light. This emergence, this first stir of growth towards Light is the experience of Dawn to a deeper sense within us but the surface consciousness that is asleep and habitually in love with its obscurity feels it as a struggle and a pain. The cosmic riddle of Light sleeping within the womb of darkness, becomes in the evolutionary journey a struggle and a tussle within the individual elements of creation. In man, this struggle becomes most acute because we stand at a threshold where we become, partly at least, conscious of our unconsciousness and there also develops a conscious longing and an aspiration for Light documented in the earliest dawns of humanity. This is the Vedic Dawn, the goddess who comes bringing illumination and call to a greater adventure. Her coming opens doors to wide expanses, luminous riches and powers that were hidden within us but held back from our sleeping state. What is experienced, seen and felt in the physical world is also the story of our inner life and our spiritual growth. All this is beautifully summarised in the opening Canto, *The Symbol Dawn*:

*Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.
A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,
A sense was born within the darkness' depths,
A memory quivered in the heart of Time
As if a soul long dead were moved to live:
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more.
All can be done if the god-touch is there.*

.....

*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.*

.....
*A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.*

(Ibid, pp.2-4)

Paradoxically the Master Poet also describes here the Dawn that breaks upon the day when Satyavan must die. It is a bit paradoxical for Dawn the giver of hope and illumination brings on this day of the fateful stroke an 'adverse' destiny. So it seems to man's ignorant consciousness. But then how else will man evolve and new possibilities emerge but through the challenge of death faced by the immortal soul within us? Savitri, the Incarnate Divine is the embodiment of this hope and strength that Dawn brings. She must face and conquer the disillusioned heart of nature that awakes slowly to the call and the effort divine. She must face the grim resistance of the abyss that whispers in the human heart and wrestle with fate that dodges all effort towards a greater climb. This is the mystery of mysteries, the Divine become human and thus taking upon Himself or Herself the burden of the ignorant death-bound human race:

*Too unlike the world she came to help and save,
Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast
And from its dim chasms welled a dire return,
A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall.
To live with grief, to confront death on her road,—
The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.....
As one who watching over men left blind
Takes up the load of an unwitting race,
Harbouring a foe whom with her heart she must feed,
Unknown her act, unknown the doom she faced,
Unhelped she must foresee and dread and dare.*

(Ibid, pp.7-8)

.....
*All the fierce question of man's hours relived.
The sacrifice of suffering and desire
Earth offers to the immortal Ecstasy
Began again beneath the eternal Hand.*

(Ibid, p.10)

The Second Canto deals with the real issue of earthly and human life, its riddle and the resolution. The problem of life is not about survival and the procurement of food, shelter and clothing. Nature has already arranged for that. It has created means and mechanisms to ensure this bare minimum. The problem of man is that he is a dual consciousness— an immortal soul within and a mortal, limited nature without. The inmost Soul seeks for freedom and expansion, for Truth and Love and Joy but the outer nature is limited and bound within a narrow range of possibilities. The cosmic forces do

not allow man's nature to go beyond a certain boundary. This boundary that prevents us from knowing and relating with all that is outside this small frame is what is called Ignorance. It is Ignorance that ties us to the stake of suffering and pain and opens the doors to doom. It keeps us bound to the circle of birth and death repeating the same drama through blind laws and mechanical habits. We know neither our past nor our future, we know not all that surrounds us and all that stirs within us, we know not the goal and direction of life. We live as blind men caged inside a box and the irony is that we do not even know it and even perhaps are content in this state. Such is the grip of Ignorance upon our life! This Ignorance pursues us wherever we go, in homes and marts, in isolated forests and solitary confinement, in the ascetic's cave and the mountain tops. It is the dress we wear and even when we discard this dark and unseemly robe for a while after Death, we come back and wear the same or a similar dress again. The story of our life does not end with the death of the body. We return to complete the curve of energies we have let out in one life-time. All this must change and human life must be freed from the clutch of Ignorance and Death. The laws of earthly life itself must change and we must be able to live as a conscious being in a conscious world. Savitri, the incarnate Grace and Love has come to change the law. Therefore She must pass through the doors of Doom through which earth's children pass. She must pay the tax of the Night in full and for all of us who seek and aspire for a higher life. She must balance and settle the dark account for good so that man is rid of this karmic burden and can make the needed ascent out of this mortal state into the state of immortality. This is Her great mission and divine Work. She comes to open the door to man struggling in the darkness of Ignorance, caught in the forest of life, his kingdom of glory lost and his celestial vision forfeited. She comes to open the door denied and closed.

But who or what brings down this Glory to earth? One is here who dwells within this mortal frame and yet is the All-knowing Guide. He is hidden behind His works, moving things and forces from behind towards the great goal, the leader of the evolutionary march. Yet sometimes he stands in front as the visible Godhead, the Avatara, the Divine descent in humanity, the Supreme wearing the human mask, embodying earth's anguish and pain, carrying in his lonely heart the seeking and the longing that burns unseen within the human depths. He embodies this seeking and calls down the Grace and Love that alone can save. This is Aswapati, the seer and the tapaswi whose force of concentrated energy prepares the earth for the descent of Grace. He is the human father of Savitri; even as he is the divine seer who does the tapasya for man for the birth of the Incarnate Grace amidst our blind and ignorant humanity. He prepares humanity to receive the mould of the future type. From the third Canto onwards we have a detailed description of Aswapati's Yoga that is done to open the way for this descent. He is the forerunner who opens the path, the accomplishment is done by the embodied Grace. The first three Cantos of his journey are reflected in Book One, canto three, four and five. They reveal the path that Aswapati undertakes to ascend out of the human field of Ignorance and journey through higher and luminous worlds that will be one day man's natural station. The experiences and findings of this most fascinating inner journey are described in great detail in these three Cantos. This is followed up in Book Two (*The*

Traveller of the Worlds) by an even greater detailed description of the different worlds, their energies and forces and beings as well as their role and influence upon earthly life and men. The whole cosmic field is seen and reclaimed for the work, the entire universe mapped out. Nothing is hid from his unsealed eye of Truth. One day man too shall have these experiences as naturally as he breathes and thinks today since the path for him has been cleared by the incarnate Divine.

Book One, Canto three, four and five are Aswapati's individual Yoga. In this part, he is shown attaining freedom from Ignorance and uniting with the Divine, in both the static and the dynamic aspects of Iswara and Shakti. In Book Two, he reveals the next step, the stage of Universalisation. He discovers and unites with the Cosmic Divine in all His aspects and powers and on all the universal planes of the manifested worlds. Each of the triple lower worlds of mind, life and matter is described in their essence and their effects, their high peaks and low points; their glorious and their fallen state mapped out. Of special importance to us is the way these planes and their forces have influenced earthly life that has so far evolved under the stress of these lower planes. Exploring these planes in their fullness, Aswapati's yoga takes him further to the Self of the Mind where thought becomes still and the word is mute. Great Yogis have stopped here since it frees them from earthly grief and care. But Aswapati is not looking for any selfish personal gain, even it be the silence of Nirvana. He is on another trail, the search for the perfect solution to the cosmic riddle. Not a mutilated and half victory but the complete triumph, the fullest Perfection that re-unites the body and soul and weds the earthly life to heaven's altitudes. Therefore his journey does not end there. Passing beyond the flaming stairs of the higher worlds and the silence of the Self, he ascends further to the secret Source of all. He dives deep into the heart of the universe and discovers the World-soul that stands behind this ambiguous net of world-forces that we experience as so many cosmic systems or worlds. But not here can the cosmic puzzle be solved. Its is the core of the manifested universe but there is beyond it the Unmanifest, and beyond the Manifest and the Unmanifest is the secret Womb of Light, the Undivided Consciousness, Aditi, from whom all has emerged. He must find and knock at those gates, the border where the Form and the Formless meet. He must dare to enter the empire of the Sun even as he has faced and dared the dark chill Night of Hell.

It is here that Aswapati stands compelled to a tremendous choice. He can, if he so wills, now plunge from this highest point into the utter infinity of God, the Absolute who is hid behind the worlds of relativities. Thus have the greatest of Yogis in the past used these gates of the Sun to pass to the Beyond never to return. None can come back having once entered through these golden gates. Aswapati too can plunge and vanish into this greatest of all Mysteries like so many others, undoing the entire thread of Cause and effect, forgetting earth, forgetting Time and Space, forgetting Man. However as he looks down from that highest line he sees the struggling universe ascending through the long zigzag serpentine path created through the complex play of forces. On the other hand looking into the heart of that Mystery he glimpses the Beauty and Light that await their hour to manifest below. They are there in the heart of the Unmanifest, ever existing in an eternal dance. But here there is still too much of the play of division

and darkness. Refusing the temptation to merge into the ineffable Bliss of Infinity, he invokes the Grace Supreme to come down and heal the earth's pain. The Great Mystery persuades him to leave this endeavour for a later time. It tests him with the offer of the highest status that any soul can seek for its individual self. But by now, Aswapati has grown one with every heart. As a deputy of the aspiring world, he asks Her Bliss, Her Freedom, Her Light, Her Love for earth and men. This is the theme of Book Three. It is the state where Aswapati transcends the universe and is face to face with the Transcendent Eternal. But instead of merging and losing himself into That, he rather aspires to bring down That Glory and Greatness into the earth play. The boon is granted and Aswapati returns with the great divine assurance.

Time rolls by and the Supreme Mystery is born upon earth as Savitri, his human daughter who is nevertheless born of the Fire of Aswapati's tapasya and yearning. She grows up initially a stranger to earth's ways but soon gathers all things into her deep and divine embrace. After all she is none else but embodied Love and Light and the supreme Grace that has consented to wear a human form. The birth and growth of Savitri is the theme of the Fourth Book, till she reaches that point in her life when she must consciously take charge of her Avataric mission and go out and summon the soul of Satyavan caught up into the net of Death and Ignorance like us mortals. The soul consenting to the divine work is as important. It is the other self of the Divine Beloved who as much, and even more, seeks the aspiring soul as we seek the Divine. If Her work can be done successfully on one symbol type, it can then be replicated and extended in the whole of human race. Who else but the Divine Himself can play this difficult part as well? The Lord himself becomes Satyavan to lead the way and pass through Death.

Books Five and Six are Savitri's entry into the human law and the human way of life. She must completely identify with all that is human, experience that grief that man experiences following the stroke of adverse Fate. Love and Fate are the two powers that together weave the life of man. In a deepest sense they are the double term of that yoga which goes on subconsciously in earth where Love aspires to unite all things while Fate works to divide and separate. Outwardly we rejoice and suffer destiny, inwardly we grow and evolve through both towards a greater life. Love gives us sweetness and strength, Fate gives us wisdom and force. They are the two sides of the One Godhead. Book Five brings together the two, Satyavan, the aspiring soul caught up in the grip of Ignorance. Book Six reveals the secret truth of Destiny and Fate that follow each such attempt to redeem life and fill it with the sweetness and fragrance of Divine Love.

Book Seven begins with the human struggle that Savitri experiences, the sign of the Incarnate's perfect identification with our humanity. She suffers and struggles like an ordinary mortal and even wonders at the justification of fighting against fate. Why not simply accept the law and endure the stroke silently. But that is only for a brief moment. Soon her deeper Self wakes up to the divine mission for which she has come down, to show the path to man that would eventually deliver him from all forms of Ignorance including Death. She is the pathfinder who must open the sunlit way for man to follow in her divine steps. After all that is why She had assumed the human form, to share the burden and to show the way. But where to find such a Strength that can conquer

Death? The Strength is within us, in the depths of our being. The true reality of our being is not the ego-self that is but a mask put out for a certain purpose but the inner flame of Truth and Love, the psychic being that evolves through life and death and rebirth. This she must uncover. Savitri takes this high recourse within and finds her secret soul. Once the soul is found her nature blossoms into a figure of divinity; her being becomes a temple and a camp of God pitched in human time. Having found the secret way, now lost to man, she universalises her consciousness and being so that whatever she has discovered in her own depths can be given to man directly through her touch. Thus armed she waits for the great work, the fatal stroke of Destiny, the victory in the tournament with death.

Book Eight describes the death of Satyavan in the forest and thus links us back to the story. Book One, Canto One had started with the day when Satyavan must die. Now we are brought back to that fateful day after covering the background and the foreground of the story. Satyavan must pass through Death for such is the term and the rule of the game for the conquest. There is a reason why Death exists, why it has come into being, a function that it serves, a purpose that Death fulfils in the grand scheme of things. Step by step Savitri must follow in his trail and step by step see and answer the objections of Death to the sought after change in this cosmic law that governs all creatures and things upon earth. She must transform Death into the being of Love and Light that it once was. This can only be done by Savitri entering into his dark infinity, the shadow from where he emerges into the play and filling these unconscious Spaces with Her Consciousness. She must enter there and recover the Light that is hidden behind his inscrutable mask. She must lay bare with her flame of Light all its masks such as doubt, denial, distrust, fear scepticism and all the rest. Books Nine and Ten describe this conflict with the being of Death. It is the unseen Work, the Yoga that Savitri undertakes to clear the path of Immortality definitively for earth and men. She meets Death on his own ground and beats him at his own game. Eventually Death tries to match his power with her. What follows is an apocalyptic vision in which the Incarnate Goddess thrusts aside Her human veil and stands face to face with Death. Unable to bear that powerful gaze, Death tries to make a hasty retreat calling upon all his occult source of power, but nothing helps. Light enters the dark abyss and eats up the body of Death. Eventually he succumbs to Her mastering power and gives up the hope to keep man forever in his iron grip, under his inflexible rigid law that would never allow the soul and nature, spirit and body, to be free and become one again.

Death dies and in place of that dreadful form there emerges from behind the mask of terror and pain, the beautiful Godhead who had carefully and deliberately hid Himself in this mask so as to goad and prepare earth and mankind for this high consummation, the victorious emergence of man's innate and now hidden divinity through the coats of an ignorant nature. Now Savitri has accomplished this fact and shown that the hour has come for this great possibility to be realised upon earth. But the great and beautiful Godhead, Hiranyagarbha, the golden womb of things, the bright guardian of the law and the way, once again tries to charm and allure Savitri to ascend to the highest status of being along with her lover Satyavan. He concedes her the boon of immortality she

asks for Satyavan but only as an extra-terrestrial realisation. He bids her to ascend with Satyavan to some high Heaven of Immortality and Bliss and live there for all eternity. But that would leave the old and dusty laws of earth unchanged. A solitary victory cannot fulfil her mission. Not for herself but for man has she come down. The enchantment of the highest Heavens does not ensnare her for those were once her natural home and she had no need to come down upon earth and accept the burden and the ordeal of man if it was just to return to where she came from. Refusing this offer, the divine lure of an individual realisation, Savitri remains steadfast in her high and divine resolve. Nothing can turn her away from her divine mission, the great work that her soul has chosen along with Satyavan, the soul of man to establish here upon earth the Life Divine. The great and beautiful Godhead is pleased and accepts to grant her wish but for that she must ascend to the utter oneness of the Infinite's embrace. This is the home of the mysterious fiat of the Transcendent Will. The laws that govern us have their sanction there and it is there that they can be changed. The moment arrives when the Incarnate Godhead is face to face with her own eternal Self. The doors of destiny are thrown open before Savitri. Hearing the sob of things in earthly life, She chooses carefully and wisely the eternal gifts for the magnificent soul of man upon earth. Book Eleven ends with the grant of these boons that Savitri has won for earth and man.

Now comes the close of the great and grand epic of the divine struggle and hope that takes place within the human breast. Earth is the field of this struggle and man's soul the main protagonist. But the central figure, the transmuting alchemist power is the Power and Grace and Love of the Divine Mother incarnate in the being and persona of Savitri. Satyavan has merely consented to her working, he has surrendered himself in the safe hands of the Incarnate Mother, the power that alone can change all things. Meanwhile as a result of the boons she has secured, not only does Satyavan return to earth from the domain of Death but his father Dyumatsena recovers his sight and his kingdom. In symbolic terms it means that not only does the human soul escape the snare of Death but also human nature discovers the greater powers of celestial Sight now lost to the mind and to that is added all the regal and royal riches that pour into nature and fulfil it with powers that have not yet manifested upon earth. The seers who witness this strange miracle is filled with wonder. Satyavan reveals the secret of this miraculous change even as the heart of the seers who have gathered around her is filled with gratitude:

*If this is she of whom the world has heard,
Wonder no more at any happy change.
Each easy miracle of felicity
Of her transmuting heart the alchemy is.* (Ibid, p.723)

But Savitri reveals her own secret in such marvellous simple words:

*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.* (Ibid, p.724)

Rejoicing they return homeward as night falls on the beautiful landscape where the great drama took place. But Savitri's heart is already moving ahead of Time towards a yet greater Dawn she seeks to bring down for earth and man.

In its deepest essence *Savitri* is the story of Love labouring in the heart of creation to bring together the two seeming opposites— Earth and Heaven. It is therefore also our own story, the story of our soul, the story of our inner life no less than the story of our outer life as well, in its essence of course, but as seen by the Divine eyes. Repeatedly we find in *Savitri* our ignorant human view of things contrasted by the deeper and greater divine vision. This is another beauty of the divine poem that even in its highest flight it never loses hold of the earth. It is as if a benevolent Love is ever leaning down from its sublime heights to take account of the pain and struggle that the children of earth experience. We are a double birth— our bodies are earth-born while our soul is heaven-born. That is the reason of our high unease. In the reconciliation of these two tendencies in us— earthward and heavenward we have the key to the perfect harmony that we ever seek but never find. Either we end up abandoning the earth like the solitary ascetic in pursuit of Nirvana or the heavenly riches or else, like the average man, renounce all hope of a higher Truth and a higher life and stay within the limits fixed for us by Nature. But Savitri comes as a bridge to bring these two together. She is the *golden bridge*, the bridge of Light that links the two— on the one side man's ignorant, painful world, and on the other side the griefless worlds of a shadowless Light and unending Bliss.

It is the message of hope— the hope that comes through this wisdom that this world is in its core and essence divine. There is hidden within its anomalous appearances a Sun of Secret Knowledge and Truth; there labours in its silent depths an untiring Love; there lies behind its back an infinite Bliss and an infinite Power. All limitation is a temporary phenomenon, our ignorance is a passing phase, pain merely a stage in our further evolution. Night is simply an appearance; Death is an appearance, a temporary self-concealment of life needed for its grand and mighty purpose. We are inheritors of a divine destiny and the Divine will see to it that this high destiny is restored to us. Truth, Bliss, Immortality are our inborn right. From our side we have to learn to trust the Wisdom that has gone forth into the world, we have to make the courageous act of a supreme surrender, we have to take a leap of faith. Hence the supreme alchemist Herself takes up the task of transforming us and remoulds our human nature into the divine nature and changes this earthly life into the life divine:

*At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.
Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,*

*The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down.
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.
All here shall be one day her sweetness' home,
All contraries prepare her harmony;
Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes;
In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,
Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain.
Our self shall be one self with all through her. (Ibid, p.314)*

*.....
But vain are human power and human love
To break earth's seal of ignorance and death;
His nature's might seemed now an infant's grasp;
Heaven is too high for outstretched hands to seize.
This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength.
A Power that lives upon the heights must act,
Bring into life's closed room the Immortal's air
And fill the finite with the Infinite.
All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.
Now other claims had hushed in him their cry:
Only he longed to draw her presence and power
Into his heart and mind and breathing frame;
Only he yearned to call for ever down
Her healing touch of love and truth and joy
Into the darkness of the suffering world.
His soul was freed and given to her alone. (Ibid, pp.315-6)*

Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

7. Meeting Satyavan

How much freedom can a creative writer take with an existing material? It is very obvious that there are no restrictions as long as the author does not tamper with the basic characterisation of the classical heroes and heroines. Sometimes this is done out of extraneous considerations like those who subscribe to the Aryan invasion theory and portray Rama as an Aryan invader who destroyed Dravidian supremacy. For the rest, the writers or singers retelling myths and legends have not deviated outrageously when presenting classical heroes and heroines.

This is specifically true of the legend of Satyavan and Savitri. It has been retold innumerable times. Some descriptions get added or left out when it is retold in Matsya Purana or Shiva Purana; local colour is given when it is retold by folk singers; even the English versions have not diverged from the Mahabharata Upakhyaana. Whoever is the author, Savitri remains the same perfect Savitri; and so is Satyavan; and so are Aswapati, Rishi Narad and Dyumathsena.

In the Mahabharata upakhyaana, we first hear of Satyavan when Savitri returns from her travels. Asked by King Aswapati whether she had found her life's companion, she says that she had met the blind king Dyumathsena:

"Though fixed in wisdom he was, exploiting this opportunity, finding him with his sight gone, and his son still too young; a past enemy of his, a king of the neighbouring land, attacked him and seized his kingdom.

Then he, accompanied by his wife with the child yet at such a tender age, retired to a forest; in that deep and wild forest he began to do austere tapasya by observing great and difficult vows.

*His son, though born in the city, was brought up in that penance-grove; in him, whose name is Satyavan, I saw an agreeably proper husband for me and I have chosen him so in my mind."*¹

Our first encounter with Satyavan is thus through Savitri's report. There is nothing much said about him either. In any case, nothing much to enthuse the royal parents of

Savitri. An exiled king's son. Having grown up in forest hermitages he may not possess martial heroism to reconquer his parent's country. Yet the crucial word is "*anurupa*"; she has found him equal to her in all respects. As we already know, Savitri is a superior girl and Vyasa has several adjectives to describe her. He says: *sumadhyaam prutusroneem pratimaam kaanchaneemiva*, with large hips and a slender waist graceful as she was, like a golden statue. Hence one equal to her feminine perfection must have been handsome, heroic and wise. We accept her report and then it is time to proceed to Rishi Narad's description of Satyavan, agreeing with her assessment. He has been named Satyavan as he is always truthful: he is fond of horses, enjoys making clay horses and hence is known as Chitrasva. Aswapati surmises that Satyavan is affectionate towards his father (which is significant as the father is actually now poor, blind and totally helpless) but then being a kshatriya is he valorous (*soora*)?

In his reply Narad says that Satyavan is bright like Vivasvan the Sun-god, intelligent like Brihaspati, a valorous hero like Indra and patient like Mother Earth. Aswapati persists with his questions. Is Satyavan inclined to give charity? Is he handsome (*priyadaršana*)? Rishi Narad says:

"Like Rantideva, the son of Sankriti, he is munificent within the means at his disposal; and like Shibi, the son of Ushinar, he is a counsellor of truth and is established in Brahmanhood. Like Yayati he is exceedingly bounteous, and is beautiful like the moon; this son of Dyumatsena, strong in build, is as handsome, as if he were one of the Ashwinikumars.

He has subdued his passions, is soft-natured, is a youth of heroic deeds, is full of truth, and has regulated senses; he is friendly with everybody, without envy, and is of a reserved shy disposition, radiant as he is. Those who have advanced in tapasya, and grown rich in virtuous nobility, say briefly about him that he is always straightforward, and is steadfast, and is well-established in those qualities".

The only blemish (*dosha*) Narad can think of when selecting Satyavan as a groom for Savitri is that he has but twelve months more to live on earth. Even when faced with this dire prophecy, Savitri chooses Satyavan. Was such a bond fixed at the very first sight? Did they converse with each other when they met? Did the words of Satyavan show any special traits that made Savitri decide? We have no clue to any such happening in Vyasa's upakhyaana. But the fact of their having met in the forest unfurls Sri Aurobindo's imagination as other Indians have done when retelling the legends found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is quite possible he took the cue from the famous Tamil poet Kamban who retold the story of Valmiki's epic.

In Valmiki's poem, Sita and Rama do not meet prior to their wedding. Rama successfully strings Shiva's bow and receives King Janaka's offer of Sita as the *veera sulka*. Dasaratha is then invited to Mithila. The King of Ayodhya arrives with Bharata, Satrugna and his entourage. Then there are formal exchanges of messages and finally it is only in the wedding pavilion that Rama and Sita meet each other. King Janaka places her hand in Rama's and says:

"This is my daughter Sita who will follow dharma along with you. Take her hand

*in yours and accept her. May all things auspicious befall you both. She is pativrata, a noble person who will follow you like a shadow.”*²

However, the great Tamil poet Kamban (11th century) who retold the Ramayana inserted certain Tamil cultural concepts in his version. One of them was the Tamil ethos of “*kalavu ozhukkam*” (path of meeting in secret) which brings the boy and girl together before the decision is taken to marry in public. It sounds very natural in Kamban’s version when Rama and Sita meet for a moment as the two Ayodhyan princes follow Viswamitra to the sacrificial hall at Mithila. It is a fleeting glimpse Sita and Rama have but that turns out to be a glance of recognition. For the concept of Avatar in the Vaishnava tradition speaks of Lakshmi always incarnating along with Narayana. That moment is caught in unforgettable accents by Kamban:

*“So stood that maiden of rare loveliness
And eye caught eye and each the other ate;
As quiet they stood, minds into one were fused;
The two looked at her and Sita looked at him.
The pair of pointed lances called her glance
Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram;
The lotus eyes of him with sounding anklets
In turn pierced the bosom of the maid –
Bewitching like enchantress fair of yore.”*³

Then Rama goes his way. However, Kamban has cantos describing that night of *viraha* spent by the two thinking of each other. Though the Mahabharata assumes that Savitri and Satyavan must have met in the forest before she returned to Madra and spoke of her choice to Aswapati, it is only in Sri Aurobindo that we have a detailed canto on the meeting of the Madran princess and the Shalwa prince living in exile. The famous revolutionary V.V.S. Aiyar who was also a self-exile in Pondicherry in the early years of the last century, used to meet Sri Aurobindo often. Politics and India’s independence movement may have been the subject of their conversations. However, both were scholars and had deep interest in literature and hence must have exchanged a lot of information. It was thus that by the time Sri Aurobindo began writing for Arya, he had already a good knowledge of Tamil literature. He was to write in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* when dealing with the retellings of Valmiki’s epic in the regional languages after the tenth century:

*“Only two however of these later poets arrived at a vividly living recreation of the ancient story and succeeded in producing a supreme masterpiece, Kamban, the Tamil poet who makes of his subject a great original epic, and Tulsidas whose famed Hindi Ramayana combines with a singular mastery lyric intensity, romantic richness and the sublimity of the epic imagination and is at once a story of the divine Avatar and a long chant of religious devotion.”*⁴

The admiration for Kamban soon blossomed as ‘*The Book of Love*’ in Savitri. Three cantos of quiet beauty that also give us a full picture of what Vyasa has briefly suggested in his description of Satyavan by Rishi Narad. Vyasa had mentioned several

names like Ranti Deva and Emperor Shibi. Sri Aurobindo mentions none. But he takes us directly to meet Satyavan as Savitri’s quest nears its goal and the title is significant too: ‘*The Destined Meeting-place*’. With Savitri we are drawing close to an avatar, and the Two-in-One principle follows. Like Sita being born for Rama, here Satyavan is born for Savitri:

*But now the destined spot and hour were close;
Unknowing she had neared her nameless goal.
For though a dress of blind and devious chance
Is laid upon the work of all-wise Fate,
Our acts interpret an omniscient Force
That dwells in the compelling stuff of things,
And nothing happens in the cosmic play
But at its time and in its foreseen place.”*⁵ (Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.389)

All that Vyasa has left unsaid about the forest hermitage in which Satyavan lived are now brought to our view by the magic wand of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. This is spring time and wherever one turns it is *prakriti saundarya* bewitching our eyes and ears. We would be seeing the Rudra face of the Divine in the description of Death later on. Here it is Neelakanta Shiva (auspicious) aspect that forms a preview to Satyavan’s coming:

*At the end reclined a stern and giant tract
Of tangled depths and solemn questioning hills,
Peaks like a bare austerity of the soul,
Armoured, remote and desolately grand
Like the thought-screened infinities that lie
Behind the rapt smile of the Almighty’s dance.
A matted forest-head invaded heaven
As if a blue-throated ascetic peered
From the stone fastness of his mountain cell* (Ibid, pp.390-1)

The stage is thus set while Savitri’s chariot is still on the move, questing for the Lord. Sri Aurobindo has to portray a person who brings coolth to our eyes which are burning with the fever of birth, one who is verily like the Aswin gods.

*As if a weapon of the living Light,
Erect and lofty like a spear of God
His figure led the splendour of the morn.
Noble and clear as the broad peaceful heavens
A tablet of young wisdom was his brow;
Freedom’s imperious beauty curved his limbs,
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.”*⁶ (Ibid, p.393)

Caught in the crowded spaces of today’s life, watching day after day the terrorist’s face or the cunning politician’s or the wan expression on the face of the common man leading a life of silent desperation, we have forgotten how a truly handsome personal-

ity looks like. Gathering in hand the *nakli* pictures of heroes in films we think these are heroes, brandishing their cardboard swords and plastic shields. But here is the ideal man who is going to be chosen by Savitri at the very first glance, who is handsome as well as wise, “intelligent like Brihaspati” (says Vyasa):

*Heir to the centuries of the lonely wise,
A brother of the sunshine and the sky,
A wanderer communing with depth and marge.
A Veda-knower of the unwritten book
Perusing the mystic scripture of her forms,
He had caught her hierophant significances,
Her sphered immense imaginations learned,
Taught by sublimities of stream and wood
And voices of the sun and star and flame
And chant of the magic singers on the boughs
And the dumb teaching of four-footed things.* (Ibid, pp.393-4)

Sri Aurobindo also indicates that Satyavan had already ascended the plane of universal consciousness by his tapasya. He was by now “one with the single Spirit inhabiting all”. Savitri sees him but more as one merged in the beautiful nature scene. She who has descended from the infinite to wrestle with destiny on earth first sees him only from her surface mind and turns aside but then something prompts her to look back at Satyavan’s figure.

*But the god touched in time her conscious soul.
Her vision settled, caught and all was changed.* (Ibid, p.395)

The deeper ranges of her mind inform her that she had at last met her companion in this ascetic-looking young man in the forest. The incarnation who had taken birth to transform life on earth, was first transformed into an image of love. Born as the daughter of Aswapati, now she is reborn as Satyavan’s beloved:

*Thoughts indistinct and glad in moon-mist heavens,
Feelings as when a universe takes birth,
Swept through the turmoil of her bosom’s space
Invaded by a swarm of golden gods:
Arising to a hymn of wonder’s priests
Her soul flung wide its doors to this new sun.
An alchemy worked, the transmutation came;
The missioned face had wrought the Master’s spell.* (Ibid.)

Savitri’s chariot stands, as if arrested. That is the moment described by Kamban as Rama’s gaze meeting Sita’s in Mithila. Sri Aurobindo puts emphasis on this gazing at each other, conveying the pellucid message of true love. Like Kamban, Sri Aurobindo also says that their eyes meeting and not withdrawing at once was like “sight’s embrace”. She recognised the eyes as familiar companions in her past lives too. As for Satyavan,

*He met in her regard his future’s gaze,
A promise and a presence and a fire,*

*Saw an embodiment of aeonic dreams,
A mystery of the rapture for which all
Yearns in this world of brief mortality
Made in material shape his very own.* (Ibid, pp.396-7)

Having sealed their covenant by their glances, now Savitri and Satyavan relax and seek to learn about each other. They are no strangers, of course. But in *this* life on earth, they are meeting for the first time. How and where were they born, what kind of path have they taken so far? Whatever be the revelation, the contract is going to remain for all time, for their hearts have already merged. In this connexion one is necessarily reminded of a brief poem in the ancient Tamil classic, Kuruntokai (2nd century B.C.):

*Who was my mother and yours?
How were my father and yours related?
What paths have we taken in our journey?
Like water fallen on red earth
Our hearts in love have commingled.”⁷*

Thus the third canto of ‘*The Book of Love*’ has been written for us to meet Satyavan. If he was all that we find in Rishi Narad’s description in the Mahabharata, what was it like to watch him grow up into an ideal young man? Sri Aurobindo avoids this recounting as we have already watched Savitri growing up in Madra in the *Book of Birth and Quest*. It is so in Valmiki’s Ramayana. We have detailed descriptions of Rama’s growing up in the Bala Kanda. But of Sita’s childhood and girlhood we have no clue. To begin again at the beginnings showing us Satyavan being born in the Shalwa city (*pure jaatah*) and reaching manhood in the forest hermitage (*samvruddhascha tapovane*) would have been tiresome repetition. Sri Aurobindo solves the problem by inserting a pellucid autobiographical fragment in the canto, ‘*Satyavan and Savitri*’.

When they meet, finding her chariot had come to a halt, Satyavan speaks first to Savitri. Looking so much a “*sunlight moulded like a golden maid*”, who could she be? A goddess descended from the heavens? A mortal like him? He is not a stranger to gods and goddesses looking at him through the veil of nature, for he has grown up with nature as his teacher. He has seen the heavenly damsels bathe in mountain tarns and has surprised them peeping (as flowers) through the leaves. However, he would be happy to know that she is no goddess, no apsara. That she is a mortal like him and has a human heart that can love. If this were so, she should think of descending from her chariot and taking rest in this place. His father’s hermitage, rich with the green and gold of creepers and trees is close by and the cottage would accord her a royal welcome. It is obvious she is a princess, for her bearing is noble; she comes in a royal chariot. This, however, should not make her think the less of his house. “*Bare, simple is the sylvan hermit-life; / Yet is it clad with the jewelry of earth.*” (Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.402)

Unlike Satyavan’s emotional and anxious welcome, Savitri only says, “*I am Savitri, / Princess of Madra.*” At the same time, her heart has decided. All that remains is she should know about his antecedents to take her message to Aswapati. Having introduced herself so simply, she shoots a number of pointed questions at him:

*“Who art thou? What name
Musical on earth expresses thee to men?
What trunk of kings watered by fortunate streams
Has flowered at last upon one happy branch?
Why is thy dwelling in the pathless wood
Far from the deeds thy glorious youth demands,
Haunt of the anchorites and earth’s wilder broods,
Where only with thy witness self thou roamst
In Nature’s green unhuman loneliness
Surrounded by enormous silences
And the blind murmur of primaeval calms?”*⁸

(Ibid, pp.402-3)

This sets Satyavan to proceed with the story of his life so far. The phrase, “*pure jaatah samvruddhascha tapovane*” of Vyasa gives Sri Aurobindo enough to launch upon Satyavan’s growing up in the forest.

The thought immediately wandering in his surface mind, the image of his blind father who was once the highly acclaimed king of Shalwa is released first, revealing the spaces of love and compassion in the young man’s heart. The Princess should be told that he has an equal status too. He is the son of Shalwa’s king:

*“A living night enclosed the strong man’s paths,
Heaven’s brilliant gods recalled their careless gifts,
Took from blank eyes their glad and helping ray
And led the uncertain goddess from his side.
Outcast from empire of the outer light,
Lost to the comradeship of seeing men,
He sojourns in two solitudes, within
And in the solemn rustle of the woods.
Son of that king, I, Satyavan, have lived
Contented...”*

(Ibid, p.403)

Ah, contented till he met Savitri! Living in the forest ashrama meant living in total freedom. The external shackles of sculpted living did not curb his free spirit. Living itself became tapasya. What the royal Aswapati experienced through his askesis came as a natural occurrence to Satyavan:

*“A visioned spell pursued my boyhood’s hours,
All things the eye had caught in coloured lines
Were seen anew through the interpreting mind
And in the shape it sought to seize the soul.
An early child-god took my hand that held,
Moved, guided by the seeking of his touch,
Bright forms and hues which fled across his sight;
Limned upon page and stone they spoke to men.
High beauty’s visitants my intimates were.”*

(Ibid, p.404)

While he had all the freedom of living in tune with nature, Satyavan had also the advantage of nurturing the inner countries of the mind, thanks to the sages of the forest

who lived in his hermitage. With them, he learnt to look within, to meditate and gain a universal consciousness, recognise the One in all creation. One thing alone has eluded him so far. Yes, Death! Why should there be death? There has been an infusion of light into the soul and that has lived on but alas! The body that houses the soul remains a victim to decay and death. How so? But in one moment everything has changed. It is like the clicking of a light switch that floods a dark room with luminescence:

*“But thou hast come and all will surely change:
I shall feel the World-Mother in thy golden limbs
And hear her wisdom in thy sacred voice.
The child of the Void shall be reborn in God,
My Matter shall evade the Inconscient’s trance.
My body like my spirit shall be free.
It shall escape from Death and Ignorance.”*

(Ibid, p.406)

Savitri encourages Satyavan to go on. He is only too happy to speak. Yes, there was a time when he had lived like other men experiencing the surface movements of life. But then intimations of immortality had come to him from the movements of nature. To understand them he had taken recourse to meditation: “*I groped for the Mystery with the lantern, Thought.*” The deeper he went, greater was the mystery. If he seemed to succeed in finding the spirit, he became a stranger to earthly life. If he depended on the material sheath, the spirit was lost. How was he to bridge the two seeming irreconcilables, Matter and Soul? How to link the finite with the Infinite? Satyavan says that at last he seems to be getting near the link and that is Savitri herself. He gives an unambiguous call: “*Enter my life*”. She replies with divine simplicity: “*I know that thou and only thou art he.*” She gathers the flowers that are a-plenty, makes a garland and offers it to him along with herself. Savitri’s meeting with Satyavan now concludes with the yogic union of the two:

*“On the high glowing cupola of the day
Fate tied a knot with morning’s halo threads
While by the ministry of an auspice-hour
Heart-bound before the sun, their marriage fire,
The wedding of the eternal Lord and Spouse
Took place again on earth in human forms:
In a new act of the drama of the world
The united Two began a greater age.”*

(Ibid, p.411)

References

- 1 Translations from Vyasa quoted in this article are by R.Y. Deshpande
- 2 **Bala Kanda**, Sarga 73, verses 26-27
- 3 Translated by V.V.S. Aiyar
- 4 **The Foundations of Indian Culture** (1953 edition), p. 361
- 5 *Savitri*, Book V, canto i
- 6 *Savitri*, Book V, canto ii
- 7 Translated by Prema Nandakumar
- 8 *Savitri*, Book V, canto iii

Aswapati's Yoga

Srimat Anirvan

I

The first two cantos carry the essence of the epic. Man's aspiration for immortality is universal. It is the motto of all religions. What is its nature?

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the immortality of pure consciousness, the immortality of the psychic being and physical immortality. But where is the bridge between the endeavour to be immortal and that to be Brahman? Brahman is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Force. The idea of Existence of Brahman causes immortality. Realisation of eternal existence is immortality. This realisation, if individual, is mere imagination. Immortality is a realisation. It may be divided into two – realisation of knowledge and that of *Prakṛti* or *Mahāśakti*. Realisation of knowledge is the realisation of immortality of *puruṣa*. The Existence of Brahman is divided into *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*.

The endeavour with the aid of knowledge is of *puruṣa*, that with the aid of Bliss and Force is of *Prakṛti*.

The two are inseparably mixed up, though they are seemingly opposite to each other. *Puruṣa* is the realisation of Pure Consciousness, Pure Spirit and is formless. *Puruṣa* is formless, *Prakṛti* is form. The idea of *Brahman* eternally coheres in *Brahman*. *Puruṣa* tends to be formless, *Prakṛti* tends to form. The difference is felt when knowledge is judged on the basis of eternity. Being is formless and immutable, *Puruṣa* is eternal, beyond time. Flow of time is also eternal. Nobody knows when it will end. Both the beginning and the end are unmanifested, we are mutable forms in it. On the other hand, we see the existence of solitary *Brahman*. The idea of immortality is due to this *Brahman*. On the other hand, we have the delight of *Prakṛti* in forms. Then the endeavour to be immortal may take shelter either in the formless or in form. To manifest the formless is the *tapasyā* of *Prakṛti*. The source of form is its giver. *Prakṛti* is dual existence. On the one hand, there is mutation of forms which is called *guṇavikṣobha* in the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy. Yet another concept arises. Pure form is not non-eternal. That is another manifestation of *Brahman*. In the mystic philosophy, *Puruṣa* is beyond qualities, eternal and immortal. *Prakṛti* is *aparā* and agitated with qualities. *Nirguṇa Puruṣa* and the play of qualified *Prakṛti* – these two make creation possible. Pure quality is *parāśakti*. *Nirguṇa Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* as pure existence can never be separated. Manifestation of bliss, if it takes shelter in the two, is called creation. That is why we admit the two, though the root cause is one. The relation between them is the

relation of love. The bliss of *Puruṣa* is the love of *Prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* has another aspect of force. *Vikāra* is all-extensive. Manifestation of force in the play of qualities is termed *vikāra* in the Sāṃkhya system. *Vikāra* is lowered sometimes, but the *Vaiṣṇavas* speak of *sāttvika vikāra*.

Yet a problem remains. How can the eternal form be conceived wherein *Prakṛti* goes on creating forms with the agitation of the three qualities. Force endeavours to arrive at the eternal Form through multifarious forms with the aid of knowledge and love. Many aspirants take this path. According to the *Vaiṣṇavas*, an inner self-intended body can reach the eternal Form.

In the Upaniṣadas, we have statements about mutable forms as if they want to preach that there is no eternal form. On the other hand, the Upaniṣadas speak of seeing the Formless in its manifold forms. The mystics do not think it impossible to discover the eternal Form in the partial forms. They admit the eternity of forms. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the same idea in '*physical immortality*'. He imagines the appearance of eternal Form there. His *Savitri* is an acquaintance with the endeavour to be immortal.

This truth is to be judged by the male and female characters of the epic. Aswapati and Satyavan are men. *Savitri* is the *Paramā Prakṛti*. She is the central character of the epic. *Puruṣa* is divided into two. Aswapati is the father of *Savitri*, Satyavan is her eternal companion. Satyavan is disgraced by death. The matter is significant. Satyavan has to die after one year. *Savitri* knew this, yet she accepted him as her companion. It is as if a revolt against death.

Aswapati's endeavour is an endeavour of a *puruṣa* to ascend. It is an endeavour to arrive at self. No doubt there is rigour in it. *Savitri*'s endeavour is the endeavour of *Mahāprakṛti*. It is an endeavour of love. Her beloved is disgraced by death, he has to be made immortal. Satyavan is a simple man. The appearance of *Savitri* and Satyavan is, in fact, an *aviḥ*. One harmony and one greatness appear before eyes. But disharmony arises in comprehension. Satyavan is not aware of death like us. That is why we are not the least acquainted with his endeavour to be immortal. *Savitri* is an embodiment of it. No doubt, Aswapati's endeavour is to be immortal. But this is to bring down *Savitri* here upon the earth.

Satyavan easily falls a victim to death. *Savitri* regains him by means of her *tapasyā*. Aswapati's yoga is called the yoga of self-establishment by Sri Aurobindo. We need it for ourselves, there is eternal Satyavan in all of us. He is to be known. Aswapati's endeavour is the endeavour of the *jīva* to be *Śīva*. Satyavan's endeavour is the endeavour of a *śava*. *Puruṣa* is dual existence – *Śīva* and *Śava*. *Savitri*'s endeavour is for making the two successful. Aswapati's endeavour is the endeavour of all of us. *Mahāprakṛti* is engaged in *tapasyā* just as being *Śīva* like Aswapati and *Śava* like Satyavan. This is the philosophy behind the epic.

The whole epic is an account of the life of yoga. Of the main characters one is *yogī*, the other *yoginī*. The fruit is enjoyed by Satyavan, the immutable *puruṣa*. Aswapati's yoga is meant for bringing down *Savitri*. There is power in him. In the Vedas the horse is its symbol. Aswapati stands for power. But *Savitri*'s yoga, sheltered in

knowledge, is the yoga of love. She glitters with intuition. The intensity of her endeavour is unique. She goes on carrying it very easily. There are two steps in it. The first is to conquer fate. She acts as the wife of Satyavan, though she knows that Satyavan is disgraced by death. She has disclosed it to nobody. She has led the life of a *yoginī* for one long year.

Then she perceives death. In the Mahabharata we find that *Yama* is going to take the soul of Satyavan. Savitri goes behind him. We find the same in the death-transcending endeavour of Nachiketa. To go behind death, to admit death – we get the two in Savitri's endeavour. Then she conquers death by her lone spirit's power. This, in short, is an account of the life of yoga given in the epic.

There are three parts of Aswapati's yoga. The first is to have self-knowledge. Sri Aurobindo calls it '*The Yoga of the King*'. The second is to have cosmic knowledge. The third one is accomplishment. The secret of a *yogic* life is contained in it.

According to the Mahabharata, Aswapati had to endeavour for a period of eighteen years. The number 'eighteen' is suggestive. At every moment *prakṛti* goes through decay and growth. *Prakṛti* is qualified upto the fifteenth moment. Then *Prakṛti* is established in eternal truth which is called eternal sixteenth moment in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣada. This state of *prakṛti* is destroyed in the dark. It is the seventeenth moment. The eternal sixteenth moment is called the moment of bliss. But yet everything of *Prakṛti* is not unveiled. Complete light of the sixteenth moment and complete darkness of the seventeenth have an opposition. This opposition is solved in the eighteenth. Complete light and complete darkness, i.e. manifestation and destruction have to be transcended, the eighteenth moment has to be brought down. The eternal form of *Prakṛti* lies therein.

First Aswapati wants himself. Sri Aurobindo aims at the soul's release first and then Spirit's freedom and greatness. Knowledge makes a bridge between the two. Soul is psychic being, immortality. That psychic being is being unveiled through births and rebirths. This is called psychic opening, liberation of the psychic being by the touch of Infinity. There are two parts in an endeavour. In its first part, it has rigour. This brings self-knowledge. Then it awakens Soul's greatness, Spirit's release. First bondage is admitted. One can control oneself if one is controlled. This is all about Soul's greatness and freedom. Psychic opening is impossible unless one can be free from the play of qualities of *Prakṛti*. That is why the first step of the *yoga* of Aswapati is psychic opening. In its opening Aswapati becomes eager to know the eternal Form. He tends to eternity. This is the second step of his *yoga*.

What is the necessity of the *yoga* of Aswapati? Sri Aurobindo speaks of it in the third canto of the epic. The eternal has come down admitting death. This is the '*world's desire*'. There is aspiration for light in complete nescience. That makes for the appearance of Savitri. Aswapati is the symbol of this divine aspiration. He is not an ordinary man, he is a divine man. All the characters of this epic belong to the transcendental level.

II

To some extent Aswapati's *yoga* expresses a limit to our capacity. It is better to know the force working behind his *yoga*. Apart from the three main characters there are two invisible ones. One of them is the character of absolute *Puruṣa*. He is the seer of the play of force in the world. In the *yoga* of Aswapati and Savitri a flash of the existence of that *Puruṣa* recurs in the form of void or death. *Paramā Prakṛti* of this *Puruṣa* carries this death. We are very often acquainted with it in the epic *Savitri*. The three main characters embody the golden *Puruṣa*. While reading the epic, the force behind it must be kept in mind. Something supernatural is happening, but that is almost nothing for the Infinite. This force is to be understood as the root-force. Everyone endeavours. There is upward *tapasyā* in *Prakṛti*. But that is done many times unwittingly. Many of us endeavour in a dreaming manner. This is one class of aspirants.

The consciousness of aspirants of another class is opened from the very outset. There is rigour in such an aspirant. But that is not an impediment. That is ultimately transformed into force undefeated. That kind of force is not manifested in the ordinary aspirant. Among the two classes of aspirants, the endeavour of the first class belongs to men and that of the second class belongs to God. The endeavour of the first class is that of transcendence and that of the second class has an entrance by force in addition to it. The first begins with the mind, the second with science. In either an endeavour begins in the form of an intuition. This rouses a confidence in Infinity. This confidence is temporary, it disappears soon in the case of the aspirants of the first class. But in the case of the second class we have a flight from light to light. Nothing can mar the endeavour of the aspirants of the second class. Those aspirants are called *Purotraṭā* in the Vedas. They are always forerunners. Their endeavour is universal. Divine force automatically glows in such an endeavour. Their glow is beyond causal relation, beyond qualities. Matter is identified with consciousness here. The consciousness of the second class of aspirants relates to the cosmos. Aswapati belongs to this class. He is a thinker and toiler in the ideal's air. Everything is clear to him. Vitality and mentality work in him simultaneously. An entrance of idea enlivens mind. This *yoga* is quite natural for Aswapati. What appears to Aswapati with sure success spreads over the whole world. That is why the *yoga* of Aswapati is the *yoga* of all of us. The worldly consciousness does not know what it wants. But Aswapati knows it. There is impediment at every step of Aswapati's *yoga*. He has to face and remove the impediments. Being a '*colonist from immortality*' he is able to do this, but we are not. He is attached to each one of us. This *yoga* is not impossible. It is in us as well. Psychic opening happens in us. We also like to transcend ourselves. Thus a bridge between the two classes is built.

There are some stages of the *yoga* of Aswapati. The *yoga* of my own is the *yoga* of Aswapati. Aswapati has a sense of Infinity. He is completely detached from the ego-sense. We also get an inspiration like this, but we cannot get beyond the ego-sense. In the terminology of Sri Aurobindo, Aswapati's consciousness is the consciousness of the Higher mind. Our ordinary mind remains busy with sensuous matter, but the sense of generality is not clear to it. Matter is perceived by the ordinary man, but the ideal is

unintelligible to him. One who is entranced by the Ideal has a clear apprehension of the Ideal. He sees the thing as a manifestation of the Ideal. Then he roams in the Ideal's air. To use the thing as the Ideal is the motto of the Higher Mind. Here lies the difference between the *yoga* of Aswapati and that of the aspirants of the first class. In Aswapati's endeavour, the Ideal and the thing are identified. Our ordinary life is a life of manipulation. It is an outward one. It starts inner living when it is entranced by the Infinity. From this aspect Aswapati's *yoga* is our ideal. Aswapati's *yoga* has three stages – the spiritual stage, the cosmic stage and the stage of science. Absence of any serial order is the first condition of a *yogic* life. If this word is kept in mind the account of Aswapati's life becomes clear. At every moment of *yoga* our mind must remain open. There should be no order at the highest peak of success. There is, of course, an order if it is looked upon as a whole. As a poet and seer, Sri Aurobindo describes it in a two-fold manner.

At the outset of this canto, we get an account of Aswapati's spiritual *yoga*. Here Sri Aurobindo also makes a synthesis between this *yoga* and ordinary *yoga*. He speaks of all the positive ideas. Everything is then positive. Then arises un-manifestation of everything at the destruction of the value of the positive ideas. Hereafter a golden flash of the force behind appears from within the unmanifested. Intuition then becomes very easy. Then appears a sudden entrance. *Savitri-śakti* comes down. It is understood that Aswapati's *yoga* is meant for this descent. And that is why an endeavour is necessary for manifestation, then for destruction; and at last *Śakti* descends as a result of the synthesis of the two.

It has similarity with the account of the method of *yoga* which Sri Aurobindo has given elsewhere. Undivine consciousness is transformed into divine consciousness. A conflict arises sometimes in it. But when this conflict arrives at the harmony *Śakti* descends.

Aswapati is, as I, the existence of the sun. Grown from Aditi consciousness it is 'a greater sonship'. Aswapati has come down in the kingdom of men with divine rights. Having attained spiritual salvation, he is one who can remember the incidents of his previous life. In the ordinary sense a *jātismara* can remember the incidents of previous lives. But in another sense it is the remembrance of a *nitya siddha*. Aswapati bears the stamp of mighty memories. The veil of ignorance being removed, he understands what he feels is eternal; it spreads from the past to the future. It is called *dhruvā smṛti*. I was. I am. I shall be. Without the sense of the Infinity the sense of eternity does not wake. The veil of ignorance being removed, one can feel one's liberated nature. This is beyond time. This is the resource of a *siddha* consciousness.

Above all, Aswapati has an aspiration. He has perceived a path of light, a divine path in himself. That path is always upward. He goes upstream. His worldly life is illumined by a transcendental greatness. An ocean impulse is manifested in him. This is the life of Aswapati. He is, as if, a piece of diamond. Every piece of coal has a force to be a piece of diamond. Every life has a divine aspiration, but a truly enlightened person is diamond all through. Everyone is potentially the Buddha, but all men do not become the Buddha. Those who so become are chosen. Intuition is their essence. Divine appearance is possible in each of us. He is in all of us and is perceiving their divine destiny. All

of us cannot understand that. It is understood by the *siddhapuruṣa*. When the beam of the eternal is manifested in the heart of a devotee his luminous unmanifested life comes to a standstill. Then the source of force springs from it. This force is *Aditi-force*. He himself carries the life then. He is *Bodhisattva*. Aswapati is such a carrier. *Savitri-force* is in him. That is why Savitri is his daughter. At every moment Savitri grows in his heart. This is what is meant by the entrance of *Savitri-force*.

Aswapati's endeavour is the endeavour of *Mahāprakṛti*. Only he who will be welcome by *Mahāprakṛti* will bloom. Mango trees blossom but every flower does not bear fruits. Even the slightest endeavour is entranced by the Infinity. An endeavour is benign. When *Savitri-force* descends in Aswapati, he feels harmony in him. While carrying this entrance he is transformed into a seer, he is then liberated. He can then play with limits, with bondage. We find two things when he is infinite and free – freedom applied to soul and *sāmrajya siddhi*. This is the result of the spiritual *yoga* of Aswapati.

(The Bengali original, which appeared in 'Bartika' published by Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Kolkata, has been transcribed into English by Dr Sunil Roy, Professor, Dept of Philosophy, University of Burdwan, West Bengal. Prof. Roy is particularly interested in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and contemporary Indian philosophy in general and specially in the philosophy and thinking of Srīmat Anirvan. His book in Bengali entitled *Sri Aurobindar Darshan Manthaney* was published by Burdwan Univ. in 2007. His latest work *Kant on the Human Subject* has been published by the same University in 2010.)

Love and Death

Debashish Banerjee

Savitri is a modern epic written in the English language by the 20th c. Indian scholar and mystic Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and dealing with the theme of love conquering death. The epic gets its name *Savitri* and its storyline from the Mahabharata, itself an ancient epic of India. But I call *Savitri* a modern epic, not merely because it was written in modern times or by somebody who lived in the 20th century, but because it addresses the crisis of modernity in a very central way.

If we look at our present condition, we find ourselves in a world where humanity has made enormous strides as a race. It is a world in which we can truly call ourselves 'global' a world made for the convenience of modern man. We can travel from one point of globe to another in little time, we consume products from all over the world, we communicate with people who are a vast distance away in an instant and yet if we look at our subjective conditions, we find that we are individually as primitive, petty and selfish as we were when mankind first emerged from the caves.

This has made for a very dangerous situation. It is a situation in which somebody may blow up enormous populations of the world at the push of a button. We are at a point of time following two World Wars where the possibility of the extinction of the human race walks side by side with us at every moment. It is a real possibility and it is this possibility of the extinction, of the death of man, not merely a metaphysical death but a metaphysical and a physical death which constitutes the absolute nakedness of the human condition that we experience in our modern times. It is this condition that is addressed centrally by Sri Aurobindo in his epic poem *Savitri*.

Savitri gives us a different kind of solution to this problem. We know today that the thinkers, the wise men of our race are trying to find all kinds of solutions to this problem of human nature and its enormous power in modern times. We have thought of economic solutions, political solutions, scientific solutions and yet all these facts and possibilities of external engineering have not brought us one step closer to solving the problem of human consciousness which is at the centre of the crisis of modernity. It is this problem that Sri Aurobindo addresses and it is a solution to this that he provides, a solution where each individual needs to find the resources of consciousness, of universality and oneness by which Suffering and Death can be addressed. Sri Aurobindo follows in the footsteps of the ancient sages of India to give us a solution which is based on the growth of consciousness, a solution in which the individual can become

universal and transcendent and can find the problems which beset us to be problems that can be addressed and overcome by consciousness. All the works of Sri Aurobindo address this issue from the vantage of someone who has arisen to a state of transcendence.

Sri Aurobindo is a unique personality in modern times. He is known to be a great spiritual personality of India. While he was living, many knew him as the greatest living yogi of India, and the solution that he can offer us is the glorious assertion of the possibility of human consciousness becoming sovereign, master of its circumstances, of the world situation and the forces of Nature.

Sri Aurobindo grew up in England, where he had most of his schooling and his collegiate life. He returned to India around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For the first half of the twentieth century, the whole of the non-western world was embroiled in anti-colonial struggles. Sri Aurobindo found himself in the thick of colonial oppression and he participated actively in the struggle to rid India of this kind of oppression, initiating a revolutionary movement. But the aspiration of Sri Aurobindo was much vaster than that of liberating a certain nation from colonial subjection. He went on to express this aspiration in terms of a spiritual journey that made him expand his consciousness and explore its powers so that he could address not merely a revolution against a nation but a revolution against human nature itself.

Sri Aurobindo's life and Sri Aurobindo's teaching stand for such a revolution that can ultimately give us a key to the apotheosis of the human being, his becoming divine, his gaining the power of consciousness over the forces of nature and ultimately leading a godly life on earth. This, he says, is the very destiny of human beings and this particular message is the central message of *Savitri*. *Savitri* becomes a vehicle for this central message that Sri Aurobindo introduces to the world through the English language.

Now the theme of love conquering death has other parallels in world literature and mythology. We find, for example, the story of Osiris and Isis in Egypt. In Greece, we have the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. We may find many variations of the story of *Savitri* in Indian vernacular literatures as well, for example, in the narrative of the goddess Manasa in Bengal. We may even say that the life of Christ itself is an example of love conquering death, of a spiritual personality, an avatar offering his life up as a sacrifice for the sake of humanity; and through that being able to overcome the power of death in his resurrection. All these stories have certain things in common. They all address the issue of death and they all find love to be the power that can overcome death or at least approach such an overcoming. This results in a certain kind of aspiration in humanity.

In all these stories we come across something of an archaic memory, a memory of the deep past, a core intuition in humanity, which refers to an aspiration for immortality, for eternity, for a shadowless happiness in our lives. We find that this is contradicted by our actual lives where we are confronted with suffering, confusion, misunderstanding and death. All these stories see Love as the supreme power, the Divine Power carried within human beings with which they can overcome these powers of Falsehood and Ignorance. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, we find that that this original aspiration, this

great aspiration of humanity to overcome its seed problems is present from the very beginning.

Soon after Sri Aurobindo returned to India, while serving as a Professor at the Baroda College, he attempted a poem called '*Love and Death*'. The theme is initiated here in his work, but at this stage it is a romantic theme. Later when he went to Pondicherry, he began writing this epic *Savitri*. But in this epic, he brought to bear his entire spiritual experience, his very rich power of consciousness and also his power of expression which is related to this power of consciousness. We find that unlike all these other stories, in *Savitri* we get not merely a myth, not merely a hope, but a description of the processes, the vision, the understanding, the record of the experiences and the promise of the intervention of Divine Love that can overcome and transform the conditions of human nature and of the world in which we find ourselves.

We may ask the question as to why Sri Aurobindo chose to write this poem in the form of an English epic. It is often thought that mankind today does not have the capacity or the consciousness to write epics. Epics are thought to belong to an earlier age of Humanity, a more primordial stage when man was in possession of a grander consciousness. Human beings lived a wider, grander, freer life. In modern times, we are beset with a condition of living in which we have been rendered anonymous. We have been made insignificant by the gigantic powers of Technology. Humanity today, can at best express itself in brief bursts of intense emotion as in a lyric or perhaps in narrative poems. But Sri Aurobindo chose to write an epic. However, he was not the only one in modern times to write an epic. We have also the example of the Greek poet Nikos Kazantzakis who wrote *Odysseus: a modern sequel*. In this, Kazantzakis, a Greek poet, draws on the ancient myths of Greece, the Homeric legends of the Iliad and the Odyssey and he takes the character Odysseus and makes him into a trans-historical person who achieves a kind of cosmic consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* does something similar in a sense, but goes beyond this in giving us the scope of a cosmic poem, a poem in which the characters express cosmic and transcendental ranges of experience, a consciousness which overflows the normal limits of humanity and can come to grips with the problems of nature, transforming the laws by which we lead our lives. In this, Sri Aurobindo's poem is an epic and at the same time an invitation to modern man to outgrow his limited nature and lead a life which embodies the vastnesses and the glories of consciousness that are demanded of it in modern times. What is called for us to experience today is an epic consciousness and Sri Aurobindo invites us to this, shows us the way to this through his poem *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo thought of himself first and foremost as a poet. We find that Sri Aurobindo started writing poetry early in his life. He grew up in England, so the English language was like his mother tongue. He took his Tripos in the Classics at Cambridge University, so the classical languages Greek, Latin and Sanskrit were very close to him. He also had a very good understanding of modern European languages, such as French and Italian. When he came back to India, as we know, he started writing '*Love and Death*', a poem which dealt with the same theme as *Savitri*; and later, when he was in Pondicherry, he embarked on this grand epic *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo brought to his power of writing, his poetic power, a power of consciousness which he saw as an integral part of the development of human consciousness. He has written about this in his book *The Future Poetry*. Sri Aurobindo sees human language as one which embodies consciousness and the power of consciousness has to arrive at a certain pitch of articulation where rare spiritual experiences, experiences which are of a universal and cosmic nature can be directly expressed in a special manner, which he calls 'mantric'. *Savitri* is the record of such a mantric expression in the English language. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo uses the English language to express directly experiences of a high transcendence and power of consciousness which are otherwise impossible to express, were it not for this power of expression that he developed as he proceeded in his spiritual journey.

If we think of the messages that *Savitri* carries, we find that it bears four principal messages. For one, it tells about a great event that occurred in the past, an event of a Divine Intervention where Love conquered Death. The power of this intervention is still alive in our milieu in the present and we can bring it into our lives and make it a living power in our everyday consciousness. Another message in *Savitri* concerns the experiences and processes by which such a power of consciousness can be had. A third message is that it talks of the inner lives of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator, The Mother, who, in a sense, are reflected in the main characters in *Savitri*. Fourthly, *Savitri* is a prophecy of the future; it carries in itself the message of the great apotheosis of the earth that can come when the powers that are invoked in it can be activated in our lives, and the work that is opened up by *Savitri* and by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother become a power for change in the world.

To address the story of *Savitri*, as said before, it is a story that is told in the great Indian epic, Mahabharata. This is the form in which we have it at present. In this story we have a yogi king, Aswapati, a king who is a spiritual person, who does not have any children and who does a great austerity for eighteen years to obtain the boon of a child. Finally at the end of these eighteen years, the solar godhead, Savitri, the Divine Mother, comes to him and bestows upon him the gift of being born as his daughter. Now this daughter of Aswapati, the yogi king, is not just an incarnation, she comes with a power, a mandate to overcome the iron law of Death. Soon after she grows up, her father sends her out on a journey to seek a husband. When she finds her husband and returns to the court of Aswapati, the demi-god, Narad, who is the preceptor of the king, also arrives and makes a prophecy. He says that within one year the husband of Savitri will die. Aswapati and the mother of Savitri try to convince her that she should not marry this man. But her will is indomitable. She will not take back her word once given and she suffers the lonely knowledge of the impending death of her husband for a year. At the end of the year, she brings her superior power of consciousness into a dialogue with Death. This confrontation is in the nature of a debate which ultimately ends by Death giving a number of boons to Savitri, the final one being the life of her husband.

This is the traditional story of Savitri. But Sri Aurobindo uses the story as a vehicle to tell an epic of great spiritual power and in all these characters, he reads the spiritual experiences, visions and understandings that are those of his own spiritual journey, his

message for humanity and the power and work of his collaborator, The Mother. We can read what Sri Aurobindo feels about the principal characters of *Savitri* in the preface he wrote to the book *Savitri*. This is what he has to say in that preface:

'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.'

So, as Sri Aurobindo makes clear, the characters he portrays for us in *Savitri* are embodiments of living and conscious Forces. Savitri herself represents a memory from the ancient original past of Humanity, of the intervention of an incarnation of Love who came to open up the possibility of this supreme consciousness for the future. This is how *Savitri* represents itself to us today because Sri Aurobindo and The Mother also came to carry out this mission and it is, in a sense, the conflation, the identity of the characters of *Savitri* and the characters of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother that is represented in this epic, with its prophecy of the future of humanity and the transformation and solution to our modern crisis.

Sri Aurobindo develops this epic *Savitri* in terms of two major movements. The first movement is a universal aspiration of humanity for the overcoming of the problems of the human condition. This aspiration is embodied by the great yogi king, Aswapati. We may say, Aswapati mirrors the universal aspiration of Sri Aurobindo himself. The second movement is the movement of the action of Grace through an intervention of an embodied form of Love. This is expressed through the birth and ministry of Savitri. Savitri is born as an incarnation of Love, as a child of Aswapati, and in her life she carries the problems of destiny which will force her to mobilise her consciousness of Love to overcome the human condition, the problems of mortality, suffering and confusion which beset humanity at all times. This power is also embodied in a mirrored form in the life of Sri Aurobindo and particularly in his spiritual collaborator, The Mother. The Mother represents in modern times the power that is represented by Savitri in the ancient past. So *Savitri* becomes like a backdrop for the spiritual journeys of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and of the future of the human race, of what we may learn from it, of what we may embody in terms of the experiences that can lead us to that point.

If we think about the power of Love overcoming Death, we see that this is in consonance with the ancient Vedic and Vedantic teachings of India. We see that the power of Love is a primordial power of spiritual consciousness. According to the Vedanta there is only one Reality, one Being. Being is infinite and characterised by its power of consciousness and its intrinsic self-delight. Any manifestation is a self-conception of Being. A self-conception of infinite Being is naturally itself also infinite. Through its power of self-conception Being can view itself as an Other and call its own potentialities into a Becoming. This power of calling forth is the primordial power of Love at the base of any manifestation of Being. Becoming in our terrestrial cosmos is an evolutionary process, a process which mobilises another spiritual power, the power of Non-Being, to create a matrix out of which it may emerge. Non-Being, Death, Inconscience are the properties which face us as the objectified reality without consciousness out of which consciousness struggles to be born; and this is the Becoming of Being by the agency of Love.

It is Love which is the power of self-conception of the Divine. The primordial property of Divine Delight, Ananda stands at the head of creation and in the manifestation it translates itself into Love. Love in the manifestation is that which unites the multiplicities into the unity which is the single Being there is. It is also that which overcomes the power of division and the power of Non-Being which is mobilised as the death of things, as the Inconscience at the base of things, as the dark origin out of which consciousness struggles to be born. The Mother speaks about this in her works as the power of Love which is at the origin of this creation and which can incarnate in humanity and show us the way to our true destiny, the destiny of the human being to overcome all powers of Non-Being and to know himself to be divine.

The Mother says

'The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Love. This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice. The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch

prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.'

So this is the destiny of the human being as a being of Love. The Mother also says 'Love is a supreme force which the Eternal Consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine. The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine. Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed, "There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!" And with the awakening to love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace. Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fullness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine. This world was a world of dead matter till Divine love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way, it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought. The maximum it has reached is what seems to human beings love in its highest form, its purest and most disinterested kind, like the love of the mother for the child. This human movement of love is secretly seeking for something else than what it has yet found; but it does not know where to find it, it does not even know what it is. The moment man's consciousness awakens to the Divine love, pure, independent of all manifestation in human forms, he knows for what his heart has all the time been truly longing. That is the beginning of the Soul's aspiration that brings the awakening of the consciousness and its yearning for union with the Divine. All the forms that are of the ignorance, all the deformations it has imposed must from that moment fade and disappear and give place to one single movement of the creation answering to the Divine love by its love for the Divine. Once the creation is conscious, awakened, opened to love for the Divine, the Divine love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete.

'Great beings have taken birth in this world who came to bring down here something of the sovereign purity and power of Divine love. The Divine love has thrown itself into a personal form in them that its realisation upon earth may be at once more easy and more perfect. Divine love, when manifested in a personal being is easier to realise; it is more difficult when it is unmanifested

or impersonal in its movement. A human being, awakened by this personal touch, with this personal intensity, to the consciousness of the Divine love, will find his work and change made more easy; the union for which he seeks becomes more natural and close. And the union, the realisation will become for him, too, more full, more perfect; for the wide uniformity of a universal and impersonal Love will be lit up and vivified with the colour and beauty of all possible relations with the Divine'. (CWM, vol.3, pp. 71-75)

It is this that becomes the backdrop of the epic poem *Savitri*, the power of the incarnation of Love, of the intervention of Divine Love and the power of the human consciousness to come into contact with it, to become the vehicle of the expression of consciousness that is manifested in the high supreme words that Sri Aurobindo has given us in this poem.

I would like to read a few more passages from the Mother regarding what she has to say about *Savitri*. She says '*Savitri, this prophetic vision of the world's history including the announcement of the earth's future.... The importance of Savitri is immense. Its subject is universal, its revelation is prophetic. The time spent in its atmosphere is never wasted.*' She also wrote that '*Savitri is the daily record of the spiritual experiences of the individual who has written it*', in other words, Sri Aurobindo, '*a complete system of yoga which can serve as a guide for those who want to follow the integral sadhana, the yoga of the earth in its ascent towards the Divine, the experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated*'. In her own diary the Mother wrote, after some quotations from *Savitri* that she wrote by hand. '*Some extracts from Savitri... that marvellous prophetic poem which will be humanity's guide towards its future realisation*'; and on another occasion she said '*For the opening of the psychic, for the growth of consciousness and even for the improvement of English, it is good to read one or two pages of Savitri each day. I believe this is the message, all the rest are preparations, but Savitri is the message. Savitri is a mantra for the transformation of the world.*'

*"A secret air of pure felicity
Deep like a sapphire of heaven our spirits breathe;
Our hearts and bodies feel its obscure call,
Our senses grope for it and touch and lose.
If this withdrew, the world would sink in the Void;
If this were not, nothing could move or live.
A hidden Bliss is at the root of things.
A mute Delight regards Time's countless works:
To house God's joy in things Space gave wide room,
To house God's joy in self our souls were born.
This universe an old enchantment guards;
Its objects are carved cups of World-Delight
Whose charmed wine is some deep soul's rapture-drink:
The All-Wonderful has packed heavens with his dreams,*

*He has made blank ancient Space his marvel-house;
 He spilled his spirit into Matter's signs:
 His fires of grandeur burn in the great sun,
 He glides through heaven shimmering in the moon;
 He is beauty carolling in the fields of sound;
 He chants the stanzas of the odes of Wind;
 He is silence watching in the stars at night;
 He wakes at dawn and calls from every bough,
 Lies stunned in the stone and dreams in the flower and tree.
 Even in this labour and dolour of Ignorance,
 On the hard perilous ground of difficult earth,
 In spite of death and evil circumstance
 A will to live persists, a joy to be.
 There is a joy in all that meets the sense,
 A joy in all experience of the soul,
 A joy in evil and a joy in good,
 A joy in virtue and a joy in sin:
 Indifferent to the threat of Karmic law,
 Joy dares to grow upon forbidden soil,
 Its sap runs through the plant and flowers of Pain:
 It thrills with the drama of fate and tragic doom,
 It tears its food from sorrow and ecstasy,
 On danger and difficulty whets its strength;
 It wallows with the reptile and the worm
 And lifts its head, an equal of the stars;
 It shares the faeries' dance, dines with the gnome:
 It basks in the light and heat of many suns,
 The sun of Beauty and the sun of Power
 Flatter and foster it with golden beams;
 It grows towards the Titan and the God.
 On earth it lingers drinking its deep fill,
 Through the symbol of her pleasure and her pain,
 Of the grapes Heaven and the flowers of the Abyss,
 Of the flame-stabs and the torment-craft of Hell
 And dim fragments of the glory of Paradise.
 In the small paltry pleasures of man's life,
 In his petty passions and joys it finds a taste,
 A taste in tears and torture of broken hearts,
 In the crown of gold and in the crown of thorns,
 In life's nectar of sweetness and its bitter wine.
 All being it explores for unknown bliss,
 Sounds all experience for things new and strange.
 Life brings into the earthly creature's days*

*A tongue of glory from a brighter sphere:
 It deepens in his musings and his Art,
 It leaps at the splendour of some perfect word
 It exults in his high resolves and noble deeds,
 Wanders in his errors, dares the abyss's brink,
 It climbs in his climbings, wallows in his fall.
 Angel and demon brides his chamber share,
 Possessors or competitors for life's heart.
 To the enjoyer of the cosmic scene
 His greatness and his littleness equal are,
 His magnanimity and meanness hues
 Cast on some neutral background of the gods:
 The Artist's skill he admires who planned it all.
 But not for ever endures this danger game:
 Beyond the earth, but meant for delivered earth,
 Wisdom and joy prepare their perfect crown;
 Truth superhuman calls to thinking man.
 At last the soul turns to eternal things,
 In every shrine it cries for the clasp of God.
 Then is there played the crowning Mystery,
 Then is achieved the longed-for miracle.
 Immortal Bliss her wide celestial eyes
 Opens on the stars, she stirs her mighty limbs;
 Time thrills to the sapphics of her amour-song
 And Space fills with a white beatitude.
 Then leaving to its grief the human heart,
 Abandoning speech and the name-determined realms,
 Through a gleaming far-seen sky of wordless thought,
 Through naked thought-free heavens of absolute sight,
 She climbs to the summits where the unborn Idea
 Remembering the future that must be
 Looks down upon the works of labouring Force,
 Immutable above the world it made.
 In the vast golden laughter of Truth's sun
 Like a great heaven-bird on a motionless sea
 Is poised her winged ardour of creative joy
 On the still deep of the Eternal's peace.
 This was the aim, this the supernal Law,
 Nature's allotted task when beauty-drenched
 In dim mist-waters of unconscious sleep,
 Out of the Void this grand creation rose,—
 For this the Spirit came into the Abyss
 And charged with its power Matter's unknowing force,*

*In Night's bare session to cathedral Light,
 In Death's realm repatriate immortality.
 A mystic slow transfiguration works.
 All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky,
 And Love that was once an animal's desire,
 Then a sweet madness in the rapturous heart,
 An ardent comradeship in the happy mind,
 Becomes a wide spiritual yearning's space.
 A lonely soul passions for the Alone,
 The heart that loved man thrills to the love of God,
 A body is his chamber and his shrine.
 Then is our being rescued from separateness;
 All is itself, all is new-felt in God:
 A Lover leaning from his cloister's door
 Gathers the whole world into his single breast.
 Then shall the business fail of Night and Death:
 When unity is won, when strife is lost
 And all is known and all is clasped by Love
 Who would turn back to ignorance and pain?
 "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."*

The passage I read is from Savitri, Book X canto III: *The Debate of Love and Death*. This is towards the end of the epic and here Savitri is speaking to Death. As we see, in a quintessential form, this passage carries the message of Savitri as the power of Love conquering Death. She also presents in this passage her archetypal reality, who it is that she and Satyavan are. We will look at this passage a little more closely to bring out the essential lines of its development.

Sri Aurobindo begins the passage by talking about Delight which is at the source of the manifestation. He says:

*A secret air of pure felicity
 Deep like a sapphire heaven our spirits breathe;*

In these lines, he sets up the source of the creation as Delight, Ananda. Whatever we are experiencing in our outer lives, there is a certain delight that is upholding our entire experience and our spirit basks in that delight, enjoys that delight. It is an essence of delight that pervades the creation and penetrates the creation. This is the '*secret air of pure felicity deep like a sapphire heaven*' which '*our spirits breathe*.' It slakes every thirst as it were. The thirst of humanity, of all the creation is completely quenched, fulfilled by this infinite delight '*like a sapphire heaven*.' He continues to talk about how our senses may not fully partake in this experience, which is the experience of the spirit at all times, as an essence. He says

*Our hearts and bodies feel its obscure call,
 Our senses grope for it and touch and lose.*

In other words, there is a hiatus, a distance between this essence, this dimension of pure delight and the dimension of our sense experience, the experience of our living creature lives. Yet this is what upholds the entire creation. So he says

If this withdrew, the world would sink in the void;

It is also the essence of our normal affective experience, because as Sri Aurobindo points out, our experience at the affective level, at the level of our feelings, is of a triple character. We receive the world's contacts either as pleasure or pain or neutrality, something which is completely neutral. It is particularly in the neutrality of experience that we come closest to this causeless delight that pervades all things. It is when we are calm, when the intensity of joy or suffering is not our normal experience that we can come into contact with this equal delight, the '*sapphire heaven*' which pervades all things. This is the reason why it is a joy just to live. The essence of existence is Delight. This kind of delight is what makes us want to continue to live even if our life is full of pain, experiences of misery. That is why Sri Aurobindo says

A will to live persists, a joy to be.

He writes

*Even in this labour and dolour of Ignorance,
On the hard perilous ground of difficult earth,
In spite of death and evil circumstance
A will to live persists, a joy to be.*

Prior to this, he points out how the Delight of creation, creative Delight brings into existence Space and the manifold objects of space. He says

*A mute Delight regards Time's countless works:
To house God's joy in things Space gave wide room,
To house God's joy in self our souls were born.*

That is what we know as Space. The infinity of Space is the canvas, the self-extension of God, the objectification of God as a Spatial Being so that within it there may occur phenomena, events and incidents and beings and interactions between these beings, that set up the play of Delight, the 'lila.' And in this 'lila' it is as if the one Being, who is also the One Person, Purusha, the Supreme Purushottama has multiplied Himself into all the various different beings, the infinity of beings that this space holds. These are the souls. That is why he says

To house God's joy in self our souls were born.

Now he continues, writing about the presence of this Delight in Nature, in the universe. Here he says that all the objects of nature are like 'carved cups of World-Delight.'

*Its objects are carved cups of World-Delight
Whose charmed wine is some deep soul's rapture-drink:
The All-Wonderful has packed heaven with his dreams,*

Then he writes about how this wonder, this Delight has poured itself into all the objects and selves of the world.

*He spilled his spirit into Matter's signs:
His fires of grandeur burn in the great sun,
He glides through heaven shimmering in the moon;
He is beauty carolling in the fields of sound ;
He chants the stanzas of the odes of Wind;
He is silence watching in the stars at night;
He wakes at dawn and calls from every bough,
Lies stunned in the stone and dreams in flower and tree.*

So this is the presence of Delight intrinsic in all things of material Nature. All things are signs of divinity, cups of this 'World-Delight.'

After this, he goes on to write about our experience of delight in the double terms of pleasure and pain, because, indeed, if we look at world experience, we seem always to be faced with this duality. But he says that even in this double term, it is only Delight that offers its play. It is Delight at play in the world through this dual term. Therefore, there is delight in joy, delight in pain. Similarly, he says, in both evil and in good there is this joy:

*There is a joy in all that meets the sense,
A joy in all experience of the soul,
A joy in evil and a joy in good,
A joy in virtue and a joy in sin:
Indifferent to the threat of Karmic law,
Joy dares to grow upon forbidden soil,
Its sap runs through the plant and flowers of Pain:
It thrills with the drama of fate and tragic doom,*

Now one may wonder whether Sri Aurobindo is making a case for sadism here, for the experience of pain as a kind of perverse delight. But that is not what he means. What he means is that behind both the experiences of pleasure and pain, there is Delight; if we were to expand our consciousness, if we were to experience the world like the Divine experiences it, we would see this Delight that is at work in all experiences.

Firstly, this relates to the Indian theory of *rasa*. In other words, there is a kind of *rasa* that is experienced even in agony, and evil, even in all contrary events of life. We can catch a glimpse of this, for example, in art, or in theatre. When we go to a theatre, what we experience are all the various moods that are portrayed there, but we take a delight in all this, what Sri Aurobindo calls following Indian aesthetics *rasagrahana*, seizing of the taste of different experiences. Now *rasagrahana* is all very well when it is happening in a drama, or to "someone else." When we ourselves are the recipients of agony and pain and evil, it is not so easy to think of it as Delight.

But what Sri Aurobindo is pointing out is that even in our own experience, there is a part in us, a dimension of our consciousness, our soul that enjoys the various experiences of our life impersonally, as a spectator of the moods of delight, without being touched by them. Just as we watch a play, this soul in us watches our own experience and the experience of everything else in the world. It is an impersonal witness. That impersonal witness is completely free, it is intrinsically and eternally liberated. If we were to experience life, our own as well as everyone else's from the vantage of this liberated witness, we would see all experiences as experiences of Delight. We would enjoy these as an impersonal play of delight wearing the masks of good and evil.

But this is not all there is to the experience of Delight in all things. It is possible to become impersonal enough so that one even experiences the incidents of even one's own life as something distant. In that case, one does not surrender to the pain, one is detached. There is a witness self that can have this experience. So we can try to develop that dimension in us and experience our lives as the static witness of the play of existence. This is the dimension of the soul. But what of the nature? What of our vital parts that experience these things in the nerves and in the heart, the affections? This is the dimension of vital and physical experience. We can reduce or deny our identification with them through our entry into the dimension of soul, where they seem like masks, but these parts have their own experience, which are not so impersonal, they are marked by personality and its responses.

Now as far as this dimension of Nature is concerned, Sri Aurobindo tells us that these experiences of pain, in the physical or vital being, are also forms of Delight. But

we don't experience them so because we are caught in the play and give them the conventional values which Nature has provided for them. We are made to give them these responses through natural limitations of capacity. So part of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, in this aspect of the integral experience of Delight, is to enlarge the power of consciousness in all parts of the human nature, so as to be able to hold greater intensities of delight and its opposite, of pleasure and of pain, to the extent that we can convert or transform these experiences of Pain into the truth of their origin, which is Delight. Pain is then experienced as nothing but Delight wearing the form of an intensity that we cannot bear. Because we cannot bear it, we wince, we give to it the conventional or natural value of pain in our experience. When this intensity crosses a certain threshold for our physical nature, we experience it as death. But if we were to be able to experience this sting of delight that we call pain without responding with our limitation of consciousness, then we would see that indeed even pain and its extremes are actually intensities of joy, of Delight. Sri Aurobindo holds this out as a development, a growth in consciousness.

So we can talk about two kinds of growth in consciousness that help us to experience delight in all things. One is a growth of impersonality through an opening up of the soul dimension and the experience of the contacts of the world as forms of aesthetic delight, *rasagrahana*; and the other is a growth of wideness and response in the vital and physical consciousness which allows us to transform the powers of pain and suffering into forms of intensity of delight.

Now, apart from these two stages, there is a third form of consciousness which gives meaning to the creation. This comes from the growth of power of the soul. Here we go beyond dealing with the relative values of the world through individual adjustments of consciousness to ask what is the meaning of these dual conventions of experience in Nature. Here, we begin to approach the central message of *Savitri*. Why is Delight allowed to take the contrary forms of pleasure and pain? We see that this is because through these experiences, the Conscious Being who has forgotten Himself in this evolutionary self-conception, who has subjected Himself to the Inconscience of Death, through the power of Non-Being, and subjected each possibility of birth to a repeated power of the same Death in time, this self-forgetting of God is made to grow up, evolve into the fullness of his own self-knowledge and his power over Suffering, Pain and Death. This is the evolution of Divine Consciousness, Power and Delight, which needs to be challenged to awake to its own potential. Sri Aurobindo writes:

*'Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,* (*Savitri*, Bk VI, Canto II, p.443)

The Inconscience is made to grow into divine consciousness through these contrary experiences of pleasure and pain. So something deep in us, our soul, our psychic being, experiences these moments of pain, deprivation, absence of God, abjection as an adventure of consciousness and joy. That is another aspect to Delight in the cosmos, the Delight of growth through suffering, through resistance to evil. This aspect opens up for us the vertical dimension of the evolution of Spirit in Matter. This is why Sri

Aurobindo points to Delight as something which is present both in Power and in Beauty in our experience. He writes:

*The sun of Beauty and the sun of Power
Flutter and foster it with golden beams;
It grows towards the Titan and the God.*

So Delight provides sustenance, for growth towards both these poles. But behind these experiences, spiritual Delight, which is equal in all things, provides sustenance for the growth of the soul towards its unity with the Supreme self.

Now after this long passage where Sri Aurobindo writes about the duality of pleasure and pain as forms of Delight, he goes on to write about that part of our being which is impersonal to both of these, the witness self. He writes:

*To the enjoyer of the cosmic scene
His greatness and his littleness equal are,
His magnanimity and meanness hues
Cast on some neutral background of the gods:*

So from the dimension of the witness, we experience this neutral background and all our life experiences are seen as different hues colouring this background. But this relativity of hues provides no sense of meaning; the "reason" why Delight created this universe escapes us, or alternately we may say, the essential form of Delight at work in the cosmos escapes us. This is seen when we realise that the duality of pleasure and pain is a transient or a temporary experience leading to the unveiled play of pure spiritual Delight. This is why he writes:

*But not for ever endures this danger game:
Beyond the earth, but meant for delivered earth*

In other words, liberated earth, earth which has been freed from its bondage to Inconscience—

*Wisdom and joy prepare their perfect crown;
Truth superhuman calls to thinking man.
At last the soul turns to eternal things.*

Our drama of pleasure and pain in the cosmic play changes and we develop a thirst for the transcendent Delight.

*Then is there played the crowning Mystery,
Then is achieved the longed-for miracle.
Immortal Bliss her wide celestial eyes
Opens on the stars, she stirs her mighty limbs;
Time thrills to the sapphics of her amour-song
And Space fills with a white beatitude.*

We experience true spiritual Delight, *Ananda*, Delight in its own origin, and at that point, the human soul rising into its higher potency comes to an understanding of the meaning of the play of Delight in the creation. This is what Sri Aurobindo has termed Supramental Delight. The experience of the soul unites with the experience of God who created this evolving cosmos from the supramental heights as, what Sri Aurobindo calls, the Real-Idea. The Real-Idea is the vision of God manifesting itself as an evolution

from an Inconscience to its perfect self-finding in a manifestation of Delight on earth. When the soul rises to its spiritual heights, it experiences this Real-Idea as the origin of the creation of Delight in the manifestation. Sri Aurobindo writes about this in this passage:

*Abandoning speech and the name-determined realms,
Through a gleaming far-seen sky of wordless thought,
Through naked thought-free heavens of absolute sight,
She climbs to the summits where the unborn Idea
Remembering the future that must be
Looks down upon the works of labouring Force,
Immutable above the world it made.*

This unborn Idea is the origin of the supramental creation and so it carries a prophetic vision. This is the *trikaladrishti*, the vision of the three times. This is why it is as if this Idea is always present in the creation and yet it marshals itself as a progression in time. Therefore, it remembers its future as in a prophetic vision. Its past and its future are both present in its Presence. Thus, through this remembrance of its future, it looks down upon the works of the ‘labouring Force, Immutable above the world it made’. At this point, Sri Aurobindo presents us with a vision, a beautiful image of the supramental consciousness watching the works of itself in and as Time. He writes:

*In the vast golden laughter of Truth's sun
Like a great heaven-bird on a motionless sea
Is poised her winged ardour of creative joy
On the still deep of the Eternal's peace.*

As part of this vision, the dimension of cosmic meaning opens up. Sri Aurobindo elaborates on why Delight has made this creation in this particular form, of the vicissitudes of life, of labour and struggle and the experience of the contraries of pleasure and pain.

*This was the aim, this the supernal Law,
Nature's allotted task when beauty-drenched
In dim mist-waters of inconscient sleep,
Out of this Void this grand creation rose,—*

In this beautiful image we are shown the earth goddess rising from the ocean of Inconscience as a form of Beauty. But this is an Inconscient form, a form containing in itself all the possibilities of the manifestation, the emergence of Delight in the world.

*For this the Spirit came into the Abyss
And charged with its power Matter's unknowing force,
In Night's bare session to cathedral Light,
In Death's realm repatriate immortality.
A mystic slow transfiguration works.
All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky,*

In these rapturous lines Sri Aurobindo opens up the purpose of the Spirit's plunge into the abyss. ‘In Night's bare session to cathedral Light’ – to house Light, as it were in the temple of the Night. ‘In Death's realm repatriate immortality’: Inconscience,

death, the forgetting, the repeated universal shadow falling on the lives of creatures and of man are a challenge and an adventure to manifest Immortality. Sri Aurobindo then sums up the meaning of the entire process of the evolution of consciousness on earth. This entire play of Delight is a play of transformation.

Following this passage, Sri Aurobindo points to the progress of Love. Love is at the basis of this creation, because Delight when it creates and enters into the manifestation operates as Love. Delight belongs to the unity of the Infinite Conscious Being, but when it creates, it multiplies itself into its own Witness and its own Force, and its own innumerable, infinite possibilities at play in the creation. This self-multiplication of God is what the Mother has called ‘*the holocaust of the Purusha*’. This holocaust of the Purusha, this fragmentation of the One into Many can be seen as the multiple self-conception of the One manifested by its own Delight operating as Love, calling forth these possibilities. And again, in the manifestation, the Delight of the One becomes the Love of the Many. This leads to a progress or yoga of Love in Nature. Sri Aurobindo writes of this in the following lines:

*And Love that was once an animal's desire,
Then a sweet madness in the rapturous heart,
An ardent comradeship in the happy mind,
Becomes a wide spiritual yearning's space.
A lonely soul passions for the Alone,*

Love awakes in us to its origin which is the origin of the united, the undivided Conscious Being.

*The heart that loved man thrills to the love of God,
A body is his chamber and his shrine.*

In other words, we become the embodiments, the individualised embodiments of Supreme Love in potential. This is the essence of the human being, the power of Love centred in the soul.

*Then is our being rescued from separateness;
All is itself, all is new-felt in God:
A Lover leaning from his cloister's door
Gathers the whole world into his single breast.*

This is a description of the transformation of Love from its littleness and its individualised manifestations to its universality. It becomes the One Love of the Supreme Being which then returns to us as an Infinite Love for all things.

*When unity is won, when strife is lost
And all is known and all is clasped by Love
Who would turn back to ignorance and pain?
Then shall the business fail of Night and Death*

This concludes the chapter of the evolution of the soul through the struggle of good and evil. This is why he writes, ‘*Then shall the business fail of Night and Death*’.

In the last few lines of this passage, Savitri announces her own supremacy over Death. Death is a shadow of Non-Being and just as Non-Being and Being are two faces of the Supreme, which is beyond manifestation, so too, pure Delight comes from that

Source which exceeds Being and Non-Being; it can irradiate both Being and Non-Being. It can wake up in the heart of Death. This is why Sri Aurobindo makes Savitri say

*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;*

Rising to this statement of her divinity, she now reveals her Avatarhood, the fact that she is an Incarnation, a Descending Intervention from the supreme heights just as is Satyavan. This revelation includes a sense of the cyclic repetition of Time, Savitri and Satryavan are self-revealed as divine archetypes who come into this creation time and again to uphold the journey of love into its final transfiguration and its entry into the realm of the play of Immortality. This is why she says:

*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,*

In a symbolic form, were it not for the Divine remembering the purpose of this creation from His own prophetic supramental heights, humankind in its forgetfulness would let slip the purpose at work in the cosmos. So it is that the Avatar comes, God comes in human forms to take up the human play.

*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.*

The apotheosis of human love as Divine Love which is the central message of the epic *Savitri*, is announced by Savitri in this passage. She points out how she has come to create a symbolic destruction of Death, a defeat of Death through the vindication of the power of Supreme Love, which is the Delight that is beyond Being and Non-Being at the very source of the manifestation.

*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,*

Savitri ends on a prophetic note. Love is that which will eventually conquer the impossibilities of this suffering creation and bring the deathless joy of the heavens here on earth.

*Love is the far Transcendent's angel here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.*

Savitri ends her address to Death with the certitude of his conquest through a reminder of the Holocaust or Sacrifice of Purusha as the burning Love mortgaged in the foundation of the world. The Absolute has left his mortgaged Love here, in the material world, so that there is no escape. This lien is the security of the creation against the hands of Death and into the certainty of the Supreme Delight manifesting here.

(DVDs of the complete series of talks are available at a price from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, 8 Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata 700 071. For details, please contact Arup Basu, Editor, **Sraddha** at 98032 58723)

***Savitri* – Book VI, Canto II : The Way of Fate and The Problem of Pain**

Makarand R. Paranjape

Savitri, Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus*, a modern epic of nearly 24,000 lines, is akin to an ocean. It is difficult to fathom all at once, but every part of it shares its intrinsic nature. In that sense, where and how we plunge into it is of little consequence. We will glimpse its magnificence no matter what method we adopt. Provided, of course, we open ourselves to its magic. Though the whole of *Savitri* may be regarded as a sacred text, a contemporary Veda, it is a very long and complex composition. Therefore, we might actually single out some Cantos, perhaps half a dozen, which are so important that they encapsulate the whole structure, the whole methodology and also, if we might use that word, the whole "theology" of the epic. And this, Book VI, Canto II, is one of those crucial Cantos – "*The Way of Fate and The problem of Pain*." What follows could be seen as a part of the age-old Indian tradition of commenting on major texts. Master texts had multiple commentaries over generations. *Savitri* is a poem that invites such treatment.

This Canto is important because it asks fundamental questions, the kind of questions, in fact, which all of us ask. Why do we suffer? Why is there so much pain in human life? Are we fated to suffer in this manner? Is there no cure, no solution? Because all of us have suffered at some point or the other as human beings, these questions go to the very heart of what it means to be embodied, what it means to be human. No doubt, many have also found great solace in this Canto, answers to these questions. As one person responded after this talk, "I went through an extremely difficult phase in my life. During that time, I must have read this Canto literally a hundred times. Each time I read it, it revealed something new about not just my problem but also about life." Thus, not only does the Canto *ask* fundamental questions, it even answers them to the satisfaction of many readers and *sadhaks*.

Some 2500 years ago, the great Sakya Muni, Gautama Buddha, himself reflected on such questions, making them the bedrock of his teaching. He said there are four noble truths – *cattāri ariyasaccāni* in Pali or *catvari ariya satyani* in Sanskrit. These are suffering, its cause, its elimination, and, finally, the way to this elimination. According to the Buddha, suffering is universal, its cause is craving; but it is also possible to end suffering, and suffering can be ended by the cessation of craving or *tanha*. This

great teaching was offered in the very first sermon that the Buddha gave – *Dharma chakra pravartana* sermon – in Sarnath when he started preaching after becoming the Awakened One. Ultimately, the way to end suffering is to lead a right, or one might prefer to say, the *righteous* life. This is based on the eight-fold path – right view, right intention (*prajña* or wisdom), right speech, right action, right livelihood (*śīla* or conduct), and right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration (*samādhi* or concentration). In a way, Sri Aurobindo also covers similar ground here, in this important Canto.

The Vadantic approach to suffering, in contrast, focuses not so much on the causes of the suffering but on the nature and identity of the sufferer. [1] The end of suffering is effected by the end of false identification, which is the prelude to liberation or *mukti*. According to some schools, such liberation is available while being embodied, in which case it is called *jivamukti*. For Sri Aurobindo, suffering becomes the aid, in fact the goad, to spiritual evolution. In a way, Sri Aurobindo also covers similar ground here, in this important Canto. We shall look at Sri Aurobindo's approach in greater detail later.

In this first part of this exposition, let us look briefly at the action of the Canto. In the previous Canto, Narad, the heavenly singer, has descended into the marble halls of King Aswapati's palace. Savitri, the Madra princess, the Divine Flame and Aswapati's daughter, has just returned after finding her soul-mate in Satyavan. But Narad tells the shocked royal couple that if Savitri marries Satyavan, he will die in a year's time. Having heard this dread sentence, Savitri instead of retracting, reaffirms her choice.

This Canto records, to begin with, Queen Malawi's, that is Savitri's mother's reaction to this shocking pronouncement. The queen, Sri Aurobindo tells us, is also a very evolved person, quite in control of her mind and sense, but when she hears this awful news she is disturbed. She loses her calm, her poise, her equanimity and plunges into a questioning which is somewhat angry. She is hurt, upset, and therefore asks, how and why is it that we who live on this earth, we enjoy some moments of joy, then we suffer, and we go through the same cycle again and again. Is this the law? If so, then why did God make this world? Why did he make us for this meaningless cycle of pain? Indeed, is something wrong with the creation itself, did all go wrong somewhere?

Narad then gives his reply at some length, which is a very important explanation about why it is so, why we suffer, and whether we are bound by law or Fate to this chain of causality. Again, we might briefly remember the Buddha when he saw those sights of suffering humanity which had been shielded from his eyes. He saw death, old age, sickness and things that his father, Prince Suddhodana, had wanted him never to see. The father wanted his son to be raised in the palace in happiness, shielded from all sorrow and suffering. But Gautama saw these things and realised that he was also going to grow old and die, that he would also know suffering and perhaps illness. That is why he determined to find the cause for suffering so that he could, once and for all, cure it and free all other sentient beings from it. What a noble resolve, how grand his ideal.

Similarly, one might say that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother also have resolved, but through a different path, to end the suffering of humanity. For them the path is transformation, the yogic endeavour to perfect the human condition through the

supramentalisation of the earth. Unlike the Buddha, who believed that human life as we know it cannot be free of suffering, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother declare that the Divine Life on earth is actually possible, that even physical immortality can be achieved. In fact, death itself is neither inevitable but it is more like a bad habit which must be overcome. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother strove to change the way we are hard-wired as it were; they wanted to change the programme, to alter the very matrix. That is their bigger project.

Returning to this Canto, Narad gives the explanation as to why there is pain, why there is suffering, why we suffer. Then Aswapati, Savitri's father, asks a very brief question, "Is Fate final?" he wants to know. After all, isn't Fate nothing but what God decrees, so can't God change his mind? He is also a father, but unlike his wife the queen, he also has the secret knowledge of the meaning and significance of Savitri's birth. We must remember that in Book II, which is nearly half of the epic, after journeying the worlds, after exploring all the known territories and levels of consciousness, Aswapati has finally reached the Divine Mother, and wrested a boon from her that the world-saviour would be born as his daughter. So he now says that he thought that Savitri was meant for something else, something higher. Narad replies saying only the Gods know how Fate works, but not human beings. Sri Aurobindo uses a rather interesting phrase here—Narad says, that God uses truth to cover up truth, he does not cover up truth with falsehood. It is a very interesting way of putting it. In other words, as of now we only know that Satyavan has to die. What else is going to happen we shall have to wait and watch; and this, he adds, depends to a large extent on Savitri herself.

Indirectly, Narad seems to hint that he knows what is going to happen but Savitri herself does not know as yet. This is because she has to rise to the occasion and understand the meaning of her birth and fulfil her life's mission. Only the crisis of Satyavan's death can bring that to the fore. Since she is born a mortal like all of us, she has also to carry the yoke of mortality, has to carry the burden of being human.

There are two or three passages here in which Narad sort of mixes up all kinds of religious symbolism. He talks about Christ here, 'The Son of God born as the Son of man,' carrying his cross in Calvary, scorned and wounded. He also talks about Mansoor al Hallaj, who was the great Sufi mystic from Persia, crucified because he dared to say 'I am the Truth.' He offended the orthodox and was put to death at the orders of the Caliph, who was no doubt guided by Ulema. He was quartered and cut into pieces in the public square in Baghdad; it is believed that every part of his dismembered body cried out its oneness with God.

Sri Aurobindo also mentions one more person here – maybe it is himself – someone who is to come later and change the way the whole system works, change the law as it were, re-order life on earth as we know it. It would be interesting to know what other commentators on *Savitri* have to say about these lines:

*One yet may come armoured, invincible;
His will immobile meets the mobile hour;
The world's blows cannot bend that victor head;
Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night;*

*The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace,
He turns not to high voices in the Night.
He asks no aid from the inferior gods;
His eyes are fixed on the immutable aim.* (Savitri, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.449)

At least the biography of Sri Aurobindo on the Sri Aurobindo Society web-page seems to think that they refer to Sri Aurobindo himself (<http://www.sriarobindo-society.org.in/sriauro/aurolif1.htm>; accessed 18th December 2010).

Then the Canto ends, rather abruptly, as does Book VI.

*He spoke and ceased and left the earthly scene.
Away from the strife and suffering on our globe,
He turned towards his far-off blissful home.* (Ibid, p.462)

In just three lines Narad leaves and returns to the heavens. He has done his job. It is then that Savitri's ordeal and struggle begin.

Let us now look at some of the passages from the Canto in greater detail. What happens to the queen when she hears Narad's prognostications? She loses her composure, what Sri Aurobindo calls 'the empire of her hard-won quietude'. This is how her 'fall' from calm is described by Sri Aurobindo:

*Awhile she fell to the level of human mind,
A field of mortal grief and Nature's law;
She shared, she bore the common lot of men
And felt what common hearts endure in Time.* (Ibid, p.437)

The question she asks is not just her own doubt, but actually earth's question. So

*Voicing earth's question to the inscrutable power
The queen now turned to the still immobile seer:
Assailed by the discontent in Nature's depths,
Partner in the agony of dumb driven things
And all the misery, all the ignorant cry,
Passionate like sorrow questioning heaven she spoke.* (Ibid)

Thus, full of passionate questioning, she asks Narad

*By what pitiless adverse Necessity
Or what cold freak of a Creator's will,
By what random accident or governed Chance
That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,
Made destiny from an hour's emotion, came
Into the unreadable mystery of Time
The direr mystery of grief and pain?* (Ibid, pp.437-8)

So this is the question: why, by what chance or necessity, or even Divine caprice, did grief and pain enter the world, or to put it more plainly, who created grief and pain and how did the twain come to earthly life? Carrying on this vain, she asks, even more searchingly, almost in rebellious anguish,

Is it thy God who made this cruel law? (Ibid, p.438)

It is the same problem that all religions have asked or tried to explain. If God is all-good, then who created evil?

Who created pain and suffering? If everything comes from God, then God must be responsible for all this too. Sri Aurobindo answers that question in a different way here. He says through Narad:

Thou art thyself the author of thy pain (Ibid, p.454)

What a dramatic declaration this is. Which one of us who has suffered can accept this? We always think that someone else, even Fate or chance, is responsible for our pain. We are ever innocent; we have done nothing to cause it. Like Job, we even question and blame God. But Sri Aurobindo says, it is not God, it's you yourself who have created this, you chose this, you meaning 'we', individually but also collectively, to suggest that manner or the terms by which creation took place. The queen continues:

*Is it thy God who made this cruel law?
Or some disastrous Power has marred his work
And he stands helpless to defend or save?
A fatal seed was sown in life's false start
When evil twinned with good on earthly soil.* (Ibid, p.438)

She is asking a profound question. Has creation itself gone wrong? Was the whole design flawed to begin with?

Was it that right at the beginning, along with good, something else – like its twin, its doppel-gänger, its double – was also born? So, if there is good, there is also evil, pain with pleasure, misery with happiness. Was there a mistake at the very beginning or, worse, has somebody else interfered in between?

This notion of interference you find in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where God sets creation into motion. But then there is Satan and Satan is a fallen angel. God asks all the angels to bow down or respect man, whom, he says, he created in his own image. All of them agree except one called Satan or Shaitan depending on the tradition. So Satan, the accuser, obstructor, but above all, the tempter, becomes this interfering, intervening intermediary who tries to subvert or change God's plan.

The queen also admits that it is we who create so many problems ourselves. She talks about the mind of human beings and how the mind creates so many difficulties. The story of *Savitri* is set in prehistoric, olden days, in ancient times, even before the Mahabharata because it is narrated in the Mahabharata; so it must have happened long before. But the queen here speaks as if she is predicting the future because she talks of modern science. This is one of the many passages in which Sri Aurobindo takes a dig at science.

*His science is an artificer of doom;
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;
He slays his happiness and others' good.
Nothing he has learned from Time and its history;
Even as of old in the raw youth of Time,
When Earth ignorant ran on the highways of Fate,
Old forms of evil cling to the world's soul:* (Ibid, p.440)

She thus acknowledges how the human mind has itself created a hell. "The mind can make a heaven out of hell or a hell out of heaven" says Satan in Book II of

Paradise Lost, after he is thrown into hell. He pretends not to care; he is defiant, trying to rally all the fallen angels to his command; after all, "it is better to rule in hell than serve in heaven"! It is all in the mind after all.

Knowing the tremendously destructive power of the mind, the queen observes:

An idiot hour destroys what centuries made, (Ibid)

Things take so long to build, but can be destroyed in an instant; such is man's foolishness. She thus describes the other follies that we often commit:

*War making naught the sweet smiling calm of life,
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre
Are still the fierce pastimes of man's warring tribes;
An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought
And the mighty output of a nation's toil.* (Ibid)

It is as if she is predicting the devastation wrought by a nuclear bomb, which was first used in August 1945, during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. So, an atom bomb or a hydrogen bomb or a nuclear device, can, in a few minutes, destroy what has taken centuries to build. She talks about the immense power of science, its capacity to destroy in a few minutes what may have taken thousands of years to make.

Is this how God made us, she wants to know so that one day we would destroy ourselves, render the whole experiment useless? Then she returns to her original question:

*What need had the soul of ignorance and tears?
Whence rose the call for sorrow and for pain?
Or all came helplessly without a cause?* (Ibid, p.441)

Remember that all these questions are asked in the context of what Savitri is to suffer when Satyavan, her lover, her chosen mate, dies. It is thus a loving mother's heart that questions God's plan.

But these are also questions that Sri Aurobindo himself frequently asked. We must not forget that Sri Aurobindo, as a young man, started off as an agnostic, even an atheist, certainly not as a man of faith. It was only later he started seeing the divine purpose. When he was in England as a young man, he thought it was all meaningless, this world of men and machines. It seemed as if chance or accident ruled human destinies. We were a minor and inconsequential part of a larger design which was governed by Necessity, by natural laws, the so-called laws of science. It was as if these laws determined everything; there was no purpose beyond them. Even nowadays there is a big debate about evolution and creation. From being vulgar creationists, the believers have moved to something more sophisticated called intelligent design.

The queen, too, is asking questions like that – what was the point of bringing us upon earth and giving us consciousness if it is all meaningless, if we destroy ourselves, if we are going to live lives filled with pain and sorrow on this earth?

*What hard impersonal Necessity
Compels the vain toil of brief living things?* (Ibid, p.442)

We are born, we go through the different stages of life, and we die. What for? What is the point of it all?

At first, Narad is silent; then after a pause, he starts giving his response. It is his reply that contains some everlasting, even secret knowledge, as articulated and shared with us by Sri Aurobindo. Narad begins by asking:

Was then the sun a dream because there is night? (Ibid)

In other words, does darkness falsify the reality of light? Is truth falsified because there are lies? Or to take it beyond the metaphor, just because there is pain does it mean that the soul is not eternal?

Narad's approach, then, is not to deny that pain and suffering exist, but he questions if they constitute the final truth of who we are.

Let us compare this, again, with the Buddha's doctrine. Some people call it a bit negative because his four noble truths assert the reality of *dukkha*, of suffering, but they do not assert the reality of *ananda* or joy. Ironically, his number one disciple was called Ananda. Why didn't he say that the great truth of our life is *ananda*, which we can reach if we renounce craving? But he does not say this; he starts with *dukkha*. That is why some people say that the Vedic religion or Vedic spirituality emphasises joy and immortality, not suffering and death. The Vedic seers envisioned the ultimate reality as Sat-Chit-Ananda or Truth, Reality and Bliss. So *ananda* is the very fount of the Vedic view. They tell you that there is *ananda* in everything, in all experiences. The basis of sensory experience itself is joy. Even in pain there is joy. It is said that one of the greatest pains is the labour of child-birth, but even in that there is bliss, even in that extreme pain. Perhaps, Narad is also hinting at something like that:

*A darkness stands between thyself and him,
Thou canst not hear or feel the marvellous Guest,
Thou canst not see the beatific sun.
O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.* (Ibid)

This, then, is the cause of ignorance. It is a kind of veiling. There is a curtain that hides your mind from the inner reality of the Self, of the soul or the psyche. In Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the discovery of the psychic being is very, very important. You have to discover that part of yourself which is actually eternal and which doesn't die with the body. When you stop thinking of yourself as this mind-body complex, you start thinking of yourself in a different way. It is then that your spiritual life begins.

Here, this is what is being alluded to. This veiling, these sheaths, these *koshas*, veil you from that inner light. Even in the Vedas the symbolism of veiling is very important. Likewise, in Bhakti literature too, Kabir says in his famous composition, *ghunghat ke pat khol rey tujhe piya milenge*. Open the *purdah*, the *ghunghat* and then you see that the beloved is inside. So the veiling is a metaphor that you find throughout the Indian spiritual tradition. The idea is that there is the Truth, the Reality of the undying Self and then there is the veil of ignorance.

But where there is ignorance, there must be sorrow. Narad says:

Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come: (Ibid, p.443)

Narad now gives the cause for pain and suffering. And that is nothing but ignorance. Ignorance, mind you, not sin as in the Judeo-Christian worldview. In a way, this is what the Buddha also said: suffering is caused by ignorance and the biggest ignorance is craving. There is craving and then there is clinging. Craving means you do not have something, so you want it, you long for it. For some people it is material craving, for others it is more subtle, emotional or even spiritual. Clinging is when once you have it, you don't want to lose it. It's like somebody you love is dying on you and you can't deal with that. So you say why, why is this happening to me, why is God so cruel? So you cling. In brief, you crave for what you don't have and you cling to what you have.

All this, ultimately, is a form of ignorance. It is very easy to sit here and talk about it but when it happens it is really very bad. You forget all this, forget all the philosophy and wisdom, giving yourself to suffering like anyone one else. That is what the queen is going through just now. This great misfortune has befallen her child. She can't deal with it. She just plunges into grief, into that abyss.

Narad proceeds with his explanation:

*Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light;
Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience
Which was thy body's dumb original base;
Already slept there pain's subconscient shape:* (Ibid)

These lines reveal a truth which is very deep. If you look at some of creation stories in Hindu mythology, they say that Prajapati, the father, the progenitor, when he created the world, it was out of his own body. He divided himself. So in the first yajña, he offers himself. It is through pain as it were that the whole universe is born. Now Sri Aurobindo says

Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience (Ibid)

So once there is inconscience, pain will arise. Inconscience was a part of the first creation; naturally, pain too followed.

Now follow some very powerful lines:

*Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.* (Ibid)

So pain is the goad of the Gods, their *ankush*, the whip that they use to force us to change, to transform ourselves.

Without pain, as Sri Aurobindo says,

*His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun.* (Ibid)

Without pain, we wouldn't bother to question our lives. If life is too comfortable, we would never progress. In Sri Aurobindo's opinion, without struggle there is no progress, no evolution. And there's a wonderful line later when he is explaining all of this and he tells us:

*O man, the events that meet thee on thy road,
Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief,
Are not thy fate,.....* (Ibid, p.458)

He says that basically whatever events your life consists of do not matter; what is really important is how you grow, how you use these events for your evolution. Here he is saying that without pain there's no evolution, no growth. Then he explains:

He who would save the race must share its pain: (Ibid, p.445)

If you take human birth, then whatever human beings go through, you will have to go through even if you are an Avatar, an incarnation of God. You remember how Sri Rama, when Sita is abducted by Ravana, weeps and asks – it's a most moving passage in Valmiki – the birds, the trees, all of nature, where is Sita? Then finally Lakshman says don't you know who you are, have you forgotten? Remember yourself and cast off this unmanly grief. Then Rama returns to himself, picking up the bow to wage the war of Dharma. And see how Krishna's life ends, how his form is taken to be that of an animal and he is shot in his feet by a hunter. Sri Ramakrishna had cancer of the throat and even Sri Aurobindo had a fall and broke his hip bone. To explain all this, Sri Aurobindo says

*The Son of God born as the Son of man
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead's debt,
The debt the Eternal owes to the fallen kind
His will has bound to death and struggling life* (Ibid)

Obviously, the reference is to Jesus Christ. It is Narad speaking, but he is quite non-sectarian, though devoted to Vishnu. He goes on like this; he talks about the cross; he talks about Gethsemane and Calvary.

*He carries the cross on which man's soul is nailed;
His escort is the curses of the crowd;
Insult and jeer are his right's acknowledgement;
Two thieves slain with him mock his mighty death.* (Ibid)

All this is Christian. Then you also have an Islamic allusion, as I mentioned earlier, to Mansur Al Hallaj:

His crucified voice proclaims, 'I, I am God;' (Ibid, p.446)

This refers to Mansur.

'Yes, all is God,' peals back Heaven's deathless call. (Ibid)

Then there is the prediction.

*One yet may come armoured, invincible;
His will immobile meets the mobile hour;
The world's blows cannot bend that victor head;
Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night;
The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace,
He turns not to high voices in the night;
He asks no aid from the inferior gods;
His eyes are fixed on his immutable aim.
Man turns aside or chooses easier paths;
He keeps to the one high and difficult road
That sole can climb to the Eternal's peaks;
The ineffable planes already have felt his tread;* (Ibid, p.449)

This whole passage is about somebody who is going to come, who it is we don't

know but there is a prediction that someone is going to come, who will change all of this, who will change Fate and all that. Sri Aurobindo says

*Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
The world itself becomes his adversary,* (Ibid, p.448)

Those who strive to save the world must walk alone. This includes all the great mystics and sages. They are alone and they have to struggle alone just as later he tells us that Savitri too will have to struggle alone, with no one to help her. Even if the Gods know what she is going to accomplish, they cannot tell her not to worry, that it will be fine.

But she is going to have to suffer all by herself. So this is the secret law which Narad talks about.

But this is not the final truth; the final truth is one of hope, a promise of transformation:

*The superconscious beam shall touch men's eyes
And the truth-conscious world come down to earth
Invading Matter with the Spirit's ray,
Awaking its silence to immortal thoughts,
Awaking the dumb heart to the living Word.
This mortal life shall house Eternity's bliss,
The body's self taste immortality.
Then shall the world-redeemers' task be done.* (Ibid, p.451)

This is the promise of the divine life. Again and again, in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo assures us that we too will taste immortality in the body. He also says that the way is not the way of the titan:

*Haste not towards Godhead on a dangerous road,
Open not thy doorways to a nameless Power,
Climb not to Godhead by the Titan's road.* (Ibid)

We keep reading about such things in science fiction. We hear of cyborgs, of how people are to grow duplicate organs to find ways of living longer, of how we are going to extend our memory by having chips implanted, and so on. But that's the titan's way. Sri Aurobindo warns us against it:

*The Titan's heart is a sea of fire and force;
He exults in the death of things and the ruin and fall,
He feeds his strength with his own and others' pain;
In the world's pathos and passion he takes delight....* (Ibid, p.452)

What Sri Aurobindo is saying is that evolution is not going to happen in that mechanical, scientifically modified way, but it will happen in the spiritual way. He is telling you of the titan, the notion of the titan seizing power from the gods like Prometheus and he says that this will only lead to great pride and arrogance. That is not the spiritual way. The spiritual way is that of supramentalisation, which means that the Truth-Consciousness, the Higher Energy comes down and changes the way matter is.

*Till then must life carry its seed of death
And sorrow's plaint be heard in the slow Night."* (Ibid, p.451)

According to Narad, till the whole thing is modified, we will have to live like this again and again. Then he says

*“O mortal who complainst of death and Fate,
Accuse none of the harms thyself hast called;
This troubled world thou hast chosen for thy home,
Thou art thyself the author of thy pain.”* (Ibid, p.454)

Here we have a clue to what we might call Sri Aurobindo’s “theology.” Here too, there is a fall, as in Christian theology, even if it is somewhat different. Whereas in other Hindu philosophies, for example, in Ramana Maharshi, there is no fall; because it is *ajātavād*, there’s no creation, it’s always eternal Sachchidananda. There’s no evolution, no creation; the perfect life, the perfect world is always available to us all the time. So there are different ways of looking at this. But here, in Sri Aurobindo, there is an explanation given in the idea of the fascination that consciousness itself has for Inconscience.

Sri Aurobindo says:

*In a vast of Truth and Consciousness and Light
The soul looked out from its felicity.
It felt the Spirit’s interminable bliss,
It knew itself deathless, timeless, spaceless, one,
It saw the Eternal, lived in the Infinite.
Then, curious of a shadow thrown by Truth,
It strained towards some otherness of self,* (Ibid)

That is to say that the soul was happy and knew perfection and felicity and interminable bliss but it was fascinated by something, something other than happiness. It gave itself to that. It’s as if I am perfectly happy but just out of curiosity I want to know what unhappiness is like. This is what Narad is saying – it is an amazing expression:

It longed for the adventure of Ignorance (Ibid, p.455)

The adventure of Ignorance. Oh what a terrible, sorrowful adventure this is, which all of us have embarked upon! When will we outgrow it, to return to our original nature?

But, perhaps, we need to pass through this in order to appreciate what our true nature is. Hence this deadly adventure. Sri Aurobindo says that ignorance is an adventure just as Truth and Bliss are an adventure. That is why there is chaos and the inconscience, that is why there is involution. From the bliss of the Supreme, there is the involution. That is creation. It is as if God himself is curious about being other than himself. So he pushes himself into Matter, the opposite end of consciousness, but still does not cease to be conscious. From there, the long, tortuous process of evolution is launched, till God regains Himself.

That is where there is a fall, with ignorance and pain entering our world.

A huge descent began, a giant fall: (Ibid, p.456)

That is why I say that in Sri Aurobindo’s thought there is a fall. But unlike in Christianity, this fall is cyclical, a cyclical movement because time is eternal. This is how the great spiral operates. There’s involution, then there’s evolution, then there’s invo-

lution, and then again evolution. It’s like the *yugas*, the great ages or aeons in which creation proceeds. After Kali there will be another Satya Yuga, perhaps a greater one than the original Satya Yuga.

And after that there will be Dvapara and Treta. And so on. Thus, time is cyclical. It is not as if time’s arrow is pointing in one direction, from the Big bang to the end. It’s not like that here.

Now Aswapati, quietly intervening, asks if Fate cannot be changed. He knows and therefore prompts the heavenly seer to offer some palliative. Narad, ever the diplomat, answers “*covering truth with truth*” (p.456). Note that he doesn’t lie; no heavenly singer could be accused of blatant lies, but he doesn’t tell the whole truth either. Narad says that everything that happens to all of us is like a hieroglyphic. True, it is all already written, but then we don’t know the script. We have to discover it for ourselves. Because we do not know sometimes we lose faith. But those who know, know that the end is also certain. Thus he turns to Savitri’s Fate:

*It is decreed and Satyavan must die;
The hour is fixed, chosen the fatal stroke.
What else shall be is written in her soul* (Ibid, p.458)

Narad has told us about Satyavan’s death, but what else is going to happen he is not telling us, that is in Savitri’s soul, not to be revealed until the opportune moment:

*But till the hour reveals the Fateful script,
The writing waits illegible and mute.
Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance.* (Ibid)

Then Narad says something really wonderful. There is Fate, but you don’t have to agree with it! It reminds us of Iqbal who says *Khudi ko kar itna buland*, make your will strong that God himself is forced to consult you in what is to be done to you. Here Sri Aurobindo says that even if you lose, you don’t have to agree with Fate. Your defiance will not be totally wasted:

He writes thy refusal in thy credit page: (Ibid)

Though you are struggling and are going to lose this time, still it is noted that you have put up a good fight. You often see that in people struggling; for instance, they say, Oh, he went down, but he gave a really good fight. There is a next time, as the Gita assures us; we will get another chance. Even a little yoga goes a long way; it is never wasted. To repeat the lines I quoted earlier:

*O man, the events that meet thee on thy road,
Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief,
Are not thy Fate, — they touch thee awhile and pass;
Even death can cut not short thy spirit’s walk:
Thy goal, the road thou choosest are thy Fate.* (Ibid)

This is so significant. What Narad implies is that everybody goes through suffering; you can’t escape it. Also, no one’s life is really neat. There will be some mess or mishap. But the events that happen in your life are not important; even if you go through so much unhappiness, that is not your Fate, that is not who you are. So the actual story of your life is something else, something other than the events that make it up. These latter just touch you awhile and pass, but the intention of your soul, the

direction and the choices you make are the things that define who you are, that are really going to stick to you, that *are* you. That is how we may understand even the “deaths” of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: even if Sri Aurobindo and the Mother agreed to leave their bodies, basically they have already made up their minds that that will not be the end of their mission. They have already opened the door to the supramentalisation, so the work will be done, all in its own good time. After all,

Even death can cut not short thy spirit's walk: (Ibid)

Death is only an interregnum, an interval; then the journey is resumed. So the actual contents of life are not that important. What is important is the orientation of the life, and the orientation of life is ultimately towards the Divine because that is our true home. And so Narad tells the queen not to strive or fret or be miserable or try and change the decree of Fate. That this is how things are going to be; nobody can help her daughter for the time being.

Narad adds, as if in consolation,

*The great are strongest when they stand alone.
A God-given might of being is their force,
A ray from self's solitude of light the guide;
The soul that can live alone with itself meets God;
Its lonely universe is their rendezvous.
A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge.* (Ibid, pp.460-1)

This you see in other great souls, as for example in the case of Gandhiji being pushed out of the train in Petermaritzburg, all alone and freezing. He has a first class ticket, but he has been rudely kicked out of the compartment for being black. He is bewildered as this is the first week in his new job in a new country. He has no idea of the institutionalised racism of South Africa. He is all by himself. He wonders if he should pick up and leave.

But he says no, decides to stay and fight the injustice. The rest, as they say, is history.

This happens to all of us at some point or the other. It is a very important moment in your life. If you have never stood alone in life, you haven't been tested. There's a time when you will be completely alone and everybody who loves you, your parents or your children, whoever it is, they cannot help. You are just by yourself, but that is your real test. That will show your true mettle, what you are really made of. Sri Aurobindo says

The great are strongest when they stand alone. (Ibid)

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore has a very beautiful song ‘*Jodi tor dak shuney keu na ashey tobey ekla chalo rey.*’ He says even if nobody listens to your call, walk alone. It makes you think: do we have it in ourselves to walk alone? Of course nobody wants

to do that, but that's when you find out who you are. So he asks the queen not to fret and be sad.

*O queen, stand back from that stupendous scene,
Come not between her and her hour of Fate.* (Ibid, p.461)

Narad is telling her not to intercede, not to beg, or even pray. It's like when something happens to us and we don't want to accept it, we are tempted to keep trying to change the laws of God. Narad advises her not to do that, but to let be, to let Savitri meet and front her Fate without interference.

He speaks a few more lines and then he simply disappears. He is like

*A brilliant arrow pointing straight to heaven,
The luminous body of the ethereal seer
Assailed the purple glory of the noon
And disappeared like a receding star
Vanishing into the light of the Unseen.* (Ibid, p.462)

These are beautiful lines indeed, but you also wonder if Sri Aurobindo makes Narad's exit into a sort of metaphor.

There's a powerful poem by Sri Aurobindo called ‘*Thought the Paraclete*’. In that poem Sri Aurobindo tells you it is true that the mind is limited, but the mind alone can recognise its limitations; that limited mind touches something higher than itself and then is prompted to disappear into the ‘*vasts of God*’. Narad too disappears, but his body leaves a luminous trace behind, like that of ‘*a brilliant arrow*’. It is as if people on earth can see that arrow and where it is pointing. They take solace in the fact that there is a higher world up there and they may aspire for it, not so much to escape to it, but to bring it down to earth:

*But still a cry was heard in the infinite,
And still to the listening soul on mortal earth
A high and far imperishable voice
Chanted the anthem of eternal love.* (Ibid)

‘*Eternal love*’—the last words of the Canto remind us, once again, what *Savitri* is about. It is, after all, an epic which portrays the triumph of Love over Death. This is no ordinary love, of course, but it begins with the same impulse as most human embodies, such as a wife's love for her husband. But then this love is exalted into a divine principle. The conquest of Death becomes a symbol of the Greater Dawn that is prophesied at the beginning of the epic.

It is the attraction of that Greater Dawn that has drawn us to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Note

[1] I owe this insight to Shri Prashant Khanna of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.

(Based on the transcript of a talk delivered at the Sri Aurobindo Society, Singapore, on 17th October 2010)

The Descent Of Knowledge In *Savitri*

Sonia Dyne

“The sign of dawning Knowledge is to feel that as yet I know little or nothing; and yet, if I could only know my knowledge, I already possess everything.” (Thoughts and Aphorisms, SABCL, vol.17, p.87) Sri Aurobindo’s brilliant aphorism is a sharp reminder that despite the avalanche of information available to us in the contemporary world, our ideas about knowledge itself are still rudimentary and largely unexamined. The ‘dawning Knowledge’ he refers to is the emergence into earth-existence of a supramental consciousness and its incalculable consequences for both the human and the natural world. This is the knowledge sought by King Aswapati in *Savitri*, is veiled from us, and may be beyond our present ability even to conceive, for we do not ‘know our knowledge’ or have a satisfactory explanation of where it comes from.

‘How do I know?’ is a simple question on the face of it. However, it is a curious feature of English usage that even the slightest shift of emphasis to the ‘I’ transforms this question into an affirmation of ignorance. ‘How do I know?’ in everyday speech is commonly understood as an alternative way of saying ‘I don’t know’. Only philosophers, professors of linguistics and psychologists can expect a serious response to this question when speaking in the context of their own special expertise. It is as if we feel a little uncomfortable about asking ourselves how we know things—the ray of human intelligence, so eager to de-construct and analyse, does not like to be directed inwards upon itself. As a perceptive poet observed: *‘We are not very securely at home in our interpreted world.’* Somehow we sense, but do not see, intangible energies at work over which we have no control.

In a letter written to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo examines a root cause of our insecurity:

“What we know of ourselves, our present conscious existence, is only a representative formation, a superficial activity, a changing result of a vast mass of concealed existence. Our visible life and the actions of that life are no more than a series of significant expressions, but that which it tries to express is not on the surface; our existence is something much larger than this apparent frontal being which we suppose ourselves to be and which we offer to the world around us. His frontal and external being is a confused amalgam of mind-formations, life movements, physical functionings of which even an exhaustive analysis of its component parts and machinery fails to reveal the whole secret. It is only when we go behind, below, above into the hidden

stretches of our being that we can know it; the most thorough and acute surface scrutiny cannot give us the true understanding or the completely effective control of our life, its purposes, its activities; that inability indeed is the cause of the failure of reason, morality and every other surface action to control and deliver and perfect the life of the human race.”

Traditions and myths handed down from past generations (the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge is a good example) often warn against seeking greater knowledge, because it is perceived as somehow threatening to Man’s well-being and contentment. That greater knowledge might bring about a calamity, as it did when Adam and Eve lost their divine gift of immortality and were plunged into our familiar world of suffering and death. Or it might turn out to be unbearable, a fierce wind from heaven demolishing our fragile conjectures and sweeping away familiar landmarks in the landscape of our thoughts until nothing remains but uncharted wilderness. No wonder we prefer to make a joke about it: *‘knowledge is knowing that the tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in the fruit salad’*—so that any serious debate ends with laughter and relief.

What do we mean by ‘knowledge’? Is it only the sum total of all the information recorded and stored up over generations by the human mind? Most people would accept that it is, discounting future knowledge on the grounds that it does not yet exist. They might add that we have an inborn instinct for survival and we recognise the right of religious tradition to insist that knowledge comes ultimately from God in the form of natural law or by means of direct revelation. None of this prepares us for the radically different concept revealed by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. He has taken an ancient legend and turned it into a potent symbol to express a truth of existence that cannot be fully grasped by the still evolving human mind or fully expressed in words. He does this by using the intuitive language of *sight*: a concrete imagery which evokes our living experience to *‘bypass the ways of thought’*. In his role of narrator, Sri Aurobindo relates the events of his story from a double perspective so that the action moves between the timeless reality of the spiritual planes and human existence in time, with the effect that all is presented as a seamless unity. The transition is always abrupt with the *“suddenness divine events have”*, reflecting a new and unfamiliar way of experiencing time.

Supermind is the name given by Sri Aurobindo to this highest formulation of knowledge; its descent into the plane of Earth and emergence in an evolving humanity is a major theme in *Savitri*. More than that, the poem itself is a powerful illustration of the supermind-consciousness at work using the intuitive levels of mind to communicate through a threefold instrumentation: the legend of Savitri and Satyavan itself; a poetic language of powerful images and signs; a subtext of symbolism casting its light on the underlying spiritual meaning of the unfolding action and the many descriptive passages. All these together (and they cannot readily be separated) constitute *“a revelation of spiritual significances, a support for our spiritual growth and the evolution of spiritual capacity and experience.”* (The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, vol.21, p.848)

Knowledge for Sri Aurobindo has its origin in a divine Omniscience, and is therefore eternally present in all the planes of existence, down to the most material. In *The*

Synthesis of Yoga he makes this clear: “If the spirit is everywhere, even in matter – in fact matter itself is only an obscure form of the spirit – and if the supermind is the universal power of the spirit’s omnipresent self-knowledge organising all the manifestation of the being, then in matter and everywhere there must be present a supramental action and, however concealed it may be by another, lower and obscurer kind of operation, yet when we look close we shall find that it is really the supermind which organises matter, life mind and reason. And this actually is the knowledge towards which we are now moving.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, vol.21, p.764)

His epic poem first follows the progress of the seeker Aswapati through all the planes where Mind has a form accessible to human intelligence, venturing even beyond into regions previously inaccessible to human experience, where Mind the thinker ‘sleeps in too much light’. His quest is to find the source of Knowledge in an absolute, not a partial Truth, first to satisfy his own aspiration, and later to release humankind from bondage to death. It is a journey full of surprises from the beginning, obliging us to review the conventional wisdom of our age and see ourselves and our world in an entirely new light.

The first revelation is to discover that Sri Aurobindo makes no clear distinction between knowledge and ignorance, choosing to view them, not as opposites, but as two aspects of single and eternal power, divine in its origin. As human beings, subject to the constraints of our three dimensional existence, we assume ignorance to be a condition that comes before knowledge. In contrast, Sri Aurobindo perceives an eternal Knowledge as the pre-existent condition, with ignorance only an illusion caused by our inability to receive it in its fullness. Throughout *Savitri* we find that Sri Aurobindo speaks of knowledge and ignorance in the same context, as if, like pain and joy, they were ‘born in the same caul’. His vision, unlike human thought which thrives on division, tends always towards synthesis and admits no contraries. Just as death is only a disguise of the divine Love which alone exists, so too there is only one Knowledge, single and absolute, embracing and reconciling within itself all possible theories and interpretations.

Seemingly it was the omniscient Goddess, the Supramental Knowledge, in the guise of Ignorance and under the heaviest of veils, who first awakened our material universe when Earth ‘wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs’, ushering in the advent of a new evolution. The story of *Savitri* opens with a powerful evocation of that significant moment, presenting our planet as it might appear in some remote past, to a witness eye far out in space. It is a planet apparently quite dead, but carrying within itself a buried seed of life and mind awaiting its destined hour:

*Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.*

(*Savitri*, 4th ed, 1993, pp.1-2)

Seeking to know itself on the Earth plane, the divine Knowledge re-awakens a sleeping urge in Matter to build once again the spiral stair of intelligent life, so that the divine consciousness may be established there:

*Ambadress twixt eternity and change,
The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths
That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars
And saw the spaces ready for her feet.* (Ibid, p.4)

Sri Aurobindo seems to imply that the experiment of human life on earth has been tried before. A distant memory of that long-forgotten past survives in the All-Knowledge transcending time:

*It was as though even in this Nought’s profound,
Even in this ultimate dissolution’s core,
There lurked an unremembering entity,
Survivor of a slain and buried past
Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
Reviving in another frustrate world.* (Ibid, p.2)

The opening passage of *Savitri* must be unique in literature, for no other poet has so effectively induced in us an experience of un-knowing. Opaque, impenetrable, fathomless, featureless, inscrutable—the list of descriptive adjectives goes on and on until it seems that he has exhausted all the resources of the language. He evokes not only a dark and lifeless planet but also a state of consciousness shrouded in ignorance. We are invited to experience directly for ourselves the absence of understanding, and to set aside all previous ideas and opinions in preparation for the new world-vision that will be revealed. Sri Aurobindo is illustrating in this opening canto some of the characteristics of the supramental consciousness – the wideness of vision embracing vast distances in space and time, the knowledge by identity which brings a concrete experience of the object of attention, the supramental sight which lends a special radiance to all things suddenly seen as forms of the Divine. It is a necessary preparation, for without a willing suspension of the mind’s tendency to raise objections we will not be able to follow the yoga of Aswapati as he moves through ranges of consciousness closed to us in the present stage of our evolution. The higher knowledge will not reveal itself under the conditions of doubt and denial imposed by Falsehood. As Sri Aurobindo wrote: “by knowledge we mean in yoga not thought or ideas about spiritual things but psychic understanding from within and spiritual illumination from above.” (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, p.1113)

Experiencing for himself on each plane the form that conscious knowledge assumes there, the seeker Aswapati strips away one by one the veils of ignorance binding him to his mortal condition. He comes to see and experience Truth-Knowledge as an active creative force in the evolution of Mankind. We soon discover that he is no ordinary seeker: in him, powers that sleep unused within the human breast, Man’s divine birth-right, have come forward to be ‘annexed to the mortal scheme’:

*A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time.
For him mind’s limiting firmament ceased above.
In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day
A gap was rent in the all-concealing vault;
The conscious ends of being went rolling back:*

*The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent.
Overpassed was this world of rigid limiting forms:
Life's barriers opened into the unknown."* (Savitri, 4th ed, 1993, p.25)

Here, on our material plane, the action of Knowledge works always to reveal our full potential as human beings, to remind us that *'this deathbound littleness is not all we are'*. As the inner countries veiled from our sight open to Aswapati, his gaze embraces at a single glance the *'triple stride'* of time which for us divides into past, present and future. The illusion of separate being is abolished and a seamless knowledge replaces the rigid sequences of mental logic. Release from ignorance is the first spiritual change, the beginning of the journey:

*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 the movements that exceed our ken,
He grew one with a covert universe.* (Ibid, p.44)

The opening cantos of *Savitri, The Book of Beginnings*, contain some of the most beautiful poetry ever written in English, created by the need to put an inexpressible experience into words. The beauty of the language points to something wonderful that eludes our grasp like a dream half-remembered on waking, especially when the subject is Savitri herself as the embodiment of a spiritual Truth. A warm radiance emanates from the passages where Sri Aurobindo describes the glory of the natural world, pointing to the unique importance of the Earth in the cosmic scheme, for Man is the chosen vehicle of a great evolutionary leap culminating in the establishment of a divine Life on Earth. Aswapati undergoes a transformation which enables him to see and experience the cosmic forces at work. He feels a oneness with everything encountered on his path, the first manifestation of a new kind of knowledge, a promise of power to come — knowledge by identity. But human aspiration alone cannot take Aswapathy into the inner countries, a sanction is needed from the heights:

*His being towered into pathless heights,
Naked of its vesture of humanity.
As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leapt down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
His nature shuddered in the Unknown's grasp.*

*In a moment shorter than death, longer than Time
By a power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and bourneless change.* (Ibid, pp.80-81)

Thus it was that Aswapati *'broke into another space and time'*. Nearest to Earth in the hierarchy of planes is the world of subtle matter, where Knowledge sleeps in the perfection of form. It is a world of extraordinary beauty:

*Whatever is here of visible charm and grace
Finds there its faultless and immortal lines;
All that is beautiful here is there divine.* (Ibid, p.104)

That perfect world of crystal air is in many ways the template for our fallen Earth, but its very fixity, shutting out the possibility of error, also shuts out *'the shadows of the immeasurable'* and in this closed space Knowledge cannot build a house for limitless mind:

*Assigned as Force to a bound corner-Mind,
Attached to the safe paucity of her room,
She did her little works and played and slept
And thought not of a greater work undone.* (Ibid, p.114)

The Seeker does not linger here. In his search for *'hidden powers and other states'* he will pass through the kingdoms of life and mind and even go down into the dark nether world of falsehood where true knowledge is twisted and deformed to serve the ends of hostile and non-human agencies. This darkness is presented in *Savitri* as a terrible basement of the house of Life, the prototype of all the hells that Man has imagined or created.

The Kingdom of Life opens to him in all its turbulence and unrestrained creative power. There he encounters the archetypal energies and forces that have shaped the evolution of the Earth, and enters into other worlds bordering our own. The whole history of life on Earth is displayed to his witness eye; he understands the immense creative power of thought and its role; he uncovers the mystery of the fall of Life from its divine origin. Life was not meant to be a vale of tears, it was created to express an infinite delight and joy:

*Smiling like a new-born child at love and hope,
In her nature housing the Immortal's power,
In her bosom bearing the eternal Will,
No guide she needed but her luminous heart:
No fall debased the godhead of her steps,
No alien Night had come to blind her eyes.* (Ibid, p.128)

How then had mortal Life fallen under the influence of an alien Night? How had suffering and death found their way into the divine plan? In his need to know, Aswapati probes the depths of hell. Armed only with the light of his own divine soul, he is confronted by the dreadful inhabitants of that darkness: “*Vast minds and lives without a spirit within.*” He endures the attack of weapons designed to bring about an inner death more radical than physical mortality — the separation of life and mind from the soul:

*Captured and trailed in Falsehood's lethal net
And often strangled in the noose of grief,
Or cast in the grim morass of swallowing doubt,
Or shut into pits of error and despair,
He drank her poison draughts till none was left.
In a world where neither hope nor joy could come
The ordeal he suffered of evil's absolute reign,
Yet kept intact his spirit's radiant truth.*

(Ibid, p.230)

Suddenly from the impenetrable blackness there comes a marvellous release: Aswapati understands the ‘*secret key of Nature's change*’ — the darkness is revealed as a lie, having no right of existence in an ultimate Reality. Falsehood is the shadow cast by the divine freedom to exhaust all possibilities of existence, and by bringing the light of Truth down into those depths the terrible illusion is dispelled: “*Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream*”. Like Shiva, he has drained the ocean of poison and now he awakens as from a nightmare, opening his eyes to a paradise, an Overmind kingdom of the gods, where he tastes an immortal bliss that generates the worlds. This too must be left behind, far ahead the stair still climbs upwards and he must follow it until his work is done and the highest Knowledge gained. In the far distance, “*large lucent realms of Mind from stillness shone.*”

Aswapati finds himself in a borderland, where he is a witness to the dawning of knowledge and the slow emergence of Mind in Nature and evolving Man. He follows the progress of the instruments devised by Nature in those parts, the ‘*dwarf three-bodied trilogy*’ of a limited power of thought, a chaotic unrestrained intelligence driven by desire and greed, and finally reason. This latest instrument of Knowledge, reason, attempts in vain to master and codify into “*word-webs of abstract thought*” the tumultuous phenomena of life. In this region of the mind-plane, which in many ways resembles our own world, there is hardly room for the greater Knowledge to come down:

*There comes no breaking of the walls of mind,
There leaps no rending flash of absolute power,
There dawns no light of heavenly certitude.
A million faces wears her knowledge here
And every face is turbaned with a doubt.*

(Ibid, p.251)

Something is always missing, something half glimpsed in the pauses of thought, or felt in the heart's deep core. Aswapati continues to search for this Truth that has no name, but always it eludes him. Even on the loftiest summits of the Self of Mind, where he first discovers the divine origin of thought, he finds a corrosive doubt that “*smote at*

the very roots of thought and sense.” He prepares to put behind him these planes of Mind: “*Our sweet and mighty Mother was not there.*” He will find Her at last in the Soul of the World:

*At the beginning of each far-spread plane
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.
Above them all she stands supporting all,
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask;
The ages are the footfalls of her tread,
Their happenings the figure of her thoughts,
And all creation is her endless act.
His spirit was made a vessel of her force;
Mute in the fathomless passion of his will
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.*

(Ibid, p.295)

Aswapati has reached the first goal of yoga, a vision of the Divine Mother to whom he surrenders his whole heart and mind. The long pilgrimage is almost over, the mission soon to be accomplished. He enters at last the *Kingdom of the Greater Knowledge* as one who has become the voice of aspiring Earth, in the full consciousness of his role as the human instrument of the Mother. He has passed the limits of human thought and has earned the right to access not only the most luminous heights of the plane of Knowledge, but also, as a corollary to this right, to unseal the hidden powers of Knowledge within his own soul:

*His privilege regained of shadowless sight
The Thinker entered the immortals' air
And drank again his pure and mighty source.
Immutable in rhythmic calm and joy
He saw, sovereignly free in limitless light,
The unfallen planes, the thought-created worlds
Where Knowledge is the leader of the act
And Matter is of thinking substance made,*

(Ibid, pp.263-4)

On the summits of this supreme Knowledge-world, he finds the sovereign Kings of Thought “*surveying the enormous work of time.*” All knowledge that reaches us emanates from this ultimate source:

*A great all-ruling Consciousness is there
And Mind unwitting serves a higher Power;
It is a channel, not the source of all.
The cosmos is no accident in Time;
There is a meaning in each play of Chance,
There is a freedom in each face of Fate.
A wisdom knows and guides the mystieried world;
A Truth-gaze shapes its beings and events;*

*A Word self-born upon creation's heights,
Voice of the Eternal in the temporal spheres,
Prophet of the seeings of the Absolute,
Sows the Idea's significance in Form*

And from that seed the growths of Time arise. (Ibid, p.271)

Glimpses of the supramental plane dawn upon his sight; and he feels himself “an equal of the first creator seers” — the Rishis of Vedic times. The mystery of the descent of Knowledge has been opened to him; he has reached the end of all that can be known. Knowledge, no longer veiled, is revealed in an original plenitude of Oneness with the divine Love:

*Here came the thought that passes beyond Thought,
Here the still Voice which our listening cannot hear,
The Knowledge by which the Knower is the Known,
The Love in which beloved and lover are one.* (Ibid, pp. 297-8)

But there is more to be done, for now Love imposes its own claim upon his heart, and his destiny calls him towards a supreme sacrifice of all that he has gained:

*On a dizzy verge where all disguises fail
And human mind must abdicate in Light
Or die like a moth in the naked blaze of Truth,
He stood compelled to a tremendous choice.
All he had been and all towards which he grew
Must now be left behind or else transform
Into a self of That which has no name.* (Ibid, pp.306-7)

He can know all things created by identity with them, but the self-existent Divine “the One by whom all live, who lives by none” he cannot know while any remnant of separate self remains. At this critical point in the poem we recall the luminous opening lines of Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother*:

There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers. But the supreme Grace will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and the Ignorance. For if it were to yield to the demands of the Falsehood, it would defeat its own purpose.

In Aswapati the conditions have been fulfilled by his final surrender of all that he is to the Mother. He has passed unscathed through the ordeal of the descent into Night; he has torn away the last veil of Ignorance. A supreme Grace answers his appeal and the Mother reveals her face. Although in her presence all the knowledge he has gained seems insignificant, still the prayer he has carried in his heart for so long can be spoken:

*“Mission to earth some living form of Thee”.
But now his being was too wide for self;
His heart's demand had grown immeasurable:
His single freedom could not satisfy,* (Ibid, p. 345)

*Her light, her bliss he asked for earth and men.
But vain are human life and human love
To break earth's seal of ignorance and death;
His nature's might seemed now an infant's grasp;
Heaven is too high for outstretched hands to seize.
This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength.*

A Power that lives upon the heights must act, (Ibid, p.315)

All the wisdom that knowledge can bring is summed up in these last five lines. Yet the question *How do I know?* with which this enquiry started, has not yet been fully answered. We have discovered only that the real answer is not to be found by any process of thought or feeling: both mind and heart must fall silent.

There is another way of Knowledge revealed by Sri Aurobindo through the symbol of the love between Savitri and Satyavan. We know that their union represents the relationship between the divine love incarnate in Savitri and the human soul in Satyavan. This love, taking human nature into itself, alone has the power to liberate Mankind from suffering and death in a world of false appearances. Savitri's yoga is a search for the soul, or psychic being, hidden in each of us behind a veil, to bring it forward in its characteristic action of love as leader of the life and mind. Sri Aurobindo presents the coming forward of the soul as an essential preliminary to the advent of the supramental consciousness in Man. He says: “*If the psychic entity had been from the beginning unveiled and known to its ministers, not a secluded King in a screened chamber, the human evolution would have been a rapid soul-outflowing, not the difficult, chequered and disfigured development it now is, but the veil is thick and we know not the secret light within us, the light in the hidden crypt of the heart's innermost sanctuary.*” (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, p.892)

It is as if, by dividing his poem into two parts, Sri Aurobindo had wished to compare a past and a future way of knowledge. Aswapati takes the traditional path, ascending through ranges of mind and then transcending them, to reach a consciousness bordering the supramental which he sees, but cannot bring down into the human world. Only the divine *Shakti* taking human birth in Savitri can do this. The story of her love for Satyavan can easily be read as a parable of the dawning of a supramental consciousness in Mankind and this was no doubt Sri Aurobindo's intention, using a sustained power of imagination to evoke “*a supereminent revelation of that which is behind the image or symbol.*” As we follow the story of Savitri from her birth and childhood, marriage to Satyavan and subsequent battle against the forces of suffering, death and dissolution, we can see that Sri Aurobindo is showing us at the same time a picture of the emergence of Supermind in its characteristic mode of action. Everything that happens to Savitri, and everything she does, is indicative of the action of supermind emerging in the context of a human life, beginning with the coming forward of the human soul from behind the veil to supplant the old instrumentation of Life and Mind:

“as Mind is established here on a basis of Ignorance seeking for Knowledge and growing into Knowledge, so Supermind must be established here on a basis of Knowledge growing into its own greater Light. But this cannot be, so long as the spiritual-mental being has not risen fully to Supermind and brought down its powers into terrestrial existence. For the gulf between Mind and Supermind has to be bridged, the closed passages opened and roads of ascent and descent created where there is now a void and a silence.... there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with it there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation – there must take place, as the crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.” (The Life Divine, SABCL, pp.890-91)

Savitri's yoga offers a unique insight into the progress of a future evolution of consciousness. Her birth is a divine event comparable with the first awakening of life on Earth, as it was described in the opening canto of Book One. All Nature rejoices at this birth, and manifests the joy of being, the *ananda*, through the perfection of physical forms. A new light radiates from the natural world in anticipation of Savitri who “*has made her soul the body of our state*.” Through all the descriptive passages, like an undercurrent, runs the theme of Nature's yearning and response, reminding us once more that the ‘divine event’ will have its effect on every level of being, down to the Inconscient:

*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.*

.....
Translating heaven into a human shape (Ibid, p.353)

Just as Nature smiles upon the divine child, so Savitri is loved and cherished by the people who are close to her. And yet, “*although she longed to make them one with God and world and her*” they could not fully embrace the wonder that they glimpsed:

*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.* (Ibid, p.363)

While he elaborates the ancient legend with all the skill of a master poet, Sri Aurobindo never loses track of its symbolic aspect. *The Birth and Childhood of the Flame* can be read as legend or seen as a picture of the divine Word and its reception by the world of men. A few respond with adoration and awe; others with the desire to harness this greatness to their own small needs and purposes; and there are those “*inapt to meet divinity so close*” by whom it is barely tolerated. At the same time Savitri's birth into the world and her growth into adulthood is an image of the emergence and growth of the supramental consciousness. Savitri comes as the bearer of this divine gift, but even in that “*golden age*” of the past in which the story is set “*none could stand up her equal and her mate*”. She must go out into the wider world to seek the pure soul capable of receiving her gift to Mankind.

Savitri and Satyavan meet for the first time in a forest setting that is supremely beautiful, and again the emphasis is on a change that all Nature awaits with joy:

*There expectation beat wide sudden wings
As if a soul had looked out from earth's face,
And all that was in her felt a coming change
And forgetting obvious joys and common dreams,
Obedient to Time's call, to the spirit's fate,
Was lifted to a beauty calm and pure
That lived under the eyes of Eternity.* (Ibid, p.389)

When Satyavan comes into view from among the trees it is as if he is one with earthly Nature “*a brother of the sunshine and the sky*”:

*As might a soul on Nature's background 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.
As if a weapon of the living Light,
Erect and lofty like a spear of God
His figure led the splendour of the morn.* (Ibid, p.393)

Satyavan is presented in a two-fold role. He emerges from Nature as the leader of the evolution on earth, and he is also the forerunner who goes in front to usher in “*the splendour of the morn*” - the first dawning of the supramental knowledge. Savitri recognises him immediately as the one she has been looking for throughout the world. Just as, during her long quest, she seemed to recognise all the places she passed through as if they were already known to her, so now her first sight of Satyavan also took the form of a memory:

*On the dumb bosom of this oblivious globe
Although as unknown beings we seem to meet,
Our lives are not aliens nor as strangers join,
Moved to each other by a causeless force.
The soul can recognise its answering soul
Across dividing Time and, on Life's roads*

*Absorbed wrapped traveller, turning it recovers
Familiar splendours in an unknown face
And touched by the warning finger of swift love
It thrills again to an immortal joy
Wearing a mortal body for delight.*

(Ibid, p.397)

Once again, Sri Aurobindo uses the story of the two lovers to tell us something about the supramental consciousness: “*Especially on a certain level all knowledge presents itself as a remembering, because all is latent or inherent in the self of supermind. The future, like the past presents itself to knowledge in the supermind as a memory of the preknown.*” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, vol.21, p.829)

All the knowledge that Aswapati gained is available to Savitri and more, for she carries within her soul the immortal supermind, but until the experience of love for Satyavan and later the experience of grief and pain when Death takes him away come to her, her soul-consciousness remains behind the veil of her humanity. Afterwards, when Savitri finds her soul, all her words and actions will be framed by a supramental Power and Will opening out from within, and expressing itself in its characteristic action.

How does Savitri discover her soul? Stricken by intolerable grief when the hour of Satyavan’s death approaches, she desires only to follow him into the darkness. As Narad had foretold, pain forces her to look deeper into herself. At first the ignorance of her human mind resists, but then in reply to a Voice heard within:

*A Power within her answered 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”.
The Voice replied: “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.”*

(Ibid, p.476)

The Supramental Knowledge will transform life on earth beyond our imagining, and it is unlike anything experienced before. The first opening often comes in the form a voice heard within, carrying with it the conviction of the divine *adesh*, or command. This is the Knowledge that was incarnate in Savitri, needing only the pressure of her will to reveal itself. Savitri accepts the authority of the inner voice without question. As in a dream, she is shown the whole cosmic past, the origin of form, the emergence of life. All the knowledge that Aswapati obtained in his ascent of the world-stair arises from within. The supramental consciousness reveals to her the truth about our human past and the possibilities of the future:

*This is not all we are or all our world.
Our greater self of knowledge waits for us,
A supreme light in the truth-conscious vast:
It sees from summits beyond thinking mind,
It moves in a splendid air transcending life.*

It shall descend and make earth’s life divine.

(Ibid, p.484)

Savitri understands what is required of her – she has to push aside her human nature in order to discover her immortal soul.

Using a language of images *The Entry into the Inner Countries* and subsequent cantos tell the story of that discovery, as Savitri forces her way “*through body to the soul*”. Each image perfectly conveys a many-sided truth which the abstract language of thought would struggle to express. These images do not arise from the thought-mind. It seems that they themselves bear the stamp of an intuitive imagination raised almost to a supramental power. As Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Synthesis of Yoga* “*The imagination transformed in the supermind acts on one side as a power of true image and symbol, always an image or index of some value or significance or other truth of being, on the other as an inspiration or interpretative seeing of possibilities and potentialities not less true than actual or realised things.*” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, vol.21, p.829)

It would be a mistake to see them as anything less.

The search for the soul is attended by dangers, for the human consciousness is like a house of many unentered rooms and hidden basements which may be home to unknown and unwanted guests. Savitri must pass through these and meet with the inhabitants of other planes that impinge upon our own. Finally she encounters messengers from her own soul, helpful powers and energies who are portions of herself.

With their help she journeys on to find herself in the presence of three Powers who are active in the lives of men. One by one they recount to Savitri the meaning of their role in human affairs, but each time Savitri hears a deforming echo arising from the earth, the warped response of suffering humanity’s ignorance and ill-will. She understands the cause: the Mother of Compassion, the Mother of Might, the Mother of divine Wisdom pour down their blessings and aid, but have not power to change the harsh conditions imposed by Falsehood and Death. Savitri recognises all three as divine forms of Herself. Knowing that the discovery of her soul will bring down the power to change everything, she leaves them with a promise:

*One day I will return, His hand in mine,
And thou shalt see the face of the Absolute.
Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
Then shall the divine family be born.*

(Ibid, p.521)

The finding of the soul is an essential stage in the yoga of both Aswapati and Savitri. As Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine*:

“The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater functions as the guide and ruler of the

nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation.....all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order.” (The Life Divine, SABCL, vol.19, pp.908)

Savitri's discovery of her soul is described in the fifth canto of Book Seven. A vision of the mighty Mother of the worlds, the Power of divine Creation, descends into her body and “*all underwent a high celestial change.*” Everything has changed for Savitri and she lives in a state of innocence and joy. Even the prospect of Satyavan's death had no more power to cause her grief, for she lives in a consciousness where even suffering is seen under the aspect of eternity, as a dark disguise of bliss. But this world is intolerant of too much happiness – a nameless dread assails her heart and “*her kingdom of delight was there no more*”. It is a first encounter with all-negating Death, claiming creation as his own:

*I have created all, all I devour;
I am Death and the dark terrible Mother of life,
I am Kali black and naked in the world,
I am Maya and the universe is my cheat.”* (Ibid, p.535)

A second voice arises from the depths of Savitri's soul and she learns the meaning of her fate. She must renounce the bliss of Heaven to make herself an instrument of Heaven's Will:

*Thou hast come down into a struggling world
To aid a blind and suffering mortal race,
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,
To bring down bliss into the heart of grief,
To make thy life a bridge twixt earth and heaven;
If thou wouldst save the toiling universe,
The vast universal suffering feel as thine:
The day-bringer must walk in darkest night,
He who would save the world must share its pain.”* (Ibid, pp.536-7)

Savitri listens, falling silent in herself she turns an inward look upon the origin of these promptings that arise in her “*but most her gaze pursued the birth of thought.*” To Sri Aurobindo, thoughts become ‘ours’ only when they have been accepted by us, for we are not the sole authors of the thoughts that apparently come from within ourselves: they have their origin in a vast continuum of consciousness as wide as the universe. Sri Aurobindo identifies within this continuum ascending ranges of mind-existence: subliminal and subconscious behind and below, intuitive and illumined on the fringes of the heights above. The dream consciousness too receives influences from these self-existent planes; and there are in addition centres of energy in the physical and subtle sheaths of the human body itself that may receive and respond to universal influences. These have been discovered by the science and practice of yoga. Now Savitri's inward look uncovers the sources of her thoughts in these centres of the subtle body, mes-

sages from a wider consciousness of which the outward-looking human mind is unaware:

*But for the mortal prisoned in outward mind
All must present their passports at its door;
Disguised they must don the official cap and mask
Or pass as manufactures of the brain.
Unknown their secret truth and hidden source.* (Ibid, p.540)

Understanding this, Savitri's human mind opens to vast new sources of knowledge as wide as the universe. Yet nothing Mankind creates is wholly his: “*only his soul's acceptance is his own*”. An absolute stillness invades her mind and imposes its blank pure consciousness. She experiences the all-negating void. “*In her the Unseen, the Unknown waited his hour.*”

As, in the forest, she keeps her vigil beside the sleeping Satyavan, a tremendous change takes place. The sense of unreality disappears and is replaced by a conviction of the essential oneness of all being, all substance: “*all contraries were true in one huge spirit*” and all things were in herself and in God. She becomes one with the supramental consciousness that looks at the world through her eyes and knows itself in all it sees:

*It was her self, it was the self of all,
It was the reality of existing things,
It was the consciousness of all that lived
And felt and saw; it was Timelessness and Time,
It was the bliss of formlessness and form.
It was all Love and the one Beloved's arms,
It was sight and thought in one all-seeing Mind,
It was joy of Being on the peaks of God.* (Ibid, p.555)

The change that came upon Savitri appears to be the supramental transformation of which Sri Aurobindo speaks in *The Life Divine*:

*“the whole radical change in the evolution from a basis of Ignorance to a basis of Knowledge can only come by the intervention of the supramental Power and its direct action in earth-existence.
This then must be the nature of the third and final transformation which finishes the passage of the soul through the Ignorance and bases its consciousness, its life, its power and form of manifestation on a complete and completely effective self-knowledge. The Truth-Consciousness, finding evolutionary Nature ready, has to descend into her and enable her to liberate the supramental principle within her; so must be created the supramental and spiritual being as the first unveiled manifestation of the truth of the Self and Spirit in the material universe.”* (The Life Divine, SABCL, vol.19, p.918)

Armed with a supreme Truth, the human Savitri is ready to confront her formidable opponent, Death, as she follows the soul of Satyavan into his shadowy Kingdom. She feels neither fear nor grief, for these feelings belong to her former self. Although the

contest as depicted by Sri Aurobindo takes the outward form of a long debate, the arguments put forward are the symbol signs of a struggle which translated into the human context must be lived and endured with fortitude and faith. The human cost is real. The Persona of Death is represented as arrogant and cruel, an intellect without a heart. He is also a convincing liar. He first tries to bully Savitri and convince her of her own inferiority and helplessness, addressing her with a contemptuous command “*Unclasp, ... O slave...*” Then, becoming gradually aware of the unexpected strength of his opponent he throws upon her all the ‘*living moods*’ of his shadow-kingdom – self-doubt, helplessness, despair, the impossibility of hope, the cold, implacable indifference of the Gods to human suffering. This is no intellectual game played out on a mental plane, but a real ordeal that the human nature of Savitri must pass through to fulfil the inescapable condition of victory: “*He who would save the world must share its pain.*”

Victory over Death is the culmination of Savitri’s yoga. Throughout the long struggle, in which she opposes her love for Satyavan to all the negative forces Death can summon, the Light she carries within herself slowly begins to dissolve the great lie:

*Almost it seemed as if in his symbol shape
The world’s darkness had consented to Heaven-light
And God needed no more the Inconscient’s screen.
A mighty transformation came on her.
A halo of the indwelling Deity,
The immortal’s lustre that had lit her face
And tented its radiance in her body’s house,
Overflowing made the air a luminous sea.
In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil.* (Ibid, p.664)

We have reached a critical point in the story of the descent of Knowledge. As soon as the Mother of the Worlds unveils herself in the kingdom of Death, his reign has to come to an end, and his contract with life, ratifying their mutual dependence on each other, is no longer valid. At last the Omniscient Goddess finds on Earth “*the spaces ready for her feet*” heralding the advent of a supramental transformation. The closing books of *Savitri* are prophetic in their nature, foretelling the dawning of a new consciousness, a new way of being human in the world:

*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.
The frontiers of the Ignorance shall recede,
More and more souls shall enter into light,
Minds lit, inspired, the occult summoner hear
And lives blaze with a sudden inner flame
And hearts grow enamoured of divine delight
And human wills tune to the divine will,*

*These separate selves the Spirit’s oneness feel,
These senses of heavenly sense grow capable,
The flesh and nerves of a strange ethereal joy
And mortal bodies of immortality.* (Ibid, p.710)

The legend of Savitri and Satyavan ends with the restoration of Satyavan to life and their return to earth, but the symbolic aspect of the story will end only with the complete emergence of the supramental Light. “*If mankind could but see, though in a glimpse of fleeting experience, what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures.*” (Sri Aurobindo)

If only we knew.

Note:

Quotations from Sri Aurobindo are from *The Life Divine*, chapters 25 and 26, unless otherwise indicated in the text. Reference on p.1 is from Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* trans. Stephen Spender

The Mother's *Savitri* translations

Shraddhavan

“... *It's like a vision of the future (not too near, not extremely near — not extremely far either) a future when this sort of white thing — white and still — would spread out, and then, with the help of this work, a larger number of minds may come to understand. But that's secondary; I do the translation simply for the joy of it, that's all.*” **The Mother**

The Mother once wrote to Huta :

Beware of translations, they are never adequate.

To Prithwi Singh, she wrote :

*I must say that I consider Savitri as **untranslatable** and will never encourage translation of it except as a personal exercise for the sake of concentration on this unique marvel; but surely not for publication.*¹

However, the next day she added :

Certainly you can continue the translation of Savitri for your own benefit and I am sure that the help from Sri Aurobindo will always be with you.

Just as with Prithwi Singh, she encouraged others also to take up the exercise of translating Sri Aurobindo's epic, and even authorised publication of some of the results. Between the beginning of 1963 and up to April 1972, or possibly even later, she herself made a number of translations from *Savitri*, for the joy of the work and for her own benefit — as she says in one of her talks ‘*to help me in my sadhana*’.

Before taking up *Savitri* the Mother had translated, in part or in full, a number of Sri Aurobindo's books. From the ‘*Bulletin*’ and the Mother's ‘*Questions and Answers*’ we can trace the following titles : *The Supramental Manifestation on Earth; The Mother; The Human Cycle; The Ideal of Human Unity; The Life Divine; Thoughts and Glimpses, Thoughts and Aphorisms, The Synthesis of Yoga*. It was when she was coming to the end of her *Synthesis of Yoga* translation, in 1962, that she decided to take up *Savitri*.

Her *Savitri* translations can be classified into four categories: short passages distributed as messages on Darshan days; passages corresponding to the *Meditations on Savitri* series of paintings created in the early 1960s by the Mother with Huta; a large part of Book Ten ‘*The Book of the Double Twilight*’; and selected passages from the last part of Book Eleven, ‘*The Book of Everlasting Day*’.

Apart from Darshan messages which were distributed in the 1950s and lie outside the scope of this article, we have two sources for these translations.

The first is a book published in Auroville in 1977 by Editions Auropress, entitled *Sri*

Aurobindo, Savitri : passages traduits par la Mère. In it the English text of the translated passages is printed on the left hand pages, the French text on the facing page. Although her name does not appear anywhere in the book we know that it was compiled by the Mother's grand-daughter Françoise, later called Purna Prema, who was closely connected with Auroville in the early days. From some references in the Mother's *Agenda* we can tell too that Purna Prema was interested in the Mother's translation work on *Savitri* and may have been associated with it in some small way. So far as I know the book is long out of print. We must be grateful to Purna Prema, and to Barun Tagore, the founder and manager of Auropress, both now deceased, for putting together and publishing this precious collection. It consists mainly of the Mother's translation of parts of Book Ten of Sri Aurobindo's epic, but also contains some of the Darshan messages translations, parts of the *Meditations on Savitri* series, and is the only source for the fourth group of materials, the passages from Book Eleven. This book gives no dating or background information, except to mention in the publisher's note that the translations of Book Ten comprise 1661 lines, about half of the original, and are a draft which the Mother intended to revise.

The other source is the Mother's *Agenda*. There we can find, in addition to a few translated passages, some illuminating background information. Since the materials in the *Agenda* are arranged in chronological order, they also give us some idea about dating. In fact, we can see that the bulk of the Mother's translation work on *Savitri* took place between 1963 and 1970. Not all the passages given in the various volumes of the *Agenda* are included in Purna Prema's collection, and some occur there which do not appear in the *Agenda*. So the two sources complement each other.

The first *Agenda* conversation in which the Mother mentions her intention to start translating from *Savitri* is on September 18, 1962. From this text too we can date her *Savitri* translation work as extending up to at least July 1970.

September 18, 1962

I don't have far to go on my translation of The Synthesis of Yoga (it's going very quickly), and I have found what I'll do next.... It will be something like those notebooks [Prayers and Meditations]. I am going to take the whole section of Savitri (to start with, I'll see later) from “The Debate of Love and Death” to the point where the Supreme Lord makes his prophecy about the earth's future; it's long — several pages long. This is for my own satisfaction.

I am going to translate it line by line (not word by word — line by line), leaving a space between each line; and when I've finished I will try to recapture it in French (gesture of pulling down from above).

I am not doing it to show it to people or to have anyone read it, but to remain in Savitri's atmosphere, for I love that atmosphere. It will give me an hour of concentration, and I'll see if by chance.... I have no gift for poetry, but I'll see if it comes! (It surely won't come from a mentality developed in this present existence — there's no poetic gift!) So it's interesting, I'll see if anything comes. I am going to give it a try.

I know that light. I am immediately plunged into it each time I read Savitri. It is a very, very beautiful light.

So I am going to see.

First of all, I'll concentrate on it just as Sri Aurobindo said it in English, using French words.

Then I'll see if something comes WITHOUT changing anything — that is, if the same inspiration he had comes in French. It will be an interesting thing to do. If I can do one, two, three lines a day, that's all I need; I will spend one hour every day like that.

I don't have anything in mind. All I know is that being in that light above gives me great joy. For it is a supramental light — a supramental light of aesthetic beauty, and very, very harmonious.

So now I don't mind finishing The Synthesis. I was a little bothered because I have no other books by Sri Aurobindo to translate that can help me in my sadhana: there was only The Synthesis. As I said, it always came right on time, just when it was needed for a particular experience.

When this new translation is finished (because I know Savitri, I know what it is), I know that when it's finished ... either I'll be there or else things will take a very long time.[See below in the Addendum the last lines of Savitri that Mother translated.]

All his other books that could help me are already translated. And with Savitri, the idea isn't to make a translation, but to SEE. To try something. To give me the daily experience of that contact.

I had some magnificent experiences when I read it the first time (two years ago, I believe). Wonderful, wonderful experiences! And since then, each time I read those lines, the same thing happens — not the same experience, but I come in contact with the same realm.

It will be an interesting thing to do.

It's more interesting than listening to everybody's stories! Oh .. (Mother raps her head). That's all.

ADDENDUM

(These are the last lines of Savitri Mother translated.

They were found in her notebook under the date July 1, 1970.)

*But how shall I seek rest in endless peace
Who house the mighty Mother's violent force,
Her vision turned to read the enigmaed world,
Her will tempered in the blaze of Wisdom's sun
And the flaming silence of her heart of love?
The world is a spiritual paradox
Invented by a need in the Unseen,
A poor translation to the creature's sense
Of That which for ever exceeds idea and speech,
A symbol of what can never be symbolised,
A language mispronounced, misspelt, yet true.*

(Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1993, Bk X.IV.pp.647-8)

(Mother's translation) 1.7.1970

Mais comment puis-je chercher le repos dans une paix sans fin

Moi qui abrite la force violente de la formidable Mère,

Sa vision attentive à lire le monde énigmatique,

Sa volonté trempée par le brasier du soleil de la Sagesse

Et le silence flamboyant de son coeur d'amour?

Le monde est un paradoxe spirituel Inventé par un besoin dans l'Invisible,

Une pauvre traduction pour les sens des créatures

De Cela qui à jamais dépasse l'idée et la parole,

Un symbole de ce qui ne peut jamais être symbolisé,

Un langage mal prononcé, mal épilé, pourtant vrai.

In this extract, it is stated that this passage is the last from *Savitri* which the Mother translated. In Purna Prema's book it appears as the last passage from Book Ten of *Savitri* that is included there. But in fact, the very earliest passage from the poem that is given by Purna Prema may really be the last one the Mother ever made. It is from Book One, Canto Three. In the Auropress collection no indication is given of when the translations were made. But in *Mother's Agenda* Volume 13, on April 8th, 1972, we find the following entry:

(Mother then listens to several texts from Sri Aurobindo for the message of April 24. Sujata suggests the following passage from Savitri, which Mother immediately accepts:)

He comes unseen into our darker parts

And, curtained by the darkness, does his work,

A subtle and all-knowing guest and guide,

Till they too feel the need and will to change.

All here must learn to obey a higher law,

Our body's cells must hold the Immortal's flame. (Ibid,p.35)

That's excellent.

Since the Darshan messages were usually given in both English and French, it seems likely that it was on this occasion and for this purpose that the Mother made the following translation of these lines.

Invisible, il vient dans nos parties les plus sombres

Et, voilé par l'obscurité, fait son travail,

Un hôte subtil, un guide connaissant tout,

Jusqu'à ce qu'elles sentent aussi le besoin et la volonté de changer.

Tout ici-bas doit apprendre à obéir à une loi supérieure

Les cellules de notre corps doivent contenir la flamme de l'immortel.

If so, these may in fact have been the last lines from *Savitri* which she translated. But even this is not certain, as we shall see at the end of this article.

Although in this talk of September 1962 the Mother stated her intention of translating the last two cantos of Book Ten and the first half of Book Eleven of *Savitri*, we shall find that in fact, she made a start with other passages from the poem.

But first let us have a closer look at Purna Prema's collection.

Appropriately, a translation by the Mother of a note by Sri Aurobindo 'The Tale of

Satyavan and Savitri' to *Savitri* is placed at the beginning. In the current edition of *Savitri* this text prefaces the poem, under the title 'Author's Note'. This 'Author's Note' was not included in the 1954 edition of *Savitri* which the Mother used for her work. Nor did it appear in the Centenary Library Edition, which was printed in 1970. With the help of Richard Hartz of the Sri Aurobindo Archives I was able to find out that the note was first published in *Mother India* in June 1971. It then appeared in the *Bulletin* of August the same year – in both the original English and a French translation— which must have been made by the Mother. It seems that the note was found amongst Sri Aurobindo's papers early in 1971, and must have been approved for publication by the Mother. It first appeared as an introduction to the poem in the 1976 reprint of the Centenary Library edition.

In the Auropress collection, next follow the translations of passages from the four cantos of Book Ten, which we find from the *Agenda* were begun in March 1963 and ended in July 1970. These 1661 lines from Book Ten cover 58 out of a total of 72 pages of translated text included in the book.

They are followed by other passages under the heading 'Fragments', arranged according to their position in the poem. The first is from Book One, Canto Three, and corresponds to lines 463-68 in the current edition. It is the passage we have mentioned above as possibly the last which the Mother translated, to be given as the Darshan Message for April 24, 1972.

Next follow four pages of passages from Book One, Canto Four. The first covers lines 321-31, which was given as message on the Mother's birthday in 1967. The subsequent lines of the same passage, nos. 331-41, had already been translated in January 1963. The talk in the *Agenda* where they occur shows the Mother beginning her translation of *Savitri* with one of the *Meditations on Savitri* passages, and it is worth looking at it here in full. We find the Mother speaking about a passage which occurs a little earlier in the same canto (also corresponding to one of the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings), and then going on to explain about her way of working :

January 30, 1963

What are you going to read to me today? Nothing? Nothing at all? Well, I have something, then.

I have finished my translation [of the Synthesis]. When you have finished your book and we have prepared the next Bulletin and we have a nice quiet moment, we'll go over it again. And then I've begun Savitri — ah! ... As you know, I prepare some illustrations with Huta, and for her illustrations she has chosen some passages from Savitri (the choice isn't hers, it's Amal's and Purani's and made intelligently), so she gives me these passages one by one, neatly typed (which is easier for my eyes). It's from the Book I, Canto IV.

And then, as I expected, the experience is rather interesting.... I had noticed, while reading Savitri, that there was a sort of absolute understanding, that is to say, it can't mean this or that or this — it means THAT. It comes with an imperative. And that's what led me to think, "When I translate it, it will come in the same way." And it did. I take the text line by line and make a resolve (not

personal) to translate it line by line, without the slightest regard for the literary point of view, but rendering what he meant in the clearest possible way. The way it comes is both exclusive and positive — it's really interesting. There's none of the mind's ceaseless wavering. "Is this better? Is that better? Should it be like this? Should it be like that?" No — it is LIKE THIS (Mother brings down her hand in a gesture of imperative descent). And then in certain cases (without anything to do with the literary angle or even the sound of the word — neither sound nor anything, but meaning), Sri Aurobindo himself suggests a word. It's as if he were telling me, "Isn't this better French, tell me?" (!) I am simply the recording machine.

It goes with fantastic speed, meaning that in ten minutes I translate ten lines. On the whole, only three or four times are there a couple of alternative possibilities, which I jot down immediately. Once, here (Mother shows a passage with erasures in her manuscript), the correction came, absolute. "No," he said, "not that — THIS." So I erased what I had written.

Here, read the English first.

*Above the world the world-creators stand,
In the phenomenon see its mystic source.
These heed not the deceiving outward play,
They turn not to the moment's busy tramp,
But listen with the still patience of the Unborn
For the slow footsteps of far Destiny
Approaching through huge distances of Time,
Unmarked by the eye that sees effect and cause,
Unheard mid the clamour of the human plane.
Attentive to an unseen Truth they seize*

A sound as of invisible augur wings... (Ibid, p.54)²

I didn't re-read my translation, I am doing it now for the first time.

(Mother reads aloud her translation up to: "They turn not to the moment's busy tramp")

Here, there was some hesitation between de l'instant [the instant's] and du moment [the moment's]. Then he showed me (I can't explain how it takes place), he showed me both words, moment and instant, and he showed me how, compared to moment, instant is mechanical; he said, "It's the mechanism of time; moment is full and contains the event." Things of that sort, inexpressible (I put it into words but it loses all its value). Inexpressible, but fantastic! There was some hesitation between instant and moment, I don't know why. Then he showed me instant: instant was dry, mechanical, empty, whereas moment contained all that takes place at every instant. So I wrote moment.

(Mother reads the end of her translation)

It isn't thought out, it just comes. It's probably not poetry, not even free verse, but it does contain something.

So I made a resolve (because it's neither to be published nor to be shown, but it's a marvellous delight): I will simply keep it the way I keep the Agenda. I

have a feeling that, later, perhaps (how can I put it?) ... when people can be less mental in their activity, it will put them in touch with that light [of Savitri] — you know, immediately I enter something purely white and silent, light and alive: a sort of beatitude.

This other passage is what I translated the first time:

*In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march,
Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.
A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done.*

(Ibid, p.55)³

Here there were a few more erasures. It will probably go on improving. But what a wonder, this passage, what beauty!

(Mother reads aloud her translation up to: "God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep")

Splendid!

(Mother reads her translation of the last two lines.)

Oh, I love this: "God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep."

So, I'll continue.



According to the Agenda talk of December 31, 1963, this photograph shows the Mother engaged in translating part of the passage from Savitri mentioned above, the two lines shown in bold. In the Agenda we find her returning to this passage again and again — in fact it is referred to no less than 10 times in all.

The talk of January 30, 1963 continues like this :

I may even keep the manuscript in pencil: the temptation to correct is very bad. Very bad because it's the surface understanding that wants to correct — liter-

ary taste, poetical sense and all those things that are down there (gesture down below). You know, it's as if (I don't mean the words themselves), as if the CONTENT of the words were projected on a perfectly blank and still screen (Mother points to her forehead), as if the words were projected on it.

The trouble is writing, the materialisation between the vision and the writing; the Force has to drive the hand and the pencil, and there is a slight ... there's still a very slight resistance. Otherwise, if I could write automatically, oh, how nice it would be!

There may be (I can't say, it's all imagination because I don't know), there may come a few ... somewhat weird things. But there is an insistence on the need to keep to each line as though it stood all alone in the universe. No mixing up the line order, no, no, no! For when he wrote it, he SAW it that way — I knew nothing about that, I didn't even know how he wrote it (he dictated it, I believe, for the most part), but that's what he tells me now. Everything comes to a stop, everything, and then, oh, how we enjoy ourselves! I enjoy myself! It's more enjoyable than anything. I even told him yesterday, "But why write? What's the use?" Then he filled me with a sort of delight. Naturally, someone in the ordinary consciousness may say, "It's very selfish," but ... And then it's like a vision of the future (not too near, not extremely near — not extremely far either) a future when this sort of white thing — white and still — would spread out, and then, with the help of this work, a larger number of minds may come to understand. But that's secondary; I do the translation simply for the joy of it, that's all. A satisfaction that may be called selfish, but when he is told, "It's selfish," he replies that there is no one more selfish than the Lord, because all He does is for Himself!

There.

So I will go on. If there are corrections, they can only come through the same process, because at this point to correct anyhow would spoil it all. There is also the mixing (for the logical mind) of future and present tenses — but that too is deliberate. It all seems to come in another way. And well, I can't say, I haven't read any French for ages, I have no knowledge of modern literature — to me everything is in the rhythm of the sound. I don't know what rhythm they use now, nor have I read what Sri Aurobindo wrote in The Future Poetry. They tell me that Savitri's verse follows a certain rule he explained on the number of stresses in each line (and for this you should pronounce in the pure English way, which somewhat puts me off), and perhaps some rule of this kind will emerge in French? We can't say. I don't know. Unless languages grow more fluid as the body and mind grow more plastic? Possible. Language too, maybe: instead of creating a new language, there may be transitional languages, as, for instance (not a particularly fortunate departure, but still ...), the way American is emerging from English. Maybe a new language will emerge in a similar way?

In my case it was from the age of twenty to thirty that I was concerned with French (before twenty I was more involved in vision: painting; and sound:

music), but as regards language, literature, language sounds (written or spoken), it was approximately from twenty to thirty. The Prayers and Meditations were written spontaneously with that rhythm. If I stayed in an ordinary consciousness I would get the knack of that rhythm — but now it doesn't work that way, it won't do!

Yesterday, after my translation, I was surprised at that sense ... a sense of absolute: "THAT'S HOW IT IS." Then I tried to enter into the literary mind and wondered, "What would be its various suggestions?" And suddenly, I saw somehow (somehow, somewhere there) a host of suggestions for every line! ... Ohh! "No doubt," I thought, "it IS an absolute!" The words came like that, without any room for discussion or anything. To give you an example: when he says "the clamour of the human plane," clameur exists in French, it's a very nice word — he didn't want it, he said "No," without any discussion. It wasn't an answer to a discussion, he just said, "Not clameur: vacarme." [Mother's translation is: Le vacarme du plan humain.] It isn't as though he was weighing one word against another, it wasn't a matter of words but the THOUGHT of the word, the SENSE of the word: "No, not clameur, it's vacarme."

Interesting, isn't it?

But I would like us to revise the translation in the same way, because I am sure he will be here — he is always here when I translate. Then I will go back into that state, while you will do the work! (Laughing) You will write. And then, unless your vocabulary is very extensive (mine used to be extensive, but now it has become quite limited), we'll need a decent dictionary.... But I am afraid none will have anything to offer.

I even find they should be avoided.

They're bad. Somewhere they make me angry. It makes a very dark atmosphere, it clouds the atmosphere.

Unfortunately, I have lost the habit of French, the words I use to express myself are quite limited and the right word doesn't come—something looks up in the word store and doesn't find the word. I can sense it as if elusively, I feel there is a word, but all sorts of substitutes come forward that are worthless.

Now the sensation is altogether, altogether new. It's not the customary movement of words pouring in and so on: you search and suddenly you catch hold of something — it's no longer that way at all: as though it were the ONLY thing that remained in the world. All the rest —mere noise.

There, mon petit.

There are several things we could note from this conversation.

First, that the Mother embarks on her *Savitri* translation project using passages from the *Meditations on Savitri* series — that is, the passages corresponding to the paintings she was preparing with Huta. She started in Book One Canto Four, with the lines corresponding to painting no. 13 of that canto. The following passage corresponds to paintings no. 15. The next passage given in Purna Prema's collection corresponds to painting no. 31 of the same canto. The passages corresponding to paintings nos, 32-35, 38-40, and 44-49 (the last of this canto) are also given by Purna Prema. In the *Agenda*

talk of February 15 1963, translations are also given of the passages corresponding to the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings nos. 21 and 22 of Canto Four. It seems possible, even likely, that the Mother actually translated all the *Meditations on Savitri* passages of Canto Four from no. 14 to the end.

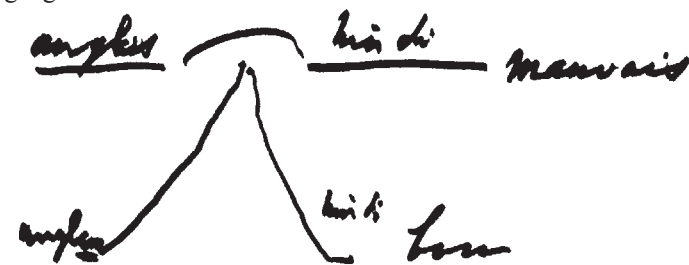
There are 20 *Meditations on Savitri* paintings corresponding to passages in Canto Five of Book One. Translations of all these passages appear next in Purna Prema's collection. In the *Agenda* talk of October 14, 1970, we find the following remark :

(Then Mother takes up a few extracts from *Savitri* that are to be set to music.)

By that time, the Mother had started recording her translations of the *Meditations on Savitri* passages. Her readings of the English versions of all the passages had already been recorded by Huta. Those recordings were given to the Ashram musician Sunil Bhattacharya, who composed music to go with each passage. Unfortunately he was not able to complete this huge work before his passing. We have his music only up to the end of Book Ten. What is less well known is that he wished to make parallel recordings of his compositions with the Mother reading the passages in French. So far as we know, this was done only for Canto Five of Book One. The recording exists but may never have been made public. The recordings of Sunil-da's compositions accompanied by the Mother's readings in English are well known and available from the Ashram.

Secondly, we can note what the Mother says about the way that the translations came to her, with an imperative absoluteness from above— in the same way that her understanding of the poem came to her as she read it— with, from time to time, suggestions and interventions from Sri Aurobindo, who, she says, ' ... is always here when I translate.'

This reminds me of the answer given by the Mother in December 1967 to a question from Shyam Sundar, about translating Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works into Hindi. He asked, "How to bring the true consciousness into the translation?" The Mother replied with a drawing, showing that the correct method was not to pass horizontally from the words of one language to the words of another, but to rise up to the level of the original inspiration, and from there find the right words to express it in the target language.



28.12.67

Sketch by the Mother, reproduced from
En route, On the Path: The Mother's Correspondence with Shyam Sundar
 Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1997, p.30

Pourna Prema's collection also contains a translation of some lines in Book Six, Canto Two — lines 856-880 in the present edition. No reference to this passage is found in the *Agenda*, so we cannot say when this work was done. Perhaps this too was distributed as a message at some time?

This passage has a special significance, because these lines are among the very last dictated by Sri Aurobindo in mid-November 1950, before giving his seal of 'incomplete completion' (as Nirodbaran puts it) to his masterwork.

*A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge.
Her single greatness in that last dire scene
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny
Where all is won or all is lost for man.
In that tremendous silence lone and lost
Of a deciding hour in the world's fate,
In her soul's climbing beyond mortal time
When she stands sole with Death or sole with God
Apart upon a silent desperate brink,
Alone with her self and death and destiny
As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
When being must end or life rebuild its base,
Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
No human aid can reach her in that hour,
No armoured god stand shining at her side.
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.
For this the silent Force came missioned down;
In her the conscious Will took human shape:
She only can save herself and save the world.* (Ibid,p.461)

Pourna Prema's book closes with four pages of selected passages from the end of Book Eleven.

In the Mother's talk of September 18, 1962 we saw that she mentioned her intention of translating the last two cantos of Book Ten, and part of Book Eleven, up to 'the point where the Supreme Lord makes his prophecy about the earth's future'. The selected lines we have here cover that prophecy, and go further, up to the very end of Book Eleven. We have no indication when they were done.

It is a matter of great personal regret that I never managed to ask Pourna Prema about these passages, even when she visited Savitri Bhavan a few years ago, shortly before her death. They are a masterly selection. It is always difficult to select lines from Savitri — one never wants to leave anything out. Earlier we saw the Mother mentioning that

the passages for the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings were selected by Amal Kiran and Purani. According to what Huta has told me, at the beginning the selection was done by Purani — which whom she was also at first studying *Savitri* in a literary way. Soon Purani went abroad, then fell ill and passed away. Meanwhile the Mother had arranged for Huta to continue her literary study of *Savitri* with Amal Kiran, who also took up the responsibility of selecting the passages to be illustrated by the paintings. But just as the Mother gradually gave Huta more and more responsibility regarding the paintings, eventually encouraging her to do even the preliminary sketches for most of them, she also at a certain point asked her to select the passages herself.

However, this selection from Book Eleven does not correspond to the *Meditations on Savitri* passages. There are 33 paintings in all of Book Eleven; 10 of these come at the end of the canto — the part covered by the translations in Pourna Prema's book, but only the first passage is the same in both selections :

*O Satyavan, O luminous Savitri,
I sent you forth of old beneath the stars,
A dual power of God in an ignorant world,
In a hedged creation shut from limitless self,
Bringing down God to the insentient globe,
Lifting earth-beings to immortality.* (Ibid,p.702)⁴

For the line 'Bringing down God to the insentient globe', the translation has been printed as 'Pour faire descendre Dieu dans cette vapeur insensible'. The word 'vapeur' — 'vapour' — is obviously some sort of mistake. It does not look like a simple misprint, more like a wrong transcription. If the translation was made after July 1970, by which time the Mother was sometimes having difficulty with writing, could this have crept in as a mis-transcription of the word 'sphère' — which would be a beautiful equivalent of Sri Aurobindo's 'globe'? I blame myself for not having made the effort to check this with Pourna Prema, and now wonder whether this puzzle will ever be resolved.

Some lines near the end of the canto also coincide in the two selections. *Meditations on Savitri* passage 11.1.33 reads

*Then from a timeless plane that watches Time,
A Spirit gazed out upon destiny,
In its endless moment saw the ages pass.
All still was in a silence of the gods.
The prophet moment covered limitless Space
And cast into the heart of hurrying Time
A diamond light of the Eternal's peace,
A crimson seed of God's felicity;
A glance from the gaze fell of undying Love.* (Ibid, p.712)

Pourna Prema's collection closes with some of the same lines, together with the final words of the canto:

*The prophet moment covered limitless Space
And cast into the heart of hurrying Time
A diamond light of the Eternal's peace,*

*A crimson seed of God's felicity;
A glance from the gaze fell of undying Love.*

.....
*A power leaned down, a happiness found its home.
Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss. (Ibid)*

In Purna Prema's book, leading up to these closing lines there are 12 passages taken from the Supreme Lord's prophecy about the earth's future, which ends

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

Each of these 12 passages conveys some essential aspect of the prophecy. If a selection has to be made, it would be hard to better this one. Perhaps the lines were chosen by the Mother herself? Maybe in order to round off her *Savitri* translation project — as a sort of 'incomplete completion'?

1 *Sri Aurobindo and Mother to Prithwi Singh : Correspondence 1933-1967*, Mira Aditi, Mysore, 1988, p. 165-166.

2 *Meditations on Savitri* passage 1.4.13

3 *Meditations on Savitri* passage 1.4.15

4 *Meditations on Savitri* passage 11.1.25

Onward She Passed... Rejection As Described in *Savitri*

Matthijs Cornelissen

One of the many marvellous things in *Savitri* is the completely uninterrupted progress in the sadhana of Aswapati and later of Savitri. Aswapati and Savitri always move on; they never stop; they never go back. Partly this may be due to the symbolic nature of the story. Aswapati and Savitri are, after all, at least to some extent typical figures. Their lives miss the many diluting and confusing side-plots that mar and delay our spiritual development. But this is only part of the explanation; there is also a more technical aspect to it. It appears to me that the secret of their quick progress rests in the perfect application of a specific yogic skill, the skill of rejection.

Rejection is one of the three main skills or "inner gestures" that have to be used in Sadhana. The most powerful description of these three skills can be found in Sri Aurobindo's collection of letters called *The Mother*. This little booklet starts with one of Sri Aurobindo's most magnificent sentences.

There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.

The further one gets in one's sadhana, the more one becomes aware that this "Grace that answers" is a permanent "given". It is always there; it is the force that carries the universe and it is one's constant companion on the road. The difficulty is with the call from below, the need for a "constant and unfailing aspiration." A little further, Sri Aurobindo specifies exactly what is demanded from our side:

The personal effort required is a triple labour of aspiration, rejection and surrender, -

an aspiration, vigilant, constant, and unceasing — the mind's will, the heart's seeking, the assent of the vital being, the will to open and make plastic the physical consciousness and nature; rejection of the movements of the lower nature — rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind, — rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth, so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being, — rejection of the physical na-

ture's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, tamas, so that the true stability of Light, Power, Ananda may establish itself in a body growing always more divine; surrender of oneself and all one is and has and every plane of the consciousness and every movement to the Divine and the Shakti.

Aspiration, rejection and surrender. Of this great trinity, aspiration is perhaps the most ancient, and the most extensively described in the Indian canon. In the Vedas it is Agni, the priest of the sacrifice. In the Upanishads and the Gita, it is *tapas*, the personal effort. In cosmic Nature it is the enormous, worldwide force that pushes the evolution. In a flower or a tree, it is that which makes it stretch out towards the light. In the individual it is the will, and more specifically, the deep, inner urge for progress.

Surrender is Lakshmi under the gods, sweet and attractive. It is the pet project for most sadhaks. Who doesn't want to lay his head on the lap of the Mother and be carried to the Supreme realisation without the least pain or effort? Of course, surrender doesn't work exactly like that. What is asked from us is what Sri Aurobindo calls an active surrender, which is not as easy as it seems. It is true that transformation can be described as the gradual replacement of personal will by the Divine Grace, but it is, indeed, a gradual replacement, and a complete surrender right from the beginning is not possible. In the beginning personal effort is very much needed. It is interesting that in *Savitri* the word "surrender" hardly occurs. In the description of the yoga of Aswapati it is used only twice and that right at the end: once just before Aswapati enters the supramental "*Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge*", and once after he meets the Divine Mother when "*A vast surrender was his only strength*". In *Savitri's* yoga the word "surrender" also occurs only twice, and again only at the end, just before she meets her Soul. The will, on the other hand, is mentioned over 300 times, especially in the yoga of *Savitri*, which is a good indication of the importance Sri Aurobindo attaches to it.

While Aspiration has the glorious role of the eldest brother, responsible, earning the money, guiding the whole family in the right direction, and Surrender is the youngest on whom all others are doting, Rejection is the waif in the middle who has to wash the dirty dishes in the kitchen. And yet, Rejection is very much essential for progress. Rejection "*keeps the temple clean*", to use another phrase from *The Mother*. She removes the old and creates space for the new. I'll try to show how this unsung hero does her menial, but absolutely crucial job in the personal sadhana of Aswapati and *Savitri* by highlighting a few of the passages where Aswapati and *Savitri* have applied the skill of rejection with utmost perfection.

Rejection in the Yoga of Ashwapati

Savitri and Aswapati follow a yoga that is similar in many ways. You can discern closely similar stages in their paths. But there are big differences also. Aswapati, just like Sri Aurobindo, is moving on in a rather impersonal manner. The different stages that he goes through are planes of consciousness. He does not interact. He talks only thrice in the whole of *Savitri*, once with the divine Mother, once with *Savitri*, and finally once with Narada, his wife and *Savitri* together. Everywhere else he is silent and alone. He is motivated by his sole, indomitable aspiration for the world's progress. *Savitri* is quite

different. She interacts with the different beings whom she meets on different planes. She has a very long debate with Death and several long exchanges with the divine Mother. Her yoga is in many respects a much more personal journey.

So, Aswapati starts alone.

Alone he moved watched by the infinity

Around him and the Unknowable above.

All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,

All could be known the mind has never grasped;

All could be done no mortal will can dare. (*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.95)

This is typical of Aswapati. There is always this vastness, this impersonality, and yet an implacable will that pursues the great end that he knows to be his destiny to accomplish. His will is entirely disinterested, it is not for himself, but for the Divine and the world that he labours. Rejection shows itself in first instance as not more than the ability to let go, to move on. It is in no way dramatic, it doesn't show off, but it is absolutely crucial for progress. Whatever stage of consciousness, whatever plane, whatever inner region Aswapati reaches on his journey to the Supreme, he never gets stuck. He always moves further. There are dozens of examples of this ability to travel on to the next stage. I'll quote one – this is about the Paradise of the life Gods. He has just gone through the pits of hell, the kingdoms of darkness, and he arrives at this absolutely marvellous plane where everything is perfect. Most of us would have lingered here for as long as we could, but he immediately moves on:

This too must now be overpassed and left,

As all must be until the Highest is gained

In whom the world and self grow true and one:

Till That is reached our journeying cannot cease.

Always a nameless goal beckons beyond,

Always ascends the zigzag of the gods

And upward points the spirit's climbing Fire. (*Ibid*, p.238)

This passage shows, besides, a major difference between the Integral Yoga and other paths. Many, if not most, spiritual traditions see peace and stability as an aim in itself. They would shun the idea of constant aspiration as a source of unrest, incompatible with inner peace. They just watch and accept the world as it is. For Sri Aurobindo peace and silence are the substrate in which a constant evolution is taking place, they are the base on which the pure fire of aspiration burns. Peace and Silence are the source of a will and action that are not egoic, but one with the divine Will. In this respect Sri Aurobindo's yoga is directly based on the Vedas, in which Agni is the central godhead, and very different from later, quietist forms of spirituality.

This ability to "overpass and leave" behind even the most wonderful ranges of spiritual achievement is described again and again. So Sri Aurobindo moves to the highest level of the mind, reaches the soul of the world, reaches the absolute silence and finally he reaches the feet of the divine Mother. And there the whole yoga changes.

Once seen, his heart acknowledged only her.

Only a hunger of infinite bliss was left.

*All aims in her were lost, then found in her;
His base was gathered to one pointing spire.*

.....
*All he had done was to prepare a field;
His small beginnings asked for a mighty end:
For all that he had been must now new-shape
In him her joy to embody, to enshrine
Her beauty and greatness in his house of life.
But now his being was too wide for self;
His heart's demand had grown immeasurable:
His single freedom could not satisfy,
Her light, her bliss he asked for earth and men.* (Ibid, p.315)

One has to transcend and leave behind everything one is and has done, and then find it all back in the Divine Mother. There has to be a one-pointed aspiration, which opens out into an unlimited vastness, an infinite wideness in which he asks for Her Light, Her Bliss “for earth and men”.

Up to the highest point, when Aswapati meets the Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo doesn't mention surrender. It comes only at the very end of his yoga when he realises that

*But vain are human power and human love
To break earth's seal of ignorance and death;
His nature's might seemed now an infant's grasp;
Heaven is too high for outstretched hands to seize.
This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength.* (Ibid, p.315)

This is of course a theme that occurs all the time in Yoga. We have to reach an absolute silence of the mind before the divine can act. The quote then continues:

*A Power that lives upon the heights must act,
Bring into life's closed room the Immortal's air
And fill the finite with the Infinite.* (Ibid, pp.315-6)

And here the second type of rejection comes in. The first one is the completely undramatic, quiet ability to let go and move on, the ability to avoid getting stuck on any lower level. The second type is the much more dramatic form of rejection that is more often associated with the word. It is the ability to actively throw out of one's system anything that stands in the way.

*All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.* (Ibid, p.316)

Here again, one may wonder, whether this form of active rejection is mentioned so late in the story only because Aswapati did not have the gross imperfections that we struggle with right from the beginning, or because it doesn't make sense to try to

improve one's nature with one's own strength. One has, as Sri Aurobindo says, to “keep the temple clean” before one can expect the Divine to inhabit it, and, yet, one can only effectively reject and correct one's defects after having reached the Supreme. The same double movement comes back that we saw in the beginning: a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below, and the divine Grace that answers.

*Now other claims had hushed in him their cry:
Only he longed to draw her presence and power
Into his heart and mind and breathing frame;
Only he yearned to call for ever down
Her healing touch of love and truth and joy
Into the darkness of the suffering world.
His soul was freed and given to her alone.* (Ibid, p.316)

At this stage, at the height of the integral realisation, Aswapati still goes further on his personal path and a third type of rejection appears which is very peculiar and very interesting because he seems to reject a proposal from the Divine Mother herself. He rejects peace and personal “salvation” and remains true to the essence of his own being, to the task he knows he has to fulfil, to his very own *swadharma*. The Mother tells him at this stage:

*“Only one boon, to greatness thy spirit, demand;
Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire.
Above blind fate and the antagonist powers
Moveless there stands a high unchanging Will;
To its omnipotence leave thy work's result.
All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.”*

*August and sweet sank hushed that mighty Voice.
Nothing now moved in the vast brooding space:
A stillness came upon the listening world,
A mute immensity of the Eternal's peace.* (Ibid, p.341)

But peace for himself was not what Aswapati was looking for, and in a mighty rejection of all that is small and personal, he cries out:

*“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?
Or if it is thy work I do below
Amid the error and waste of human life*

*In the vague light of man's half-conscious mind,
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?"* (Ibid, p.341)

After this comes one of the most striking passages of *Savitri* where Aswapati describes his vision of Shiva destroying the old world — perhaps one could call this the divine rejection that creates the space needed for the new world to be born:

*"A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death
Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;
There was a clangour of Destruction's wings..."* (Ibid, p.343)

And then:

*"I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;*

*.....
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of immortality.*

*.....
Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
And justify the light on Nature's face."* (Ibid, pp.343-4)

At the end of the magnificent description of the future world, Aswapati prays that the Divine Mother herself should come down to the earth:

*"Mission to earth some living form of thee.
One moment fill with thy eternity,
Let thy infinity in one body live,
All-Knowledge wrap one mind in seas of light,
All-Love throb single in one human heart.
Immortal, treading the earth with mortal feet
All heaven's beauty crowd in earthly limbs!
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."* (Ibid, p.345)

The Divine Mother grants Aswapati's wish for her to descend upon earth and in due time Savitri is born as his child. She grows up as the epitome of grace and beauty. Then a voice comes down which tells Aswapati that he should send Savitri out into the

world to find her husband and do with him her destined work. The voice speaks to Aswapati and says:

*"O force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,
O petty adventurers in an infinite world
And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,
How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
Around your little self and petty things?
But not for a changeless littleness were you were meant;
Not for vain repetition were you built;
Out of the Immortal's substance you were made;
Your actions can be swift revealing steps,
Your life a changeful mould for growing gods.
A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,
The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days,
Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.
A greater destiny waits you in your front:
This transient earthly being if he wills
Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme.
He who now stares at the world with ignorant eyes
Hardly from the Inconscient's night aroused,
That look at images and not at Truth,
Can fill those orbs with an immortal's sight.
Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts,
You shall awake into the spirit's air
And feel the breaking walls of mortal mind
And hear the message which left life's heart dumb
And look through Nature with sun-gazing lids
And blow your conch-shells at Eternal's gate."* (Ibid, p.370)

Just when the voice finishes, Savitri approaches and Aswapati recognises who his daughter really is. He then sends her out into the world to find her other half, with whom she can do her destined work in the world.

Rejection in the Yoga of Savitri

When Savitri has found Satyavan and returns home to tell her father, she must have been walking on clouds, expecting the brightest possible future. The world must have looked as beautiful as it can ever do. But when she enters the hall where Narad, the heavenly minstrel, sits with her father and mother, there hangs a dark cloud of doom and after a little delay, Narad reveals that Satyavan will die within a year. Her whole universe must have collapsed, but Savitri remains stoutly upright. Her mother argues that she should choose another husband, less perfect, but more fortunate, and she depicts to Savitri the spectre of living as a widow in the jungle with her blind father in law. But Savitri does not bend:

*"Once my heart chose and chooses not again.
The word I have spoken can never be erased,*

It is written in the record book of God.

.....

My heart has sealed its troth to Satyavan:

Its signature adverse Fate cannot efface,

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;

My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me

Helpless against my immortality.

Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will." (Ibid, p.432)

In an absolute and complete rejection of all weakness, she pits her will against almighty fate. As mentioned earlier, it is quite significant that in the whole of *Savitri* the word 'surrender' occurs only two times right at the end of the sadhana of Aswapati and then again two times in the sadhana of Savitri herself while "will" occurs hundreds of times. Sri Aurobindo clearly gives a huge stress to the role of the "will", especially in the yoga of Savitri.

So Savitri goes back to the forest and lives with Satyavan but as the end of the year nears, she becomes more and more aware of the doom that is awaiting them. Gradually she loses courage; she gives up and is tempted to follow Satyavan in death whenever the moment comes. But at that moment of utter desperation, her highest inner self speaks to her and asks her if she is going to fail, it has to be reported "*before the Eternal's seat*", that she has not done her destined job in the world. And immediately Savitri's attitude changes:

Then Savitri's heart fell mute, it spoke no word.

But holding back her troubled rebel heart,

Abrupt, erect and strong, calm like a hill,

Surmounting the seas of mortal ignorance,

Its peak immutable above mind's air,

A Power within her answered the still Voice:

"I am thy portion here charged with thy work,

As thou myself seated for ever above,

Speak to my depths, O great and deathless Voice,

Command, for I am here to do thy will." (Ibid, p.476)

Savitri is fully human, but never gets bogged down in human weakness. The inner voice then tells her how her path should be.

The voice replied: "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." (Ibid, p.476)

Again a perfect summary of the whole of Integral Yoga in these four lines! First find the meaning of your life, your real Svadharma. Then find your soul, realise who you are

in the depths of your being. Then transform your nature into a perfect instrument and expression of the Divine. The voice then gives a few more concrete hints how to proceed. Get rid of the mind and the senses. Through the silence find God everywhere. Get rid of the ego. Become a perfect instrument in His hands, and, finally, overcome Death:

"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,

In the world's contacts meet his single touch;

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." (Ibid, p.476)

And this is the programme that Savitri subsequently executes in the rest of the book: after an intense programme of yoga, she conquers death.

So, Savitri sets out on the path of her own yoga. There are many stages which we cannot all go through here, but the essence is this:

"Consent to be nothing and none, dissolve Time's work,

Cast off thy mind, step back from form and name.

Annul thy self that only God may be."

Thus spoke the mighty and uplifting Voice,

And Savitri heard; she bowed her head and mused

Plunging her deep regard into herself

In her soul's privacy in the silent Night.

Aloof and standing back detached and calm,

A witness of the drama of herself,

A student of her own interior scene,

She watched the passion and the toil of life

And heard in the crowded thoroughfares of mind

The unceasing tread and passage of her thoughts. (Ibid, p.538)

She moves then through the different parts of her being in a somewhat similar way to what Aswapati has done when he travels through the inner worlds in the second book of *Savitri*, but still, it has a different flavour, more personal, more psychic. After she finds her soul, she reaches the all-negating absolute:

A lonely Absolute negated all:

It effaced the ignorant world from its solitude

And drowned the soul in its everlasting peace. (Ibid, p.550)

She passes on beyond the Void and becomes one with the cosmic consciousness:

*She was Time and the dreams of God in Time;
She was Space and the wideness of his days.
From this she rose where Time and Space were not;
The superconscient was her native air,
Infinity was her movement's natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time.*

(Ibid, p.557)

It is only after she has reached that total identification with the cosmic consciousness, that she is ready to face Death. And so begins the grand debate between Savitri and Death.

In this debate Death brings in every single argument humanity has used to defend the continuation of our present stage. Every beautiful philosophy, every grand idea, the pride of science, the tenets of the great religions and almost all of traditional spirituality are put by Sri Aurobindo in the mouth of Death. And Savitri goes on saying this is not it, this is not it, what we want is a divine life on earth.

In the beginning, when Death urges Savitri not to transgress into his realm and to give up Satyavan, Savitri does not even answer:

*The Woman answered not. Her spirit refused
The Voice of the Night that knew and Death that thought.
In her beginningless infinity
Through her soul's reaches unconfined she gazed;
She saw the undying fountains of her life,
She knew herself eternal without birth.*

(Ibid, p.586)

She refuses even to engage Death and concentrates on her eternal being beyond birth. But when she finally does answer Death, in the beginning of their long debate, Death is an all-powerful God and Savitri is a mere woman. But gradually the balance changes and Death becomes more and more dubious while Savitri slowly incarnates more and more the divine power. This is how the debate begins:

*At last she spoke; her voice was heard by Night:
"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 immortal spirit.
Conscious of immortality I walk.
A victor spirit conscious of my force,
Not as a suppliant to thy gates I came:
Unslain I have survived the clutch of Night.
My first strong grief moves not my seated mind;
My unwept tears have turned to pearls of strength:
I have transformed my ill-shaped brittle clay
Into the hardness of a statued soul."*

(Ibid, p.588)

In these last five lines she describes how she has transformed her mind, vital and body and is ready to face him. Death insists that life is made out of desire, out of hunger,

and that as such it has to be extinguished, to be devoured by him. Opposing him, Savitri asserts the knowledge of her heart that behind all appearances of the opposite, there is the divine Love, which still can transform the world.

Death gives the arguments of Buddhism and *mayavadin* Hinduism to convince Savitri that she ought to forget about life and become one with his fathomless Nihil. Savitri replies:

*"But I forbid thy voice to slay my soul.
My love is not a hunger of the heart,
My Love is not a craving of the flesh;
It came to me from God, to God returns.
Even in all that life and man have marred,
A whisper of divinity still is heard,
A breath is felt from the eternal spheres."*

(Ibid, pp.612-3)

She constantly insists that the Divine is there, right here, in us. And she asserts every aspect of life. A little later, she even says:

*"Not only is there hope for godheads pure;
The violent and darkened deities
Leaped down from the one breast in rage to find
What the white gods had missed: they too are safe;
A mother's eyes are on them and her arms
Stretched out in love desire her rebel sons."*

(Ibid, p.613)

Death argues that all that Savitri says is a figment of her mind. In a few lines he gives a voice to all the basic ideas of modern psychology:

*"And know thy soul a product of the flesh,
A made-up self in a constructed world.
Thy words are large murmurs in a mystic dream.
For how in the soiled heart of man could dwell
The immaculate grandeur of thy dream-built God,
Or who can see a face and form divine
In the naked two-legged worm thou callest man?
O human face, put off mind-painted masks:
The animal be, the worm that Nature meant;
Accept thy futile birth, thy narrow life.
For truth is bare like stone and hard like death;
Bare in the bareness, hard with truth's hardness live."*

(Ibid, p.634)

The first line contains the basic paradigm of mainstream science. The "given", view in the new field of Consciousness Studies, for example, is that matter is the prime, if not the only, reality and that consciousness is not more than an epiphenomenon of chemical processes in the brain. The second line has the doctrine of the largest "post-modern" school of thought, social constructionism, which holds that all we say and think is socially mediated. Many even hold that consciousness and experience are entirely determined by language and culture. The "soiled heart" and the "dream-built God" are the grand psychoanalytic "discovery" that God is nothing more than the figment of our

sublimated sexual desires. The next lines summarise the atheistic, nihilist and materialist world-view that dominates the global culture at present. At the end we have the existentialist hell that these worldviews inevitably lead to.

But Savitri does not get fooled by any of it and she replies to the dire god:

*"Yes I am human. Yet shall man by me,
Since in humanity waits his hour the God,
Trample thee down to reach the immortal 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."* (Ibid, p.634)

Again at the same time she asserts her humanity as well as the secret power behind it, stressing the ability of the divine inhabitant to overcome death and transform life. As she becomes more and more aware of the greatness of the indwelling Divine, Death crumbles down further and further till he is finally defeated.

Then Savitri, now fully identified with the Divine Mother, rejects the possibility of finishing off Death completely. She says then, *"Live, Death, awhile, be still my instrument,"* because she recognises that Death is still needed to *"force the soul of man to struggle for the light"*.

*"Thou art his spur to greatness in his works,
The whip to his yearning for eternal bliss,
His poignant need of immortality."* (Ibid, p.666)

So she very consciously leaves Death in existence, but now only as her conscious instrument, as *"our poignant need for immortality"*, not any longer as the great God-head who can claim to be the independent master of all creation.

Finally Death accedes to defeat and Satyavan, the soul of man, is returned to Savitri, the divine Truth. But there is still one hurdle on her path, because Satyavan is restored to her in another world, not on earth. Satyavan is restored in the *"heavens of everlasting Day"*. This also Savitri rejects.

*"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 Archmason shapes his works.
Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.*

*.....
In me the spirit of immortal love
Stretches its arms out to embrace mankind.
Too far thy heavens for me from suffering men.
Imperfect is the joy not shared by all."*

(Ibid, pp.685-6)

Then one time more Savitri is tempted to merge herself into the absolute ocean of Bliss. She is addressed here as the divine Consciousness, as the Divine Mother and still asked to merge herself back into Herself. This too she refuses. Death, now as the Lord of the Everlasting Day, addresses her with:

*"Clasp, Ocean, deep into thyself thy wave,
Happy for ever in the embosoming surge.
Grow one with the still passion of the depths.
Then shalt thou know the Lover and the Loved,
Leaving the limits dividing him and thee.
Receive him into boundless Savitri,
Lose thyself into infinite Satyavan,
O miracle, where thou beganst, there cease!"* (Ibid, p.692)

This is the ultimate aim of Advaita Vedanta, to merge back into the original Absolute, not any longer sensing oneself as a drop or wave of the ocean, but realising one's eternal, immutable, irretrievable oneness with its infinity.

*But Savitri answered to the radiant God:
"In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss
Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born,
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine."* (Ibid, p.692)

By an unfailing aspiration for the very highest and an uncompromising rejection of every half-way possibility, Savitri finally reaches the state where she can surrender to the Divine Mother in every aspect of her being. It is then that the Divine Mother can say to her:

*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,
I will whirl thee as my chariot through the ways,
I will use thee as my sword and as my lyre,
I will play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.*

*.....
O Mind, grow full of the eternal peace;
O Word, cry out the immortal litany:
Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.* (Ibid, pp.701-2)

An Analytical assessment of Death-Savitri Debate

Usharanjan Chakraborty

I

In the present paper, our aim is to put forward Death's arguments on the one hand and Savitri's arguments on the other and make an analytical assessment of them.

We start with the concept of Ideal first. Death is anti-Ideal and to justify his position he puts forward some reasons. Let us now discuss them. Death says :

*Its [i.e. Ideal's] 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. (SABCL, vol.29, Savitri, p.607)

Here Death deals with two things, one is about the origin of ideal and the other is about the nature of ideal. Death closely says that thought is builder of ideal and its base is the human heart. It originates neither in heaven nor on earth. To Death, no ideal has any reality. It is a delirium of human hope. Ideal is nothing but a fantasy. It is nothing but a false hope against frustrations. Ideal originates in human thought and as such has no reality. It is a fantasy, therefore it is unreal.

Let us see how far this view is tenable.

It is true that many ideals originate in thought. But apart from ideals many things originate in thought. Any kind of thinking – be it literary, philosophical, scientific or ordinary – originates in thought. Are those thinkings real or unreal? If they are unreal, no science or philosophy is possible. If they are real, then why should ideals alone be unreal?

Moreover, what is the criterion by which reality or unreality would be determined? Is there any common criterion by which both ideal and real are to be judged or a different criterion has to be used to determine ideal and real?

Lastly, where does criterion originate? In thought or not? If in thought, then how to determine whether the criterion itself is ideal or real? If not in thought, then wherefrom does it originate?

Has Death any answer to these questions? Death stresses upon the unreality of the ideal. He says :

The ideal never yet was real made. (Ibid, p. 608)

But what is real to Death? Those which do not originate in thought? Physical objects do not originate in thought. For that reason should they be called real? Death has not defined the nature of reality. So to simply say that 'no ideal is real' has no sound implication. Let us see what Sri Aurobindo has to say regarding the ideal.

Ideals are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatist intellect which takes its stand upon the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities... But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe....the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the Idea which has created it. (Ideals and Progress, SABCL, vol.16, p.301)

Sri Aurobindo's observations are remarkable. While Death describes ideal as unreal fantasy, Sri Aurobindo holds just an opposite view. Ideal alone is real. All phenomenal realities are in a flux and, therefore, temporary but ideal is or ideals are non-temporal, i.e. not created out of facts of the world. Ideals have their true existence in their own worlds, they are yet to be manifested in this material world.

This remark of Sri Aurobindo is absolutely true. Let us explain it. In spite of all kinds of material satisfaction derived through the enjoyment of material objects, no man is fully satisfied. So he 'pines for what is not'. This 'what is not' is not any material object, it is something non-material. In that non-materiality, we look for something which to us is ideal. We aspire for that ideal which will make our life fully happy. We believe in the existence of such ideals and therefore we crave for them. It is not true that such a craving belies us or we are trapped in falsity. We truly find that our life gets energy and impetus by such ideals. Ideals are not illusory in nature. They are truly real. They derive their reality from their origin which is the Idea. Sri Aurobindo observes :

.....The Idea which seems to us to rise out of the fact, really precedes it and out of it the fact has arisen. Our vulgar contrast of the ideal and the real is therefore a sensuous error, for that which we call real is only a phenomenon of force working out something that stands behind the phenomenon and that is pre-existent and greater than it. The Real, the Idea, the phenomenon, this is the true order of the creative Divinity. (Ibid, p. 302).

To Death, ideals like Love, Immortality, Truth, etc. are unreal. They have no permanent value. Let us quote here Death's view on Love. Death holds that

*...is a passion of thy yearning cells,
It is flesh that calls to flesh to serve its lust;*

.....

In the Alone there is no room for love. (SABCL, vol. 29, Savitri, p.608)

And again

What is this love thy thought has deified,

.....

It is a conscious yearning of thy flesh,

.....
It passes and the world is as before (Ibid, p.610)

Further

*Love cannot live by heavenly food alone,
Only on sap of earth can it survive.* (Ibid, p.611)

To Death, love is 'a hunger of the body and the heart' (Ibid, p.611). The body dies, along with that love too dies. Love has nothing heavenly in it, it is simply earthly. Therefore no love can be called divine love.

With this argument Death tries to contradict Savitri's claim according to which her love for Satyavan is divine and not physical. According to Death, love is always physical, it is a result of the gland's secretion. But how far can this view be accepted? Love in itself is not restricted to biological reactions. It has a wider range. There is the psychic love, the spiritual love. They have no connexion with biological reactions. The expression of the biological love is not similar to the expression of the psychic love and the spiritual love. Different kinds of expression prove the multifaceted nature of love. Therefore, following Death, love need not be restricted to any single field.

That Savitri's love is spiritual is evident from her following words :

*My love is not a hunger of the heart,
My love is not a craving of the flesh;
It came to me from God, to God returns.* (Ibid, p.612)

In fact, Death's claim can be accepted partially. That love has a physical aspect is not altogether false. But this is not all. The mother's love for her children, men's love for mankind, love for beauties of Nature, these are of purely psychic and spiritual nature and are not connected with any biological reaction.

Further, there is a basic difference between biological love and psychic and spiritual love. While biological love is flesh-centred, psychic and spiritual love is soul-centred. Flesh of an individual man desires his self-satisfaction, therefore it is absolutely selfish, while the soul of an individual person feels affinity with souls of others, and therefore psychic as well as spiritual love is all-centric and so unselfish. This psychic as well as spiritual love is all-pervasive, while biological love is strictly limited to an individual only. While biological love is temporary, spiritual love is universal and eternal. Therefore it has a greater reality than the reality of the biological love.

As Savitri is in constant touch with this greater reality, so she speaks out boldly :

*Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme
.....
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.* (Ibid, p.633)

'Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven'. This character of love has effaced the distance between earth and heaven and earth has united both of them together. This aspect of love is incomparable.

It is true that the earthly life suffers from decomposition, degeneration and deformation. The heavenly life is free from these defects. This is why the earthly people long for heaven. But Savitri nourishes a sincere love for earth. So she earnestly seeks for the descent of heaven upon earth. But Death reminds her that it is impossible. What is heavenly will remain in heaven forever, it will not descend to earth. And earth will remain earth forever with all sorts of imperfections. So he speaks to Savitri with a warning :

Vain is thy longing to build heaven on earth (Ibid, p.615)

He says so because the nature of earth is quite different from the nature of heaven.

*Matter on the firm earth sits strong and sure.
It is the first-born of created things,
It stands the last when mind and life are slain,
And if it ended all would cease to be.*

All else is only its outcome or its phase: (Ibid, p.615)

That the matter's existence is strong because of earth's support, is true. But it is not true that when there will be no matter there will be no mind or life. Mind and life get help from matter for their external manifestation. But they do not lose their existence in their respective worlds. They are non-material powers with non-material existence. In their own worlds they preserve their existence and whenever necessary they make themselves materialised in the material world. They are not the product of matter. In truth, matter itself is the product of something else. What is that something? According to Sāmkhya philosophy, five gross elements (*Pancha Mahabhuta*) have come out of five subtle elements (*Pancha Tanmātra*). But for Pancha Tanmatra, Pancha Mahabhuta cannot come into being. So matter is not original, it is not the originator, but originated. According to the Vedānta, Brahman himself has assumed the forms of mind, life and matter. This is why Taittiriya Upanishad says ' *Annam Brahma Vyajanāt* '. Even Veda says ' *Padbhyām Prithvī* ', the feet of the Supreme hold on the earth. So matter itself is nothing but the self-externalisation of Brahman. Apart from that matter cannot exist. What Death says is nothing but a view that has been upheld by the materialists. But all problems of existence still remain unsolved by the materialists.

II

Death portrays matter as opposed to God. But Savitri contradicts his view. She says :

*One made of Matter's world his starting-point,
He made of Nothingness his living-room
And Night a process of the eternal light
And death a spur towards immortality.
God wrapped his head from sight in Matter's cowl,
His consciousness dived into inconscient depths,
All-Knowledge seemed a huge dark Nescience;
Infinity wore a boundless zero's form.
His abysses of bliss became insensible deeps,
Eternity a blank spiritual Vast.* (Ibid, p.621)

Savitri makes it clear that Death fails to see the light behind the darkness. Darkness is not the opposite of light, rather light itself becomes darkness through involution and through evolution it regains its original light. Matter is the lowest level where God has involved himself. Through evolution he returns to his original position. Likewise Nothingness is not nothing but is his 'living-room'. He lives there but in a hidden condition.

Death argues that the very existence of darkness, night, death creates a dynamic situation for the attainment of light and immortality. Had there been no light, no truth, no immortality the earthly life would have been damned, only the frustrations would have been there to make life absolutely meaningless. That would have been the greatest tragedy. But for that tragic fate the earth has not been created. The earth has a glorious future. In that coming future the earth will enjoy complete freedom, complete joy, complete happiness and immortality. For that this earth has been created. And this is why

*In inert Matter breathed a slumbering Life,
In a subconscious Life Mind lay asleep;*

*.....
In waking Mind the Thinker built his house.*

*.....
Now through Mind's windows stares the demigod
Hidden behind the curtains of man's soul:
He has seen the Unknown, looked on Truth's veiless face;*

A ray has touched him from the eternal Sun; (Ibid, p.622)

This ascent from the lowest is a proof that one day man will pass over manhood and reach the supermanhood, the divine manifestation has perfectly taken place there.

Savitri has seen that world. And this is why she rightly points out the shortcomings of Death.

O Death, thou lookst on an unfinished world

*.....
And sayest God is not and all is vain.*

*.....
A mute material Nature wakes and sees;*

*.....
Something surrounds her into which she grows:
To uncover the spirit, to change back into God,
To exceed herself is her transcendent task.
In God concealed the world began to be,
Tardily it travels towards manifest God:
Our imperfection towards perfection toils,*

*.....
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
Time travels towards revealed eternity. (Ibid, p.623)*

This creation is an experiment of God. For this he has made the lowest as well as the highest. He alone is the absolute reality. In the lowest as well as in the highest He alone

is the existent. But in the lowest He is the inconscient and in the highest He is the superconscient. The inconscient God likes to have experience of the nature of inconscient world, the conscient God likes to have the experience of the conscient world, and the superconscient God likes to know him in his reality. The purpose behind this gradual creation is to have different experiential knowledge from the lowest to the highest. God without creation enjoys one kind of experience, with creation enjoys a different kind of experience, and God enjoys himself totally with these two states at a time. Therein lies the real nature of God. Integrality is God's real nature.

The following words of Savitri echo this truth :

This world is God fulfilled in outwardness.

*.....
He has built a world in the unknowing Void.
His forms he has massed from infinitesimal dust;
His marvels are built from insignificant things.*

(Ibid, p.624)

Earlier Savitri said :

*In God concealed the world began to be
Tardily it travels towards manifest God:*

(Ibid, p.623)

Now she says :

*The mighty Mother her creation wrought,
A huge caprice self-bound by iron laws,
And shut God into an enigmatic world:
She lulled the Omniscient into nescient sleep,
Omnipotence on Inertia's back she drove,
Trod perfectly with divine unconscious steps
The enormous circle of her wonder-works.
Immortality assured itself by death;*

*.....
His knowledge he disguised as Ignorance,
His Good he sowed in Evil's monstrous bed,
Made error a door by which Truth could enter in,
His plant of bliss watered with Sorrow's tears.*

A thousand aspects point back to the One;

A dual nature covered the Unique.

(Ibid, pp.624-25)

In these lines we find the dual nature of creation: an outer appearance and an inner hidden truth. In the creation, we came across the facts of error, ignorance, sorrows, death. These are simply appearances. Behind them lie truth, knowledge, bliss, immortality. But we do not experience them in our outer life. This is because we are satisfied with our outer life. We feel no necessity of entering into the depth of our soul. We do not feel that we have an inner life also like the outer life. So long as this condition prevails, we will never have any truth-experience. Inwardly we must be more conscious. Only then can we have real understanding. The more and more we shall be inwardly conscious, more and more will truth be revealed to us. Then we will understand

'To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, — this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. (The Life Divine, SABCL, vol.18, pp.1-2)

With the following words Savitri reminds Death that

*A hidden Bliss is at the root of things.
A mute Delight regards Time's countless works:
To house God's joy in things Space gave wide room,
To house God's joy in self our souls were born.* (Savitri, SABCL, vol.29, p.630)

When we go beyond appearances we see how this delight of God is active to shower upon all beings and things of this world his unlimited delight. But for his delight the creation never could have existed.

*A will to live persists, a joy to be.
There is a joy in all that meets the sense,
A joy in all experience of the soul,
A joy in evil and a joy in good,
A joy in virtue and a joy in sin:
Indifferent to the threat of karmic law,
Joy dares to grow upon forbidden soil,
Its sap runs through the plant and flowers of Pain:
It thrills with the drama of fate and tragic doom,
It tears its food from sorrow and ecstasy...* (Ibid, p.630)

This all-pervasive joy is active in this dynamic creation. But we fail to feel it, because in its nature it is non-sensuous, and we are tied to our senses only. For this reason we fail to see its existence and its activities in the world. Senses always belie us. Therefore we have to go beyond senses. The power of the reason and the power of the soul should guide our life. Only then will we see the truth clearly. The truth is: “*Ānandat hi eva imāni bhūtāni jāyante — the whole world has been created out of joy*”.

III

Savitri wants to get back Satyavan's soul from Death. But Death declines to do so because birth and death are laws of the present world. Savitri knows it but she knows also that she has come to introduce a new law, the law of immortality in place of the law of mortality. Therefore she wants back Satyavan's soul. She knows that she and Satyavan would jointly perform this task. She alone cannot do it. So she reminds Death

*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;...* (Ibid, p.633)

Further she says:

*I am a deputy of the aspiring world,
My spirit's liberty I ask for all.* (Ibid, p.649)

Death listened to her words but did not give in. Savitri noticed that Death would never obey her words. So she had to adopt now a different method. The human Savitri awoke in herself with immense spiritual powers and thus she transformed her humanity to divinity.

A mighty transformation came on her.

.....
*Her forehead's span vaulted the Omniscient's gaze,
Her eyes were two stars that watched the universe.* (Ibid, pp.664-65)

Seeing this divine transformation, Death was mortally afraid, yet he did not yield to Savitri. Then an infinite Voice commanded Death to return Satyavan's soul to Savitri. The Voice said that that the Supreme has sent both Savitri and Satyavan as his messengers to introduce a new law of immortality, joy and infinite freedom for a new world, the supramental world. In that task Satyavan is also necessary. Their joint adventure would transform the human world to the supramental world. For that reason Death must return Satyavan's soul..

Death now obeyed the Voice and returned Satyavan's soul to Savitri.

Newness of *Savitri*: An Interpretation

Asoka K Ganguli

Newness in its method:

Critics today strongly refute the possibility of an epic being composed in modern time. To them epic poem solely belongs to primitive ages. But mysterious are the ways of creative spirit; when and in what form it may effloresce human mind cannot be predicted; always there are pleasant and unexpected surprises from Muses of poetry.

An epic, particularly the primitive or primary, deals with a story from the heroic age concerning some great war or exploits of the hero in the battle field of Troy. A statement in this regard may be given in Sri Aurobindo's words, "*It is sometimes asserted that the epic is solely proper to primitive ages when the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity, the literary epic an artificial prolongation by an intellectual age and a genuine epic poetry no longer possible now or in future. This is to mistake form and circumstances for the central reality. The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or gods need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action.... The epic of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are its greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of the greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man & universe.*"¹ These lines written sometime between 1916-20 in *The Future Poetry*, set aside the contention of critics that composition of an epic in modern times is not only a possibility but how truly he anticipates his own composition of not one but two epics.

If we seek for an adventure in *Savitri* as we must in an epic, then that adventure is not exploring new continents, not participating in a Trojan war or the battlefield of Kurukshetra; the poet has shifted his epic adventure within to explore an enormous realm of consciousness:

A greater world Time's traveller must explore. (*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, p. 71)

It is not to fight the enemy in the battlefield but the struggle is within:

But though to the outward eye no sign appears

And peace is given to our torn human hearts,

The struggle is there and paid the unseen price;

The fire, the strife, the wrestle are within (*Ibid*, p.446)

The method is not "*anything professed or realised in the old yogas. If I had I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over*

paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public."² The method followed in *Savitri* "*is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.*"³

The epic describes the battle of the human soul against the omnipotent powers of the Inconscient, the descent of the soul into the abyss of the Night, and finally the battle royal against Death itself. There can be no braver adventures than these; there can be no more authentic epic adventures, authentic because these are '*record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind*'. The narrations of the epic are not based on any objective story, they are poet's experiences, spiritual and occult. Epics written in the past are not of this kind. It is this pure subjective element which enters the epic for the first time. It may be said that *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's spiritual autobiography. This forms the most significant newness of *Savitri* round which all other elements move.

II

Newness in its poetical aspect:

The newness of *Savitri* may be interpreted from two aspects; first from its poetical aspect and secondly from its thematic point of view.

It is a known fact that an epic, particularly the primitive or primary epic deals with a story from a heroic age concerning great war or exploits of the hero. An objective story is the dominant feature of the epic as we find in ancient epics. The literary or secondary epics do not have a strong and pure story element. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* has neither a mythological nor a historical story. It is allegorical in nature. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* too, a strong story element is missing. It seems that as the epic writing moves away from expressing the outer life, the objective story element has been dwindling. In Sri Aurobindo the epic tradition has been completely revolutionised. A total reversal of the epic method enters into *Savitri*, from objectivity of the past to pure subjectivism. "*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.*"⁴ In the same statement Sri Aurobindo writes, "*there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry.*"⁵ It may safely be added that *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's spiritual autobiography, bringing a new method in epic tradition.

It is now proposed to put forward a few elements of this epic poem which are totally new from the poetry of the early ages. Readers of *Savitri* often say that Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a difficult reading both from the point of view of the subject matter and poetic speech. It is true to a great extent. His poetry, more so *Savitri*, belongs to a new genre of poetry. The readers often draw a line of demarcation between Sri Aurobindo the poet and Sri Aurobindo the visionary philosopher and yogi. To appreciate a new poetry of this kind readers must know the whole of Sri Aurobindo as much as that is within our capacity.

A very significant and yet much omitted aspect of *Savitri* is the poet's new ways of treatment of Nature. Treatment of Nature has been a favourite and much preferred topic

in English poetry. To Sri Aurobindo all Nature is simply the working of a secret consciousness embedded in the Inconscient during devolutionary creation. What the Idea (Supermind) dreams of, Nature unfolds and manifests in visible forms, first as inanimate forms, objects and things; this '*half seen Nature*' acts under an inconscient law. Then Nature unfolds living forms in the Ignorance, and finally all that lies beyond mind consciousness in spiritual and transcendental realms. This clearly suggests that Sri Aurobindo's concept of Nature has three stages – Nature in Inconscience, Nature in Ignorance and Nature in Transcendental plane. In other words Nature is evolutionary. It is indeed new and totally a revolutionary concept. In English poetry, no poet has such a concept of Nature. *Savitri* expresses all these three stages of Nature. Further in Nature's operation there are two movements, one, the horizontal movement that describes all forms, objects and things on earth, and second, the vertical movement which Sri Aurobindo calls "*The pilgrimage of Nature to the Unknown*". By its vertical movement Nature carries creation to the evolutionary goal:

God found in Nature, Nature fulfilled in God (Ibid, p.37)

This is the most significant newness of *Savitri*. In an article like this it is not possible to present examples from the poem itself. A close reading of *Savitri* shall reveal what has been said above or the readers may go through the author's book – *Sri Aurobindo: The poet of Nature & other writings on Savitri*.

Another very significant newness in the field of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is in his construction of images. Right from the ancient times poets have considered image-making as the mark of poetic genius. Both critics and poets in their judgment and practice have been insisting on this aspect of poetry. As a result there entered in poetry prior to Aurobindonian era, a deliberate indulgence in image-making as the essence of great poetry, that is, image-making for its own sake. Such images become '*detachable ornaments*' and poets were engrossed in making picturesque images pleasing to outward surface senses. However Sri Aurobindo has a different opinion "*I have not anywhere in Savitri written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect...*"⁶ Making a new image, however, brings joy to the poet and the reader, sheds more light on the thing seen. "*The poet having to bring home something, even in things common, which is not obvious to surface experience, avails himself of image, symbol, whatever is just, beautiful, meaningful, suggestive.*"⁷ Such images are not '*charming airy nothings*', but they serve '*to bring very real realities close to the spirit*'. Behind every image-making there has to be some vision of truth, some kind of intuitive seeing. No true poet can afford to make his images merely '*detachable ornaments*' or '*charming airy nothings*'. Such is Sri Aurobindo's concept of imagery in poetry.

But the real newness in this field of poetry as discovered by Sri Aurobindo is the principle and the process of image-making. To his vision the great and fundamental truth is that Consciousness is a dynamic power of creativity, including the poetical. Its '*dynamic and creative energy*' creates the universe and all that is in it. Consciousness is generally identified with mind but Sri Aurobindo's discovery reveals a whole range of its overhead planes. Yet these planes are only variables of one consciousness, '*A lone immense high-curved world-pile*'.

The gradations of consciousness are universal states. In man, too, these planes or variables of consciousness are there, '*a mental plane of consciousness, a psychic, a vital, a subtle physical as well as the gross physical and material plane*'. "*The same planes are repeated in the consciousness of general Nature*"⁸ The newness of Sri Aurobindo's image-making can be understood if once we realise the presence of two ranges of consciousness, one in being of man and the other in supraphysical general Nature which is behind all ranges of human consciousness. From this truth-vision Sri Aurobindo presents his new theory of image-making in *Savitri*. True images, if they have to convey some high truth, must be the result of a contact or '*centralising*' of the poet's consciousness with some Overhead universal plane of consciousness in general Nature. The stress formed by the concentration or contact of the poet's individual consciousness at particular point or level of the Overhead universal gradations releases the creative power of that gradation. Higher the point of concentration and centralising contact of the poet's consciousness with the universal level, intenser and purer become the light and power of poetical creation. The poet's consciousness may concentrate in the ego, in the mind or in the outside of the external being, image is then expression of the physical externalities of life. It may concentrate in the inner mind and vital or the inmost psychic, centralising its stress there, poetry then becomes the expression of the inner being or of the deeper psychic being. The consciousness may even ascend beyond the physical life and mind to the wideness and freedom into cosmic Self, poetry and imagery then become the utterance of the deepest soul of man and of the universal spirit in things. That is why Sri Aurobindo revised *Savitri* many times. By his yoga as he ascended on the ladder of consciousness from that plane he composed the poem till the highest was attained. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo advises budding poets to alter the poise of their consciousness and station themselves in some plane of overhead consciousness. Such is the theory of poetical creation Sri Aurobindo presents; it is not a mental concept of the poet but a truth-vision based on yoga sadhana, a theory never heard before.

III

Newness in its theme:

A very significant newness of *Savitri* may be studied from its thematic point of view. In the opening pages it has been said the epic method followed in *Savitri* is not the traditional method of the poet. The poet of *Savitri* does not follow any beaten track of the old method of composition. He has shifted the epic method from narrating an objective story element to a new method based on '*the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often far from what the general human mind sees and experiences*'. Therefore the readers of *Savitri* find it difficult to comprehend the poem; it requires '*a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis*' to comprehend and appreciate it. Sri Aurobindo has taken the theme of his epic to deepest psychic depth and to the pinnacle of overhead consciousness. When once asked from what plane of consciousness *Savitri* was written, he said '*mostly from Overmind plane*':

*Adventuring across enormous realms,
He broke into another Space and Time.* (Ibid, p.91)

Sri Aurobindo's yogic, spiritual and occult experiences go to form the theme of *Savitri*, his spiritual autobiography. This is the greatest newness of *Savitri*.

The thematic newness of *Savitri* has two aspects:

1. Evolution of Consciousness or Spiritual Evolution, and
2. Transformation of Consciousness.

These two aspects together form the poetic Agenda and format of his magnum opus, *Savitri*. The poetic agenda Sri Aurobindo adopts and follows in his epic reveals these two underlying currents of the poetic theme, the two that go inseparably together to fulfil Sri Aurobindo's vision to redeem the world from Ignorance.

The first stage of this world redemption is the upward march of the human soul from its earthly state to 'the discovery of a greater self', flowering of the consciousness embedded in the Inconscient. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls spiritual evolution. "*The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution.*"⁹ It is true that the theory of evolution as presented by Science has been the key-note of the thought of the nineteenth century Europe; it ushered in an era of victory for the materialistic notion of life and universe. The scientific theory of evolution has many lacunae and shortcomings which it fails to explain. The foremost among these shortcomings is the law of heredity as the mechanism of evolution. This law has marked limitations. For the process of evolution is not at all 'exclusively physical and biological as at first it looks'. All mental and spiritual phenomena are not transmitted by heredity. A more serious question is that the physical theory of evolution by its material causes does not explain the mystery of the emergence of life in matter and an equal mystery of the emergence of mind in life. It was left to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual vision to explain the mystery of creation.

"The word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution... all that evolves already existed involved... concealed from us in the shell of material Nature".¹⁰ says Sri Aurobindo. Whatever 'manifests here in a body, life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent in the whole of matter.' "Nothing can evolve out of Matter which is not therein already contained."¹¹ Sri Aurobindo's vision of a spiritual evolution does explain the mystery of creation. Consciousness from its transcendental plane descended all the way and finally plunged to become matter and gets involved therein. Evolution is the gradual release of this involved consciousness in the form of life and mind. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls spiritual evolution or evolution of consciousness. As consciousness evolves, it takes a form according to its need. Every page of *Savitri*, particularly Bk Two of the poem, reveals the planes of evolutionary creation which the consciousness of the poet has experienced and lived. Readers shall comprehend the poet's vision of spiritual evolution if they closely read Bk Two of *Savitri*. This forms in brief the first part of the poem's theme; such a vast theme dealing with the whole creation and beyond has never been found in any epic of the past, or of today.

The second thematic newness of *Savitri* is perhaps the greatest spiritual contribution of Sri Aurobindo. It is transformation of the being of man and his nature, to bring forth a new creation and establish a divine life on earth free from ignorance, sorrow and evil. "*Savitri is a Mantra for the transformation of the world*".¹² Now we take up this thematic design of the epic. Sri Aurobindo is a poet with a definite mission which no poet has ever had, and towards attaining that he directed the power and movement his Integral Yoga and that is what *Savitri* expresses in the mighty and profound voice of the poet. The poet puts a high responsibility on poetry, that of remoulding this world of ignorance, falsehood and mortality, 'to hew the ways of immortality'. It is veritably building a new world and new species on earth.

Traditional systems of yoga had for their aim union with the Divine by ascending to the highest. But such a spiritual realisation 'may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness at the top'. "One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were... There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real transformation can take place".¹³

*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 hemisphere,
We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,
Acquaint our depths with supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire.*

(Ibid, p.171-2)

Once the supernal Ray, the light of the supreme supramental consciousness cleaves the darkness of our depths, then begins the process of transformation and to achieve it becomes possible. It is veritably a new creation:

Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Transformation as poetised in *Savitri* and which forms its unique newness, has two aspects, first, ascent to various planes of consciousness as described in Book Two of the epic to the highest superconscious summit:

*His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;
Mind screened no more the shoreless infinite.
Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscious realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.
There came not form or any mounting voice;
There only were Silence and the Absolute.*

(Ibid, pp. 33-34)

The second aspect of Internal Yoga is descent of Truth, Light and Force from the highest supernal plane into earth consciousness:

*As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:* (Ibid, p.81)

The poem lays the greatest importance to the descent movement for without that no transformation is possible. This is the unique feature and newness of *Savitri* not to be found in any scripture or poem or philosophy of the past or present.

The pages of *Savitri* are strewn with verses that describe the ways to transformation:

*As a sculptor chisels a deity out of stone
He slowly chipped off the dark envelope,
Line of defence of Nature's ignorance,
The illusion and mystery of the Inconscient* (Ibid, p.36)

But a certain preliminary or some sort of purification or self-perfecting of the nature and its instruments is necessary so that they may respond to higher forces and a greater plasticity may be attained. This requires certain basic conditions to be followed although these conditions do not directly go to achieve the transformation. They form only a groundwork to facilitate the work of transformation. These conditions are:-

1. Equality:

“The very first necessity for spiritual perfection is a perfect equality”.¹⁴ The epic signs of this perfect equality of mind and spirit:

*In the world which sprang from it, it took no part:
It gave no heed to the paeans of victory,
It was indifferent to its own defeats,
It heard the cry of grief and made no sign;
Impartial fell its gaze on evil and good.* (Ibid, p.283)

This equality brings the ‘yogic poise’ so necessary in yoga and with its attainment almost half the battle is won.

2. To be Egoless

“The ego is by its nature a smallness of being, it brings contraction of the consciousness and with the contraction limitation of knowledge, disabling ignorance,—confinement and a diminution of power and by that diminution incapacity, and weakness ...”¹⁵

*The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent.
Overpassed was this world of rigid limiting forms:
Life's barriers opened into the Unknown.* (Ibid, p.25)

Then is

Annulled the soul's treaty with Nature's nescience. (Ibid)

Here is a perfect egoless state of *Savitri*

*A vacant consciousness watched from within,
Empty of all but bare Reality.
There was no will behind the word and act,
No thought formed in her brain to guide the speech:
An impersonal emptiness walked and spoke in her* (Ibid, pp.551-2)

When one becomes egoless there appears a widening of the consciousness:

*His soul was all in front like a great sea
Flooding the mind and body with its waves* (Ibid, p.318)

3. To be Desireless :

Once the yogic poise is attained by equality, ‘a constant lodging in the Eternal's realm’, ‘a settlement in the Immutable’, it becomes easier for the seeker to get rid of desires. Driven by the forces of Nature and their ego, “whatever desires come, they fulfil them, whatever emotions come they allow them to play, whatever physical wants they have, they try to satisfy”.¹⁶

“The root desire is the vital cleaving to seize upon that which we feel we have not, it is the limited life's instinct for possession and satisfaction. It creates the sense of want”¹⁷ It brings ‘unquiet thirst of sensation’, ‘lust of control, domination, success’; the ‘desire for the satisfaction of liking and disliking, love and hate, grief and joy’. The only way is to reject these elements from the consciousness itself as something foreign to our nature, not belonging to our true self. Refusal to indulge the suggestions of desire is also a part of rejection. Sri Aurobindo says that the difficulty of rejection comes because we feel desire as part of our constituent. *Savitri* suggests there is only one way to get rid of desires –

*All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.* (Ibid, p.316)

Or again the poem suggests

*He tore desire up from its bleeding roots
And offered to the gods the vacant place.* (Ibid, p.318)

4. Resistance of nature:

No path of Yoga is facile. ‘One cannot have the crown of spiritual victory without the struggle’, says Sri Aurobindo. “All who enter the spiritual path have to face the difficulties and ordeals of the path, those which rise from their own nature and those which come in from outside... they must be faced with both strength and patience”.¹⁸ As the soul approaches the Divine, there is a resistance in the form of denial, doubt and fear of the unknown.

*In the texture of our bound humanity
He felt the stark resistance huge and dumb* (Ibid, p.317)

Repeatedly the poem speaks of the hurdles of resistance of our nature on the path of yoga:

*Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:*

*It fears the pure divine intolerance
Of that assault of ether and of fire;
It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,
Almost with hate repels the light it brings;
It trembles at its naked power of Truth*

(Ibid, p.7)

And ‘inflicting on the heights the abyss’s law’,
Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence
It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;

(Ibid)

Human nature has

A veiled collaboration with the Night.....

Its kinship with the Inconscient whence it came.

(Ibid, p.317)

This can be overcome “only when there is the full call and complete self-giving of the soul and the entire widest opening of the nature”¹⁹

Let us see what the epic says –

A prayer, a master act, a king idea

Can link man’s strength to a transcendent Force.

Then miracle is made the common rule,

One mighty deed can change the course of things;

(Ibid, p.20)

The poem provides several ways to overcome the resistance with ‘a barring will, a blow of Force’ (Ibid, p. 544). However, to remain exclusively in ‘eternity’s hush, the repose of the Absolute’, ‘in the ocean silence of Infinity’ is the perfect solution given by the epic.

To write anything on Savitri in such a small article is, indeed, a presumptuous attempt. The author, however, shall feel amply recompensed if this article is even a little help to the readers to read *Savitri*. To remind, *Savitri* is not like anything of the ancient epics that deal with objective tales of wars and intrigues of life. *Savitri* is an epic with a difference. This grand Epic of epics is a poem with a high mission its poet has set before it, that is to transform this earthly life of ignorance, falsehood and mortality. The Divine Mother has very aptly said, “*Savitri is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision*”, “*Savitri is a Mantra for the transformation of the world*”. The poetic aim of *Savitri* is to divinise this terrestrial life when

The spirit shall take up the human play,

This earthly life become the life divine.

(Ibid, p.710)

and this is the newness of *Savitri*.

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3. Sri Aurobindo: Ibid
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All references to *Savitri* have been taken from Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 4th rev ed, 1993.

Note:

The author expresses his thanks to the publishers of his two books for the help in preparing this article

1. *Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri*

2. *Sri Aurobindo: the Poet of Nature and other writings on Savitri.*

Notes on Authors

(Beginning with this issue we shall include names of only those writers who have not figured previously in this section)

Asoka K Ganguli is a retired Reader of English, University of Delhi. His field of specialisation was the poetry of Milton and Walt Whitman and on the latter poet he was awarded Ph.D. in 1968. He taught English poetry to postgraduate students of the University of Agra for a decade and to students of the University of Delhi for almost three decades. A voracious reader of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, specially *Savitri* since early fifties, his first publication *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri* which was published by Sri Aurobindo Society in 2002 and his second book *Sri Aurobindo: Poet of Nature and other writings on Savitri* are the outcome of his labour and research in the field of Aurobindian literature.

Krishnaprem, Sri, known as Ronald Nixon in his early life, was a brilliant product of the University of Cambridge. In his early twenties he received an offer of appointment as a lecturer in English at the University of Lucknow and sailed for India, where he spent the rest of his life. One special contact was Dilip Kumar Roy, a musician par excellence, a great devotee of Lord Krishna and also a favourite disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Young Professor Nixon was a frequent guest in the house of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Lucknow where Nixon, on the insistence of Mrs. Chakravarty, the wife of the Vice-Chancellor, had taken up residence. As time passed, a close friendship grew up between the three of them— Nixon, Roy and Mrs. Chakravarty, a well-known and sophisticated socialite and a deeply devoted Krishna bhakta. Her relationship with Nixon developed into that of preceptor or guru, the latter being both a son and a disciple. It was at Uttar Vrindavana, that they established a beautiful ashram and a temple dedicated to Lord Krishna and Radha. Mrs. Chakravarty, now a full fledged sannyasini, adopted the name Yashoda Ma, and Ronald Nixon came to be known as Krishnaprem. Through Dilip Sri Aurobindo developed a high regard for Krishnaprem, and always commended his views to Dilip. Krishnaprem gave the world two important books, *The Yoga of the Kathopanishad* and *Yoga for the Westerner*. All of his writing displayed his impressive knowledge and grasp of highly spiritual and metaphysical subjects. He passed away in 1965. Ramana Maharshi commended Krishnaprem to his devotees with the words, 'A wonderful blend of jñyani (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion) in one person.'

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Usharanjan Chakraborty (born 1931) did his MA in English, History and Philosophy and also PhD in Philosophy from Calcutta University. After serving in different colleges, he joined North Bengal University in 1982 and retired from there in 2000 as Reader in Philosophy. In addition to presenting papers at various seminars, his writings have appeared in several journals notably Calcutta University Philosophy Journal, The Advent, Mother India, World Union and Rtam