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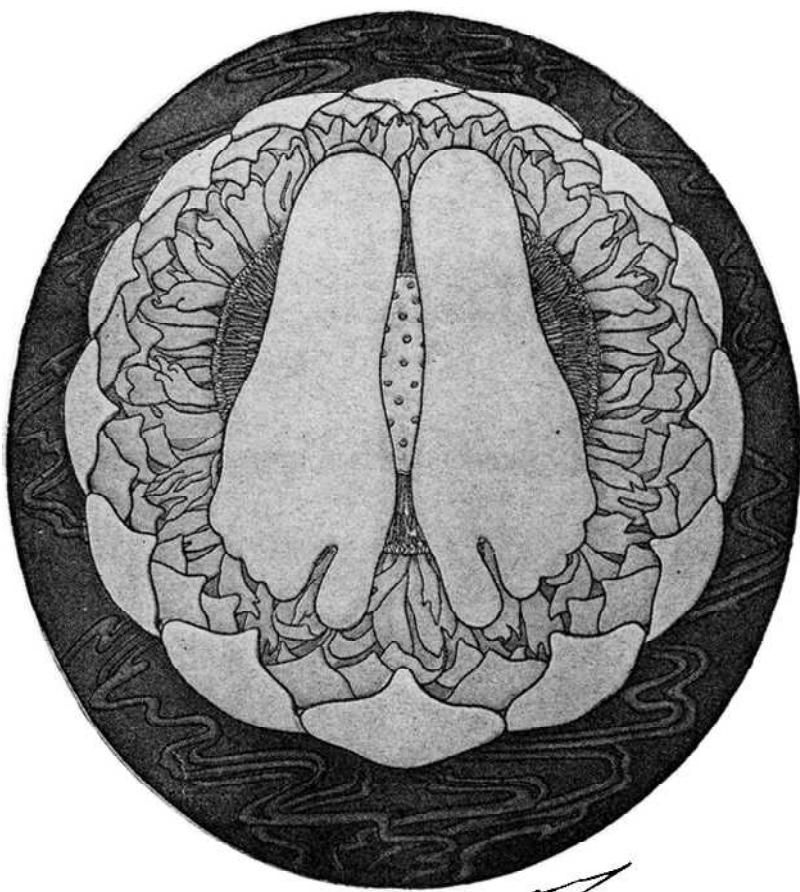
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J. J.

## **Invocation to Savitri**

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

*(Savitri p. 408)*

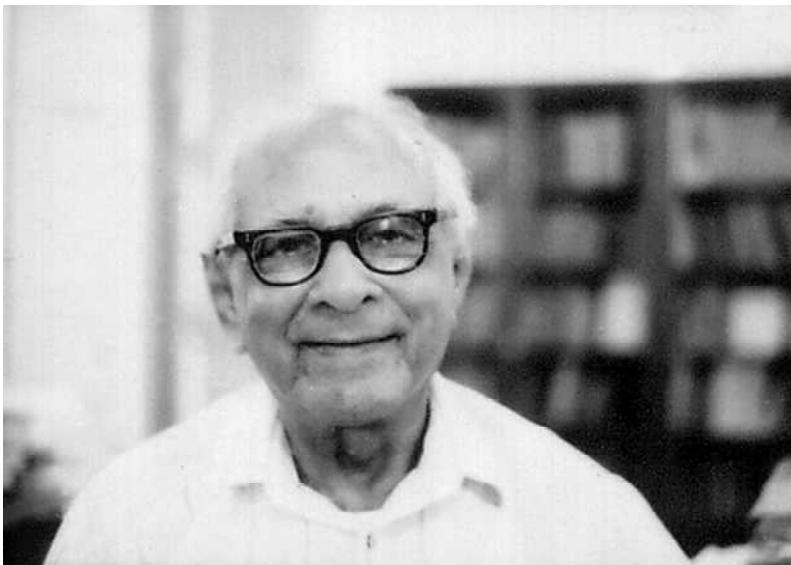
# ***Amal Kiran : The Clear Ray***

*by Shraddhavan*

November 25th marks the hundredth birth anniversary of elder sadhak Amal Kiran. As a tribute to him and his very special connection with *Savitri* we are reprinting in this issue three of his many articles on Sri Aurobindo's great poem.

Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1927, when he was just 23 and newly-married, abandoning his prospects as a brilliant philosophy student. A more brilliant light had called to him, and it was not long before Sri Aurobindo gave him his new name, signifying "The Clear Ray". As he relates in the first of the articles given here, for several years he was the only one of Sri Aurobindo's disciples who had the immense privilege of seeing lines from *Savitri*, which were sent to him in manuscript form as they were being composed. He used to type them out and return them to the Master. After some time Nolini took over this privilege. But it was to Amal, one of the poets blossoming under the Master's guidance and inspiration, that Sri Aurobindo wrote his "Letters on Savitri" - the earliest in 1931, the latest in 1947. We are also including a selection from these Letters in this issue.

Amal was away from the Ashram for family reasons for about ten years, from the early forties to 1954. But he was still considered a close member of the Ashram family, and returned for practically every Darshan. In 1947, with Sri Aurobindo's encouragement and approval, he started the periodical *Mother India*, of which he is still the Editor. The story of this great journal is an epic in itself. Up to the end of 1950 all the political articles were vetted by Sri Aurobindo himself and he is recorded as having said on one occasion, when told of someone criticising of it, "Doesn't he know that *Mother India* is my journal?" In 1954 the Mother shifted the office and publication place of the journal to the Ashram, "So that he (Amal) has no reason to stay in Bombay".



Over the years, Amal's unique capacity for poetical appreciation led to him being the person most often approached for elucidation of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, and especially *Savitri*. Although the Mother said in 1954 that she was the only one who could really explain the deeper meaning of *Savitri* as a record of spiritual experience, at the time when she was working with Huta on the "*Meditations on Savitri*" paintings in the 1960s she encouraged her to study the epic with Amal to gain a greater intellectual understanding of its contents, and at one time it was Amal who selected the passages to be illustrated, the lines which were then recited by the Mother and tape-recorded by Huta, until at a later stage the Mother gave the responsibility of selecting these passages to Huta herself.

Although he was crippled from childhood by polio, Amal, with the support of an abundant life-force, nevertheless managed to lead an immensely active life up to just a few years ago, when, after a lifetime of falling and rising, one of his falls at last led to a very serious second fracture which put him in the Ashram Nursing Home, where he has been resident ever since. But although dependent on a wheel-chair and largely bed-ridden, Amal still receives visitors and still radiates to all who come the clear ray he embodies.

Much could, and should, be written in appreciation of Amal's genius as a writer of breathtaking breadth of insight and interests, and especially of his great gifts as a poet. This genius has been less appreciated than it deserves, because its towering height has been disguised from us by its proximity to other great heights clustering around the supreme twin-peak of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But to do it justice would require more space than we can offer.

Instead, I prefer to close on a more personal note. It has been my great good fortune to find in Amal an affectionate elder brother since the day I first met him in August 1970. For many years from then on I used to meet him regularly every week, and through the years he has been a wonderfully supportive and illuminating friend and guide in all my attempts to be a true child of the Mother and the Master. To me he has been a living example of what it means to be a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Although I have very occasionally seen him shaken outwardly - for his life has been dogged by a series of tragic losses - his steady composure has represented for me a condition he aspires to make constant, expressed in these mantric lines from *Savitri*:

*A poised serenity of tranquil strength,  
A wide unshaken look on Time's unrest  
Faced all experience with unaltered peace.*

At the same time, his equanimity is tinged to smiling serenity by his sadhana-practice of "Remember and Offer", deepened by love and gratitude to the Mother and the Master. In his relationship with the world around, the sweet strength of this inner poise radiates out in a ray that sheds not only clarity, but also warmth ... as well as an unfading youthfulness. The advice Amal gave to me on my own 60th birthday provides a key to this ever-fresh state:

*"To feel as if you never had a birthday – vast, wide,  
free – not limited to any particular destiny."....*

What a privilege to have been close to him! With gratitude and love I offer him my wishes for "Many Happy Returns of the Day".

# ***Sri Aurobindo's Letters on Savitri***

*A Personal Recollection*

*by Amal Kiran*

Sri Aurobindo intended to write a long Introduction to *Savitri : a Legend and a Symbol*. Together with the final revision he seems to have had in mind of a few parts of his epic, the eagerly awaited Introduction never got under way. But, as some compensation, we have a substantial number of letters by Sri Aurobindo on what can be called, if any one achievement by so vastly and variously creative a genius can lay claim to the title, his literary lifework. They have been arranged to make an introductory ensemble - necessarily in certain places more informal, personal, unreserved, focused on details, quick-shifting, repetitive than a specially composed piece for the public would be.

Very few, however, know how these illuminative letters came to be written. We have to go back a number of decades for their origin and even farther for the background against which they emerged.

No sooner did I commence my contact with Sri Aurobindo in 1927 than I found the air of his Ashram humming with rich rumours of the masterpiece that had been in progress ever since his days in Baroda. Having always had a passion for poetry and having myself tried to catch a spark of the celestial fire, I was extremely thrilled, and I longed to set eyes on this most significant work of his which he was repeatedly recasting to make it accord with the ever higher ascension of his own consciousness in Yoga. But Sri Aurobindo was in no hurry to show it before it reached the intensest spiritual perfection. It was I, on the contrary, who kept showing him my own little efforts at expressing the few strange glimmers of beauty and truth that at times my discipleship under so gracious a spiritual and literary guru brought me. On one such occasion, to illustrate some point, he sent back with his helpful comments two lines describing "The Ray from the transcendent penetrating through the mind's passive neutral reflection of the supreme quietude of the silent Brahman". They ran :

*Piercing the limitless unknowable,  
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace*

[At present these lines stand in the reverse order on p. 312, and the word 'peace' is replaced by 'hush'.]

I was struck by the profound word-reverberations that reinforced the mystical word-suggestions with a tremendous immediacy of spiritual fact. I asked where the lines had come from. The reply was : "Savitri".

I never forgot this first brief impact of the closely guarded secret. Even before it, Sri Aurobindo had tried to make me conscious of a certain element in poetry that hailed from what he called the Overhead planes, the hidden ranges of consciousness above the intellect, with their inherent light of knowledge and their natural experience of the infinite. He distinguished four planes : Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind. The last-named has been, according to him, the top reach of the dynamic side of man's spirituality so far: a transcendental poise of immutable Brahman or featureless Nirvana is the Beyond to it usually realised when in isolated cases there is a leap to the ultimate status of that infinite silence of self-liberation which can be attained on any plane of the cosmos by an inner withdrawal. The master dynamism of the divine, the integral earth-transformative power which Sri Aurobindo designated Supermind or Gnosis or Truth-Consciousness and which was his own outstanding personal realisation, rendering his Yoga a unique hope for the world, has lain unmanifest and mostly unseized and, until certain radical conditions are completely fulfilled, cannot find direct expression in life or literature. Even the expression of the Overmind with its massive and comprehensive yet intensely immediate vision - especially in the entire authenticity of its undertones and overtones of rhythm - is rare, as is also to a less degree that of the Higher Mind's broad connective clarity, the Illumined Mind's many-sided opulence of colourful insight, the Intuition's swift and close and all-seizing focus. What the ancients termed the mantra - the stuff of Divinity itself appearing to become revelatory scriptural word as in some parts of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita - is the clearest voice of the Overmind in its few past visitations on earth. Less openly, the Overmind is the chief presence in the world's greatest poetic phrases of various types. More and more Sri Aurobindo sought - by patiently

criticising, appraising, distinguishing - to help me not only respond, in my appreciation of poetry, to the rising scale of the Overhead note but also bring some strain of it into my own verses. The quest of that note grew for me a dominant occupation and most I prayed for a touch of the Overmind.

One day, emboldened by his innumerable favours of tutorship, I made a singular request. I wrote:

*I shall consider it a favour indeed if you will give me  
an instance in English of the inspiration of the pure  
Overmind. I don't mean just a line like Milton's*

*Those lines that wander through Eternity*

or Wordsworth's

*Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,  
which has a briefburst of it, but something sustained  
and plenary. I want to steep my consciousness in its  
rhythm and its revelation. It will be a most cherished  
possession. Please don't disappoint me by saying that,  
as no English writer has a passage of this kind, you  
cannot do anything for me.*

He wrote back in his characteristic vein:

*Good Heavens! How am I to avoid saying that, when  
it is the only possible answer - at least so far as I  
can remember? Perhaps if I went through English  
poetry again with my present consciousness I might  
find more intimations like that line of Wordsworth,  
but a passage sustained and plenary? These surely  
are things yet to come - the 'future poetry' perhaps,  
but not the past.*

With the familiarity - almost the impudence - he permitted us, I replied:

*I think the favour I asked was expressed in perfectly  
clear language. If no English poet has produced the  
passage I want, then who has done so in English?  
God alone knows. But who is capable of doing it? All*

*of us know. Well, then why not be kind enough to grant this favour? If difficult metres could be illustrated on demand, is it impossible to illustrate in a satisfying measure something so naturally Aurobindonian as the Overmind? I am not asking for hundreds of lines - even eight will more than do - all pure gold to be treasured for ever. So please ... Perhaps it is possible only on Sunday - the day dedicated to the golden Surya and rich for you with leisure from correspondence. I can wait answerless for twenty-four hours with a sweet samata,*

The answer came the very next morning:

*I have to say Good Heavens again. Because difficult metres can be illustrated on demand, which is a matter of metrical skill, how does it follow that one can produce poetry from any blessed plane on demand? It would be easier to furnish you with hundreds of lines already written out of which you could select for yourself anything Overmindish if it exists (which I doubt) rather than produce 8 lines of warranted Overmind manufacture to order. All I can do is to give you from time to time some lines from Savitri, on condition you keep them to yourself for the present. It may be a poor substitute for the Overmental, but if you like the sample, the opening lines, I can give you more hereafter - and occasionally better.*

And then with an "e.g." there followed in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand sixteen lines of the very first Canto of *Savitri* as it stood then :

*It was the hour before the Gods awake.  
Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge unslumbering spirit of Night, alone  
In the unlit temple of immensity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon silence' marge,  
Mute with the unplumbed prevision of her change.  
The impassive skies were neutral, waste and still.*

*Then a faint hesitating glimmer broke.  
A slow miraculous gesture dimly came,  
The insistent 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 the moment's fading brink  
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge  
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.*

(At present this prelude - slightly altered in phrase and with its opening and its close considerably separated - stands in a passage of 93 lines: *Savitri* pp. 1 - 3)

Below the quotation were the words :

*There ! Promise fulfilled for a wonder.*

After a whole day's absorption in the absolute nectar, I sent him a note:

*Like the sample? Rather! It is useless for me to attempt thanking you. The beauty of what you have sent may move one to utterance but the wideness takes one's breath away. I read the lines over and over again. I am somewhat stunned by the magnitude and memorableness of this day : I think your description of the divine dawn can very well apply to its spiritually poetic importance for me. Perhaps you will laugh, but I had two strange feelings before writing you this letter. I was reading your verses, when I had a mute sense of big tears in the heart and a conviction that having seen what I had seen I could not possibly remain a mere mortal! What do you say to my madness?*

The day of days was October 25, 1936. From then onwards, for months, Sri Aurobindo kept sending passages which I typed out and he touched up again or expanded. About the next passage I remarked:

*It goes reverberating in depth upon depth of one's being. What I admire is that the burden of infinite suggestion is carried with such a flexible ease. There is no attempt - as in the poetry of us lesser fry - to*

*make things specially striking or strange or new,  
but a simple largeness of gesture which most  
naturally makes one surprising revelation after  
another of beauty and power.*

His comment - intended, no doubt, for only my eyes, for in his public pronouncements he rarely spoke about his own work without reserve - was :

*Well, it is the difference of receiving from above and  
living in the ambiance of the Above - whatever comes  
receives the breadth of largeness which belongs to  
that plane.*

Our correspondence went on and it continued, though with several long breaks, up to almost the end. It was a correspondence with many features. All the critical appreciation and understanding I was capable of I brought to *Savitri* and all that I could write in my own manner by way of Introduction to the poem while Sri Aurobindo was still physically among us, was put into the last chapter of my book *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. [1946]. At the time it was written, only parts of Book One of *Savitri* had been published.] About this chapter Sri Aurobindo was both generous and modest enough to say on March 19, 1946 :

*It seems to me very fine both in style and substance,  
but as it is in high eulogy of my own writing, you  
must not expect me to say more.*

Yes, I could not help eulogising most of *Savitri* with whatever analytic and imaginative apparatus was at my disposal, yet I did not abstain from questioning a few things here and there. Nor did Sri Aurobindo either expect or desire me to abstain.

The precise character and motive of this questioning must not be misunderstood. Just as the merits of *Savitri* were appreciated to the utmost, whatever seemed a shortcoming no matter how slight and negligible in the midst of the abundant excellence was pointedly remarked upon so that Sri Aurobindo might not overlook anything in his work towards what he called "perfect perfection" before the poem came under the scrutiny of non-Aurobindonian critics at the

time of publication. I was anxious that there should be no spots on *Savitri's* sun. My purpose was also to get important issues cleared up in relation to the sort of poetry Sri Aurobindo was writing and some of his disciples aspired to write. Knowing the spirit and aim of the criticisms Sri Aurobindo welcomed them, even asked for them. On many occasions he vigorously defended himself but on several he willingly agreed to introduce small changes. Once he is reported to have smiled and said to Nirodbaran apropos of my finickiness, "Is he satisfied now?"

Sri Aurobindo's grace to his uppish critic was boundless. And although the amount of fault-finding was pretty little I sometimes feel most ashamed and think that occasionally I encroached with the play of the surface intelligence overmuch on Sri Aurobindo's meagre and precious spare time. On the other hand, without that little amount and without my pressing upon his notice some unfavourable comments by an academic friend outside the Aurobindonian circle, the chance would have been missed for ever of seeing the finest critic I have known pass elucidatory judgment on the greatest poem I have read - a poem written by the most enlightened Master of Yoga and the most patient as well as considerate Superman one could hope to have the privilege to serve.

(Written in 1951 to introduce the serialisation of the Letters in *Mother India*, and taken from *Sri Aurobindo - the Poet*, SAICE, 1970, pp. 170 - 76.)

# ***Two lines from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri***

*An explanatory letter by Amal Kiran*

The lines you wish me to explain in brief -

*Akin to the march of unaccomplished Powers  
Beyond life's arc in spirit's immensities*

[p. 44]

- occur in a passage where the soul of Aswapati (Savitri's royal father) is released from Ignorance and his mind and body undergo their "first spiritual change" by a Knowledge drawn from above and within. What pours down from the overhead planes is called "a wide self-knowledge" and what broadens out from the subliminal and the psychic depths is termed "a new world-knowledge". With a combination of both, Aswapati faces the objective and subjective Nature that constitutes our common habitual experience, our life of Ignorance, the physical and psychological field of our works. These works are changed and surpassed by Aswapati's soul-release, as we learn from the two lines just preceding your quotation:

*A genius heightened in his body's cells  
That knew the meaning of his fate-hedged works ...*

Now it is the set process of embodied existence that ordinarily determines all the outer and inner activities of one's life: the activities are "fate-hedged". But behind this process are "cosmic forces", "occult impulse", "the unknown Guardians of the world". One who gets into touch with them can bring new energies into play - either the dynamism of "an inner Light" or the Shakti of "spirit's immensities" or both together. A cosmicity other than known Nature's is drawn forth into action, a deep universal Will and an archetypal Harmony from beyond even that Will, the Harmony of the Original Divine Ideas that have to be fulfilled on earth. Aswapati's consciousness of the secret creativity that can alter everything is pictured in the phrases:

*Awakened to the lines that Nature hides,  
Attuned to her movements that exceed our ken,  
He grew one with a covert universe.*

These phrases anticipate the four verses from "A genius ..." to "spirit's immensities". Within the "covert universe" are the "unaccomplished Powers" on their march in the Spirit-space transcending the limited arc of life: those Powers are the hidden lines and movements of a Supernature, with significances and purposes pressing to be realised through the slow and restricted and seemingly deterministic works of the human individual in a small earth-pattern of evolution. When Aswapati won his soul's release from Ignorance and

*His daily thoughts looked up to the True and One,  
His commonest doings welled from an inner Light,*

there took place in his very physical substance - "his body's cells" - an extraordinary growth of consciousness, a supernormal intensification of perception and puissance, due to the unfoldment of the real being in him, the essential animating self of him, and resulting in a wide-awake sustained ascent to a visionary and intuitive plane. This is summed up in the words: "A genius heightened". "Genius" seems used in the ordinary connotation as well as in the connotation of "in-dwelling soul". From the high plane reached, Aswapati caught the concealed sense of all his embodied existence, a sense akin to or instinct with the drive of the Primal Truths of the Transcendent that have to become the Final Realities of the Individual in the life-terms of the physical universe.

Henceforth Aswapati's "walk through Time outstripped the human stride" and every step of his brought nearer to accomplishment the Powers of the immense Spirit from the Overworld. Part of the means towards that accomplishment was a join-up with cosmic forces:

*The universal strengths were linked with his;  
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,  
He drew the energies that transmute an age.*

*[p.45]*

(From *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, Integral Life Foundation, 1995, pp. 122 - 24)

# ***Questions on Savitri***

*answered by Amal Kiran*

*Q. One may approach Savitri (1) with a devotee's attitude as the spiritual autobiography of the Master; (2) as a book or storehouse of spiritual wisdom comparable to the Vedas, the Upanishads or the Gita, and (3) as great poetry. Can these approaches merge? What should be the basic approach for a full and just appreciation?*

A. To make the right approach we must understand what Sri Aurobindo intended *Savitri* to be. A few statements of his may be cited.

*"I used Savitri as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular - if part seemed to me to come from any lower level I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact Savitri has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative."*

We can gather several points here. First and foremost, *Savitri* is an adventure in poetry. But the aim is not merely to write good poetry. The poetry has to be good by an ascension in poetic quality to the highest spiritual plane possible: this plane has to be creative in terms of poetic values. *Savitri* should express poetically the ever-higher peak reached by Sri Aurobindo's progressive spiritual ascension. Therefore we cannot consider it either as sheer poetry or as sheer spirituality. It must help us at the same time to ascend to Sri Aurobindo's own peak and do so with the full awareness of the poetic way in which that peak has become communicative of its truth, its power, its delight. *Savitri* has to be taken as Sri Aurobindo's poetically

spiritual autobiography which is meant to make us re-live his inner life of both poetic creativity and creative spirituality.

Further, we must attend to some details of these two creativities, keeping in view Sri Aurobindo's disclosure:

*"... there have been made several successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry. As [Savitri] now stands there is a general Overmind influence, I believe, sometimes coming fully through, sometimes colouring the poetry of the other higher planes fused together, sometimes lifting any one of these higher planes to its highest or the psychic, poetic intelligence or vital towards them."*

Mention of Overmind aligns *Savitri* to the top reach of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, and the enormous mass of it, nearly 24,000 verses, renders it a super-scripture, an unparalleled storehouse of spiritual wisdom. But we must remember that this wisdom comes at its best in the form of what the ancients called the Mantra, which Sri Aurobindo characterises in a line which is itself mantric as

*Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.*

Here the final emergence of the Overmind's truth-light and truth-vibration is suggested, the surging up of the supreme Word from the secret heart of things which is one with our own inmost heart and which has received that Word for manifestation from the hidden heights. What is pertinent in this connection is that the Mantra is borne to us in "sound-waves", not simply the luminous sense but also the harmonious verbal embodiment of it is important. Thus the poetry that is *Savitri* is inseparable from the spirituality of this master-work of Sri Aurobindo and the latter cannot be appreciated and assimilated in a living manner unless we are responsive to the mode of vision, the cast of word, the mould of rhythm - the Spirit's varied poetic avatar. The heart of *Savitri* - the mystery from which the poem has sprung - yields its pulsation most intimately when we approach it with sensitiveness to the art of *Savitri*.

I may add that the wisdom we have to absorb from this poem has an intellectual element too. That is why Sri Aurobindo says that in its final form *Savitri* is

*"a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life".*

But we have to mark the qualifying noun "sort", for the "philosophy" is no more than the mental look the eyes of Yogic vision and experience put on, and we have to note the qualifying adjective "poetic" which brings in the artistry with which that look is worn.

\*

*Q. If somebody is fond of poetry and would prefer to come to sadhana via the road of poetry, will the study of Savitri as poetry help him much? Would you kindly explain to us how and where poetry becomes yoga and yoga poetry in Savitri?*

A. I should think that all poetry, like all of the other arts, tends at its intensest to take us not only into magic but also into mystery. An impact of flawless form is felt: an impression of the ideal, the perfect, is received through the inevitable rhythmic expression. Even a descriptive line like

*Sweet water hurrying from reluctant rocks*

from Sri Aurobindo's early poetry enchantus us with its apt surprises - the choice of the contrasting epithets "hurrying" and "reluctant", the easy run of the voice in the first half of the line and the retardation of it in the second half with its close consonantal conjuncts "ct", "nt", "cks", and yet the weaving together of the opposing senses by the alliterating "r" in five words out of the six, and finally through all these bespelling effects the disclosure of some hidden life in things which apparently are inanimate but occultly carry on a play of their own. Not only is a surface beauty of natural events delineated: a secret design of interacting and counteracting mobility and stability is also hinted at. We are given simultaneously a satisfying sight and a felicitous insight. This is the function of all inspired poetry. We get an inner experience through an outer stimulus: our perceptions get subtilised. Without even a directly spiritual communication attempted we undergo an exquisite refinement which can prepare us for it. As a critic has intuitively said,

*"Poetry may not save souls but it makes souls worth saving."*

When we come to poetry like *Savitri* we have this power eminently exercised. *Savitri* can serve the poetry-lover as a road to sadhana. Here, over and above an account of spiritual states and by means of it a conceptual as well as imaginative sign-post to the mystical goal, we have a vibrant evocation of these states in a language that is born out of them and is no mere reflection of the profundities beyond the mind in mental terms. The process and the product of this special language are thrillingly pictured in the *Savitri* passage whose concluding line I have already quoted to illustrate the Mantra. Sri Aurobindo is describing the various orders of ascetics whom Savitri comes across in the course of her search for her destined mate. The Rishi-like occupation of one order is conveyed to us:

*Intuitive knowledge leaping into speech,  
Seized, vibrant, kindling with the inspired word,  
Hearing the subtle voice that clothes the heavens,  
Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,  
They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers  
In metres that reflect the moving worlds,  
Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.*

As *Savitri* exemplifies, by and large, this sort of spiritual composition, the reading of it is bound to induce movements of yoga. But the reader must approach it rightly. He should imagine the twofold birth of the Mantra: high above in an ether of Superconsciousness and deep within where the Rigvedic *hrdaya samudra*, the heart-ocean, the wondrous in-world into which opens the individual emotional-psychic experience, echoes and images the over-world. Then he should practise a dedicated silence in the mind in order to imitate something of the "hushed intense receptivity turned upwards" which Sri Aurobindo, in a letter to me, stressed as the state for the Rishi to draw the Mantra into his utterance. Such a state is necessary for two reasons. First, the full impression of the Mantric speech would be missed unless the mind were made a blank sheet on which the script of the Eternal could come out absolutely clear. Second: that speech

is itself, most typically, most fundamentally, from a similar state. Sri Aurobindo, in *Savitri*, writes of

*Silence, the nurse of the Almighty's power,  
The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word -*

and in the same context he recounts how the Goddess of Inspiration

*Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,  
And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths  
Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought  
Hewn from the silence of the Ineffable.*

A final requisite for the reader to make *Savitri* his mode of sadhana is to read it not with the eye alone but also with the ear. The silence with which he approaches this poem which is born from "the omniscient hush" can be most effectively employed for "the immortal Word" to leave its mark upon it if we peruse the verse audibly. We have to hear and not just see the lines. In a slow subdued voice we have to communicate *Savitri* to our consciousness. All poetry has to be vocalised if its total magic and mystery are to go home to us. Much more is it necessary to vocalise *Savitri*. It has rhythmic properties more subtle than in any other poem, since it hails from realms of expression rarely tapped and unless we are so adept as to get inwardly the complete shape, as it were, of its "vibrant cry" we need to realise that shape by an audible transmission. Even to understand something, it is advisable to read it aloud - and *Savitri* too is best understood through the ear. But what I am asking for is meant to bear us beyond understanding. Poetry sets up a stirring within us answering to the life-throb of a vision or emotion or intuition, a life-throb which repeats itself in us and gives us a reality of the poet's substance exceeding the mere idea of it. Understanding poetry amounts to acquiring an idea of the vision, emotion, intuition concerned and reflecting upon the way they are conveyed. Such reflection is part of winning access to the art-element. It cannot be dispensed with, but even more important for the access is to catch the life-throb of those psychological faculties at work. Audible reading most fruitfully carries into us the life-throb and the basic shape of the poetry, transmitting both its aesthetic and its spiritual truth. Of course the value and efficacy of this double aspect of the poetic

phenomenon - and particularly of a super-phenomenon like *Savitri* - will differ from reader to reader, depending on the inner sensitivity and on the intimacy with the English language. But all readers will receive the maximum they can by reciting *Savitri* instead of simply running the eye over the page.

As for the "how" and "where" of poetry becoming yoga and yoga poetry in *Savitri* I cannot make absolutely definite observations. I should say that the poetic and the yogic interplay throughout, but there are several degrees which we may attempt to mark off in a rough way. Let me take a single theme and distinguish the modes of its recurrence. There is the straightforward statement, fusing the mental and the ultra-mental with a fine ease:

*His mind transfigured to a rapturous seer ...*

This seems to be what Sri Aurobindo has termed the "adequate style" at an inevitable pitch. Then there is, in my opinion, his "effective style" keyed up to inevitability:

*Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight ...*

Next we may show an example of the inevitable "illumined style":

*In the light flooding thought's blank vacancy ...*

The "illumined" merges in the "inspired" when we read:

*Splendours of insight filled the blank of thought ...*

A mixture of all these styles - with perhaps the "adequate-effective" as an overall tone - may be found in:

*His seeking mind ceased in the Truth that knows ...*

A keener articulation of such a mixture meets us when Sri Aurobindo speaks of sages escaping from the confines of thought

*To where Mind motionless sleeps waiting Light's birth ...*

This verse draws near to the style which, according to Sri Aurobindo, goes out of all classification, however inevitable a line may be within its own class - the style which is the "sheer inevitable" and whose undeniable example, in my eyes, is:

*Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient ...*

Here poetry passes wholly into the mood of yoga and yoga becomes most intensely articulate in poetry.

An alternative scheme of distinction might take the first two instances as the "Creative Intelligence" in a couple of varying phases: quiet felicity in the one and vivida vis (lively force) in the other. Perhaps the second instance is half-way into the "Higher Mind". The next two seem to be the "Higher Mind" taken up into the "Illumined Mind" and verging on the "Intuition". The first of the pair of penultimate instances looks like the direct penetrative simplicity of the "Intuition" under the guise as it were, of the "Creative Intelligence" 's clear-cut drive rather than of its colourful play. The second member has a greater sign in it of the "Intuition" 's thrilled power going straight to the heart of a subject, be it a scene, an event, a state or a person. Beyond this power lies the revelation of the "Overmind" which brings us the intensest inmost of the calmest immense, a sovereign seizure of spiritual truth in all its beauty of vision, voice and vibrancy.

In the line I have quoted -

*Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient -*

we have the vision of the thinker in us losing his loud self-assertive limits in a spontaneous super-knowledge which lights up everything. This vision finds voice in a compact pattern, the intransitive verb "hush" acquiring an extra impact, a depth of force, by standing in an inverted foot, a trochee in a virtually iambic verse, and that too as the second unit in the scansion, a surprise suddenly interrupting the expected metrical run. At the line's end comes another surprise, a noun made out of an adjective packed with tremendous significance. I believe that it is the first time in English literature that "Omniscient" is used as a noun with an indefinite article. Apart from that singularity is the question: "Why is 'omniscience' not used?" The habitual noun would indicate a state of all-knowledge and not a being who knows all. The personal identity of the yogi is preserved in some supreme form in a realm where the basic Universal wears numerous individual faces and the One Omniscient manifests in a multiplicity of Omniscients. There is also a sound-effect to be appreciated. The sh-sound in "hush" is caught up in "*Omniscient*" which is pronounced

*"Omnishyent"*; the suggestion of the echoed sound is that the hushing of the mind deepens and widens and heightens by a natural process the mind-possessing finite being that we are into an infinite supernal self who is by contrast a knower of everything and yet mysteriously continuous with our present finitude. Finally, both for sense and for sound the epithet *"bright"* is the mot juste. *"White"* could have been put instead, connoting shadowless purity. But the special effect of the conjunct consonants br would have been absent. These consonants carry as if by the very modulation of the lips and tongue the hint of a spreading out as well as a glowing forth. The psychological impression is of a bursting into light. In addition we have to note that *"bright"* has a long i just as *"minds"* has. The sound-parity suggests the *"minds"* themselves turning *"bright"* through the hushing experience. Besides, *"bright"* is at the tail-end of a series of five monosyllables, a sort of climaxing of the process they represent. And this fivefold process thus climaxed terminates and culminates in a massive reality of transcendent transformation indicated by the single four-syllabled word *"Omniscient"*.

To feel and recognise the spiritual afflatus of so superb a kind, borne magically home to us in a design of manifold artistry, is indeed a preparatory movement of sadhana. Again and again we get a chance to develop the sadhana-mood. The fundamental attitude necessary for advance in spirituality is hit off to perfection in the middle verse of the three powerful inward-drawing lines which yet turn one's soul outward to master the world's "crass casualty":

*A poised serenity of tranquil strength,  
A wide unshaken look on time's unrest  
Faced all experience with unaltered peace.*

The absolute of this peace, the self-existent infinitude of it meets us in a life-changing passage when Aswapati's aspiring consciousness breaks beyond the barrier of both individual and universal existence:

*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.*

Everywhere, in some places more directly and in others through a transparent veil, *Savitri* which is the self-expression of a master yogi can lead us towards yoga. But its most creative function is to kindle in us a flame burning at all times so that we may build up in ourselves the living presence of that master yogi and through the illuminating art of this epic of the Spirit quicken at each moment with the invocation:

*O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe,  
Creatrix, the Eternal's artist Bride ....*

(From *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, Integral Life Foundation, 1995, pp. 131 - 140; this article was first published in the Ashram journal *Srinvantu* in August 1986)

*Amal Kiran has written in the back of his copy of Savitri :*

*If this poem becomes a part of your life, it  
will make you a part of the Poet whose  
heights have sent this call to our lowlands.*

# ***Sri Aurobindo and Savitri***

## ***The Power of Poetry***

*In Sri Aurobindo's book The Future Poetry we come across this characterisation by the Master of how poetry can open "to us by the word the doors of the Spirit".*

The reason why sound came to express fixed ideas ... started from an indefinable quality or property in the sound to raise certain vibrations in the life-soul of the human creature, in his sensational, his emotional, his crude mental being. ...

Poetry goes back in a way and recovers, though in another fashion, as much as it can of this original element. It does this partly by a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concretenss, partly by a greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries. It associates this with the definitive thought value contributed by the intelligence and increases both by each other. In that way it succeeds at the same time in carrying up the power of speech to the direct expression of a higher reach of experience than the intellectual or vital. For it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these aids its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit.

SRI AUROBINDO  
*The Future Poetry, 1997, p. 15-16.*

# **Towards an Introduction to Savitri**

## *Compiled from Sri Aurobindo's letters*

*We are told that Sri Aurobindo intended to write an introduction to accompany his epic when it was published in its complete and final form. He never did so, and the letters which he wrote on the poem, mostly to Amal Kiran, were published alongside the text in the 1954 and 1972 (Birth Centenary Library) editions. The letters are also available as a separate book, and in the Collected Works edition have been included in Volume 27 as Letters on Poetry and Art. Many of the letters deal with matters of technique that may not be of interest to all Savitri-lovers. Others deal with specific lines or passages. We hope to soon provide an index to these. Here, we present some extracts from the letters, which together may provide a sort of general introduction to Sri Aurobindo's intention and method when composing his revelatory epic. The page numbers given refer to Volume 29 of the Birth Centenary Library (1972).*

Savitri ... is blank verse without enjambment (except rarely) - each line a thing by itself and arranged in paragraphs of one, two, three, four or five lines (rarely a longer series), in an attempt to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement, so far as that is a possibility in English.

1932

p. 727

The structure of the pentameter blank verse in Savitri is of its own kind and different in plan from the blank verse that has come to be ordinarily used in English poetry. It dispenses with enjambment or uses it very sparingly and only when a special effect is intended; each line must be strong enough to stand by itself, while at the same time it fits harmoniously into the sentence or paragraph like stone added to stone; the sentence consists usually of one, two, three or four lines, more rarely five or six or seven: a strong close for the line and a strong close for the sentence are almost indispensable except when some kind of inconclusive cadence is desirable; here must be no laxity or diffusiveness in the rhythm or in the metrical flow anywhere, - there must be a flow but not a loose flux. This gives an added importance to what comes at the close of the line and this

placing is used very often to give emphasis and prominence to a key phrase or a key idea, especially those which have to be often reiterated in the thought and vision of the poem so as to recall attention to things that are universal or fundamental or otherwise of the first consequence - whether for the immediate subject or in the total plan.

1947

p. 793-94

\* \* \*

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother. This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to "hew the ways of Immortality".

1936

p. 729

\* \* \*

In this poem I present constantly one partial view of life or another temporarily as if it were the whole in order to give full value to the experience of those who are bound by that view, as for instance, the materialist conception and experience of life.

1946

p. 734

If I had to write for the general reader I could not have written Savitri at all. It is in fact for myself that I have written it and for those who can lend themselves to the subject-matter, images, technique of mystic poetry.

This is the real stumbling-block of mystic poetry and specially mystic poetry of this kind. The mystic feels real and present, even ever present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as if in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. ... To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To me, for instance, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and I can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as

man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to me an image but a fact. If I wrote "His anger climbed against me in a stream", it would be to the general reader a mere image, not something that was felt by me in a sensible experience; yet I would only be describing in exact terms what actually happened once, a stream of anger, a sensible and violent current of it rising up from downstairs and rushing upon me as I sat in the veranda of the Guest-House, the truth of it being confirmed afterwards by the confession of the person who had the movement. This is only one instance, but all that is spiritual or psychological in Savitri is of that character. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

1946  
pp. 734 - 36

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. This accusation has been brought against me by many that I think too much and that when I try to write in verse, thought comes in and keeps out poetry. I hold, to the contrary, that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends on how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but of something of its beauty, its light or its power. ... [The expression of Savitri] aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience: it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity. ... The philosophy of Savitri is ... persistently there; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being

and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience it uses without scruple or admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. ...

I have been insisting on these points in view of certain criticisms that have been made by reviewers and others some of them very capable, suggesting or flatly stating that there was too much thought in my poems or that I am even in my poetry a philosopher rather than a poet. I am justifying a poet's right to think as well as to see and feel, his right to 'dare to philosophise'. I agree with the modernists in their revolt against the romanticist's insistence on emotionalism and his objection to thinking and philosophical reflection in poetry. But the modernist went too far in his revolt. In trying to avoid what I may call poeticism he ceased to be poetic; wishing to escape from rhetorical writing, rhetorical pretension to greatness and beauty of style, he threw out true poetic greatness and beauty, turned from a deliberately poetic style to a colloquial tone and even to very flat writing: especially he turned away from poetic rhythm to a prose or half-prose rhythm or to no rhythm at all. Also he has weighed too much on thought and has lost the habit of intuitive sight; by turning emotion out of its intimate chamber in the house of Poetry, he has had to bring in to relieve the dryness of much of his thought too much exaggeration of the lower vital and sensational reactions untransformed or else transformed only by exaggeration. Nevertheless he has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straightforwardness and directness of style.

1946

pp. 736-39

I have accepted in the present version of Savitri several of the freedoms established by the modernists including internal rhyme, exact assonance of syllable, irregularities introduced into the iambic run of the metre and others which would have been equally painful to an earlier taste. But I have not taken this as a mechanical method or a mannerism, but only where I thought it rhythmically justified; for all freedom must have a truth in it and an order, either a rational or an instinctive and intuitive order.

1946

p. 746

Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. ... In mystic poetry ... repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may cite as an example the constant repetition of the word Rtam, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *avrtti*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. This kind of repetition I have used largely in Savitri. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the mot juste, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word: if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in one long passage provided each is the right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected.

1946  
pp. 739-40

I can perfectly understand your anxiety that all should be lifted to or towards at least the minimum Overhead level or so near as to be touched by its influence or at the very least a good substitute for it. I do not know whether that is always possible in so long a poem as Savitri dealing with so many various heights and degrees and so much varying substance of thought and feeling and descriptive matter and narrative. But that has been my general aim throughout and it is

the reason why I have made so many successive drafts and continual alterations till I felt that I had got the thing intended by the higher inspiration in every line and passage. It is also why I keep myself open to every suggestion from a sympathetic and understanding quarter and weigh it well, rejecting only after due consideration and accepting when I see it to be well-founded. But for that the critic must be one who has seen and felt what is in the thing written, not like your friend who has not seen anything and understood only the word surface and not even always that; he must be open to this kind of poetry, able to see the spiritual vision it conveys, capable too of feeling the Overhead touch when it comes, - the fit reader.

1947

p. 759

I have said that his objections are sometimes inapplicable. I mean by this that they might have some force with regard to another kind of poetry but not to a poem like Savitri. He says, to start with, that if I had had a stronger imagination, I would have written a very different poem and a much shorter one. Obviously, and to say it is a truism; if I had had a different kind of imagination, whether stronger or weaker, I would have written a different poem and perhaps one more to his taste; but it would not have been Savitri. It would not have fulfilled the intention or had anything of the character, meaning, world-vision, description and expression of spiritual experience which was my object in writing this poem. Its length is an indispensable condition for carrying out its purpose and everywhere there is this length, ... in every part, in every passage, in almost every canto or section of a canto. It has been planned not on the scale of Lycidas or Comus or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor Ramayana; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation. One artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination or understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like, architectural is to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness: that is the method I have chosen in Savitri.

1947

p. 791-92

I have not anywhere in Savitri written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if, for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience. When the expression has been found, I have to judge, not by the intellect or by any set poetical rule, but by an intuitive feeling, whether it is entirely the right expression and, if it is not, I have to change and go on changing until I have received the absolutely right inspiration and the right transcription of it and must never be satisfied with any a peu pres or imperfect transcription even if that makes good poetry of one kind or another. This is what I have tried to do. The critic or reader will judge for himself whether I have succeeded or failed; but if he has seen nothing and understood nothing, it does not follow that his adverse judgment is sure to be the right and true one, there is at least a chance that he may so conclude, not because there is nothing to see and nothing to understand, only poor pseudo-stuff or a rhetorical emptiness but because he was not equipped for the vision or the understanding. 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. You must not expect appreciation or understanding from the general public or even from many at the first touch; as I have pointed out, there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry. Moreover if it is really new in kind, it may employ a new technique, not perhaps absolutely new, but new in some or many of its elements: in that case old rules and canons and standards may be quite inapplicable; ... We have to see whether what is essential to poetry is there and how far the new technique justifies itself by new beauty and perfection, and a certain freedom of mind from old conventions is necessary if our judgment is to be valid or rightly objective.

1947  
p. 794-95

One who has had the kind of experience which Savitri sets out to express or who, not having it, is prepared by his temperament, his mental turn, his previous intellectual knowledge or psychic training, to have some kind of access to it, the feeling of it if not the full

understanding, can enter into the spirit and sense of the poem and respond to its poetic appeal; but without that it is difficult for an unprepared reader to respond, - all the more if this is, as you contend, a new poetry with a new law of expression and technique.

p. 1947-98

If you are right in maintaining that Savitri stands as a new mystical poetry with a new vision and expression of things, we should expect, at least at first, a widespread, perhaps a general failure even in lovers of poetry to understand it or appreciate; even those who have some mystical turn or spiritual experience are likely to pass it by if it is a different turn from theirs or outside their range of experience. It took the world something like a hundred years to discover Blake; it would not be improbable that there might be a greater time-lag here, though naturally we hope for better things. For in India at least some understanding or feeling and an audience few and fit may be possible. Perhaps by some miracle there may be before long a larger appreciative audience.

At any rate this is the only thing one can do, especially when one is attempting a new creation, to go on with the work with such light and power as is given to one and leave the value of the work to be determined by the future.

...  
There may still be a place for a poetry which seeks to enlarge the field of poetic creation and find for the inner spiritual life of man and his now occult or mystical knowledge and experience of the whole hidden range of his and the world's being, not a corner and a limited expression such as it had in the past, but a wide space and as manifold and integral an expression of the boundless and innumerable riches that lie hidden and unexplored as if kept apart under the direct gaze of the Infinite as has been found in the past for man's surface and finite view and experience of himself and the material world in which he has lived striving to know himself and it as best he can with a limited mind and senses. The door that has been shut to all but a few may open; the kingdom of the Spirit may be established not only in man's inner being but in his life and his works. Poetry also may have its share in that revolution and become part of the spiritual empire.

1947  
pp. 799-801

## ***From “Champaklal Speaks”***

*Two unique eye-witness accounts*

### **Writing Savitri**

Sri Aurobindo used to sit on his chair in the passage outside his room, late at night after dinner, and write. He would place chit pads on the handle of the chair and write. After writing he would repeat the lines to himself. I would sit outside in the hall listening to his reading. It was so beautiful. I had not, of course, asked him whether I could sit there. One day, however, he saw me there. For a moment he looked surprised but immediately afterwards he smiled and proceeded with his work.

### **Revising Savitri**

Sri Aurobindo used to write on small chit pads; he would collect a few sheets and pin them on the original manuscript pages in their appropriate places. I often watched him doing it. One day I saw him having some difficulty with the pinning. What had happened was that the sheets were too many and it was not easy to insert the pin in all of them together.

Pussh, I heard, and saw that the pin had slipped. Pussh - again I heard this sound, and again Pussh. Then I ran to him; and he showed me what he had been trying to do. It was indeed difficult to do it in the way he wanted. Somehow I succeeded in doing it. And I received a broad smile. Oh, what a look!

After that day, whenever it was needed, he would call, "Champaklal". How sweet to hear the name from his mouth! I used to enjoy it immensely whenever he called me by name. I remember I had even kept a record of how many times in a day (and night) he had called me by name for something or other.

9.6.1944

# ***The Mother answers Questions about Savitri***

## **1. From the Mother's correspondence with Shyam Sunder**

*(About the exhibition of "Meditations on Savitri" paintings held at the Ashram Exhibition Hall in February 1967)*

*The "Savitri" exhibition is full of pictures depicting Savitri, the ascent of the being, the descent of divinity, and the divine play. The pictures radiate a light which is as beautiful as strong, similar to that which I feel near you.*

*Is this my imagination or true?*

It is quite true and I am glad that you saw it.

13.2.1967

*Savitri says :*

*Not only is there hope for godheads pure;  
The violent and darkened deities  
Leaped down from the one breat 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 he rebel sons.*

[p. 606]

*What had the white gods missed?*

The conversion of the Asuras.

24.8.28

*Isn't the power of the Asuras as boundless as the power of the gods?*

The vibrations of evil are in truth less powerful than the vibrations of good.

26.6.68

*Each time that I come to You I should make of it an occasion  
to progress towards the goal.*

*Aswapathy was very fortunate. For him,*

*Each day was a spiritual romance, ...*

*Each happening was a deep experience.*

[p.30, 31]

This possibility is open to all whose aspiration is fervent.

1.11.68

*A knowledge which became what it perceived,  
Replaced the separated sense and heart  
And drew all Nature into its embrace*

[p.28]

*Is Sri Aurobindo referring here to knowledge by identity?*

Yes, it is a very exact description.

7.11.68

*A greater force than the earthly held his limbs ...  
Unwound the triple cord of mind and freed  
The heavenly wideness of a Godhead's gaze.*

[p.82]

*What does "the triple cord of mind" mean?*

The cords symbolise the limitations of the mind; and there are three of them, because there is a physical mind, a vital mind and a mental mind.

9.11.68

*The days were travellers on a destined road,  
The nights companions of his musing spirit.*

[p. 43]

Yes, there comes a time when nothing, absolutely nothing is outside the Yoga and the Divine's Presence is felt and found in all things and all circumstances.

11.11.68

*A last high world was seen where all worlds meet;  
In its summit gleam where Night is not nor Sleep,  
The light began of the Trinity supreme.*

[p.89]

*Is the "Trinity supreme" Sachchidananda ?*

Yes.

15.11.68

*Our body's cells must hold the Immortal's flame.* [p. 35]

*Is this the secret of the luminous body?*

It is a poetic way of expressing the transformation which has to take place and which is more complicated than that.

19.11.68

*None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell.* [p. 227]

*But still, Mother, doesn't the soul chosen by the Divine go through hell in a different way than others?*

This quotation means that in order to reach the divine regions one must, while on earth, pass through the vital, which in some of its parts is a veritable hell. But those who have surrendered to the Divine and have been adopted by Him are surrounded by the divine protection and for them the passage is not difficult.

29.11.68

*His failure is not failure whom God leads* [p.339]

*Because it is part of the play?*

It is the human mind that has the conception of success and failure. It is the human mind that wants one thing and does not want another. In the divine plan each thing has its place and importance. So it is not success that matters. What matters is to be a docile and if possible a conscious instrument of the Divine Will

To be and to do what the Divine wants, this is truly the important thing.

3.12.68

*All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.*

*Can man delay or hasten the coming of this hour?*

Neither the one nor the other in their apparent contradiction created by the divisive consciousness, but something else which our words cannot express.

In the present state of human consciousness, it is good for it to think that aspiration and human effort can hasten the advent of the divine transformation, because effort and aspiration are needed for the transformation to occur.

21.12.68

*All that transpires on earth and all beyond  
Are parts of an illimitable plan  
The One keeps in his heart and knows alone.* [p. 52]

*He who is united with the Divine, does he know this 'plan'?*

To the extent it is necessary for the execution, yes; and to the extent of the need, but not in its integrality and all at once.

13.3.69

*What man calls 'chance', isn't it a play of possibilities of which he is ignorant?*

"Chance" is only a label put on that which man does not understand. All is put in form and movement by the Supreme Consciousness which is not outside the creation, but is the Truth and the very substance of the creation.

Without the Supreme Consciousness nothing exists; in It all is.

17.3.69

In the context of what happened on the first of January the following lines of Savitri become significant:

*The superman shall wake in mortal man  
And manifest the hidden demigod  
Or grow into the God-light and God-force*

*Revealing the secret deity in the cave.*

[p.705]

Yes, undoubtedly this is what is going to happen.

18.4.69

*[On January 18th 1969 the Mother had written:]*

In fact, from the 1st January a new form of Consciousness has manifested on the earth and one of its characteristics is a golden luminosity; undoubtedly it is this that you see.

18.1.69

[The Mother later identified this consciousness as "the Superman Consciousness", and wrote on July 27, 1969:]

... What the new Consciousness is in course of accomplishing on the earth ... will lead to the creation of the superman.

*When*

*The eyes if mortal body plunge their gaze  
Into Eyes that look upon Eternity  
one finds there his native land!*

[p. 71]

That is to say the Divine origin.

It is true. You are becoming a poet in your expression.

28.9.69

## **2. From “Questions and Answers”**

*Mother; suffering comes from ignorance and pain, but what is the nature of the suffering and pain the Divine Mother feels for her children - the Divine Mother in Savitri ?*

It is because she participates in their nature, She has descended upon earth to participate in their nature. Because if she did not participate in their nature, she could not lead them farther. If she remained in her supreme consciousness where there is no suffering, in her supreme knowledge and consciousness, she could not have any contact with human beings. And it is for this that she is obliged to take on the human consciousness and form, it is to be able to enter into contact with them. Only, she does not forget: she has adopted their consciousness but she remains in relation with her own real, supreme consciousness. And thus, by joining the two, she can make those who are in that other consciousness progress. But if she did not adopt their consciousness, if she did not suffer with their sorrow, she could not help them. Hers is not a suffering of ignorance: it is a suffering through identity. It is because she has accepted to have the same vibrations as they, in order to be able to enter into contact with them and pull them out of the state they are in. If she did not enter into contact with them, she would not be felt at all or no one could bear her radiance.... This has been said in all kinds of forms, in all kinds of religions, and they have spoken very often of the divine Sacrifice, but from a certain point of view it is true. It is a voluntary sacrifice, but it is true: giving up a state of perfect consciousness, perfect bliss, perfect power in order to accept the state of ignorance of the outer world so as to pull it out of that ignorance. If this state were not accepted, there would be no contact with it. No relation would be possible. And this is the reason of the incarnations. Otherwise, there would be no necessity. If the divine consciousness and divine force could work directly from the place or state of their perfection, if they could work directly on matter and transform it, there would be no need to take a body like mans. It would have been enough to act from the world of Truth with the perfect consciousness and upon consciousness. In fact that acts perhaps but so slowly that when there

is this effort to make the world progress, make it go forward more rapidly, well, it is necessary to take on human nature. By taking the human body, one is obliged to take on human nature, partially. Only, instead of losing one's consciousness and losing contact with the Truth, one keeps this consciousness and this Truth, and it is by joining the two that one can create exactly this kind of alchemy of transformation. But if one did not touch matter, one could do nothing for it.

*Did Savitri foresee what she was going to do?*

She said so. You have not read it? She had even been told that she would be alone, and she said: I am ready to be alone.

*Did she know she would meet the "Mother of Sorrows", the "Mother of Might"?*

Indeed she did. It is said all along that she knew all that was going to happen. It is written clearly. Indeed, to each of them she says clearly: I shall bring to you what you need. Consequently, she knows it. Else she would not say so. If she did not know it, how could she say so?

*In Savitri the "Mother of Sorrows" says:*

*Perhaps when the world sinks into a last sleep,  
I too may sleep in dumb eternal peace,*

*Savitri, Book VII, Canto 4*

Ah! that, that is the human consciousness. It is the human consciousness. It is the idea of the human consciousness that when all suffering will be over, well, "I shall sleep". It is indeed of this that Sri Aurobindo speaks. When there is this aspiration for a supreme peace, one feels that if there were a pralaya and the world disappeared, well, at least there would be peace. But the phrase itself is self-contradictory, for if there were a pralaya, there would be no more peace to be felt - there would be nothing at all any longer!

But this is just one of the contradictions of the human consciousness: "As long as the world is there and suffering there, I shall suffer with the world. But if ever the world enters into peace, disappears in the peace of Non-Being, then I too shall rest." It is a poetic way of saying that as long as misery is there in the world, I shall suffer with the world. Only when it ceases to be there, it shall cease for me also.

*Then what will the "Mother of Sorrows" do? What else can she do?*

She will be the "Mother of Delight ",

*Savitri represents the Mother's Consciousness, doesn't she?*

Yes.

*What does Satyavan represent?*

Well, he is the Avatar, He is the incarnation of the Supreme.

(*Questions and Answers*, 9 December 1953  
MCW Vol. 5 pp. 387 - 90)

# ***Vedic Imagery in Savitri***

## ***The Triple Cord***

*by Nolini Kanta Gupta*

*A greater Force than the earthly held his limbs,  
Huge workings bared his undiscovered sheaths,  
Strange energies wrought and screened tremendous hands  
Unwound the triple cord of mind and freed  
The heavenly wideness of a Godhead's gaze.*

*Savitri, p. 81-82*

Sunahshepa, the human creature, says the Vedic Rishi, is bound to the stake with three cords: one on the top, the second in the middle and the third below. Sunahshepa cries out to God Varuna to be freed from the triple bondage. The God is pleased and cuts the topmost cord and throws it upward, he cuts the middle cord and throws it on either side, he cuts the downmost cord and throws it downward. Thus Sunahshepa is freed through the Grace of King Varuna.

The three cords are the three limitations of being and consciousness in the normal human creature. There is a wall or barrier up in the mind which shuts out the higher levels of consciousness that are beyond the mind - the worlds of vision and revelation, of the Truth and the Vast. The middle knot shuts out the world around and abroad and limits the being to the ego, prevents the individual person from communicating with the Universal Being and Consciousness. It is the well-known knot of the heart - *hrdayagranthi* - the crux and kernel of the egoistic consciousness. It centres the whole being on itself, limits it to itself, does not let it go out of itself to belong to the world-being. It is also the pull that prevents the being from diving down into its true personality, the psychic, and finding its union with the inner Divine. This ego centred knot has to be cut through and the thread to be scattered into the infinity of the deepest and of the widest being. The last barrier at the base of

the human consciousness is the hard crust of the physical and the material being. It is closed to the regions behind, the occult sources of all external movements. This too has to be pulled down and thrown into the gulfs of non-existence - primal Prakriti, out of which they are born - so that the subliminal ranges of consciousness emerge and manifest themselves.

God Varuna is invoked because he is the Lord of the Vast Consciousness, he it is that opens out the passage and leads the human being into worlds of the Vast, the Truth - Rtam, Brihat - from mortality to immortality.

In other words, as we know, the mind, the life and the body form the triple cord of the human being and hedge it within the frame of its normal, narrow, uncertain, bumbling existence; and each of these three constituent parts of human nature has to be delivered from its own particular limitations and released into the broader reality.

These threefold limitations are repeated in each of the statuses of being or consciousness. Thus the mind has a mental being, a vital being and a physical being. So the mind has mental limitations and vital limitations and also physical limitations. The mind's mental limitations are its notions and concepts, constructed ideas and fabricated comprehensions. The mind bound by its reasonong faculties, its deductive system, its syllogistic scheme, all that scaffolding has to go if the new light is to penetrate and illumine it with the new consciousness. The mind has also a vital element, when it moves according to its inspiration, as it is called sometimes, but it is only an ignorant inspiration, it is only another name for 'mood', for fancy. True inspiration is not a blind mental rush but something clear and steady and yet forceful and self-poised. Again, the mind has its physical element too: the physical mind is the mind controlled by the senses, the impressions of the sense, its structure is patterned according to the impact of the physical and material objects. A clear, free physical mind embodies the pattern of the movements of the higher consciousness, not of the sense-dominated consciousness.

Even like the mind, the vital too has its threefold knots according to the three elements that constitute it. First, there is a mind in the vital, it is called mental-vital, there is a vital in the vital, it is the vital proper, and there is a physical vital. The mental-vital means the field of sentiment and feeling and emotion, the vital proper is the field of

passion, the intensity and even ferocity of its urge, and finally, the physical vital, which is the field of outward impulsion and drive, the push towards physical act and execution. Last the physical too has the same threefold knots, first in the mental physical, second in the vital physical and thirdly in the physical physical, that is, the physical proper. The mind in the physical is the purely brain operation, the primitive original percepts that brain-cells emanate. The vital in the physical means the record of the nerves, more or less that are sensations. Lastly the physical physical means the most mechanical, the inertial reactions of matter.

All these triplicities have a familiar norm in the ordinary nature. And human consciousness is made up of them in various formations and modulations. These gradations are the various statuses of consciousness which the human being assumes in its relation with the world-reality. In other words, they are the instruments through which human consciousness comes in contact with the universe. They are as it were windows upon the world through which contact is made and relation established with the objects of experience. But usually in the normal consciousness these windows are made a casement with bars and nets or even blinds over it which narrow and blur and even block the view. They are made into cords, as the Upanishad says, that blind and bind and stifle the consciousness. The cords have to be cut away, thrown out. As windows they have to be thrown wide open, open not merely outward towards the external object or reality but also inwardly to the realities, the worlds that lie within and above and beyond.

(From *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, part 11)

# ***The Myth of Savitri and Satyavan: The Four Boons.***

*by Vladimir Iatsenko*

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## **Introduction**

Illumination is the central topic of our seminar. What is illumination and what is to be illumined? The very meaning of the word presupposes that there are darker parts, which should be enlightened. The Darkness is to be illumined, the Nature of our mind, vital and body. Why do we have to illumine it? Because there is something behind it, something which is growing through this darkness, being covered by it. It is our individual soul, the psychic being. The purpose of Creation, we are told, is to allow this true self to grow and come to power, and finally to rule over the whole nature.

Here I would like to take a brief look into Vedic myths of Creation in order to follow the main concept and purpose of this creation as it was seen and understood by Vedic Rishis, which should help us, I think, to have enough metaphysical data for a deeper understanding of the Myth of Savitri and Satyavan.

## **The Myth of Creation. (from Shatapatha Brahmana, Taittirya, Aranyaka, Brihadaranyaka Upanishads)**

### **I THE BEGINNING**

"At the beginning was the Self (Atman). He was Alone. He looked around and did not find anybody else except himself. He said: "I Am

..." But there was no other name to say, for he was alone. ... So He felt lonely. He wanted Another."

## II THE FIRST INVOLUTION

"So out of Himself, as it were, he cast a shadow (all these worlds) , *sa iman lokan asrijata.*"(Aitareya Upanishad 1.1, etc.) Denying Himself, gradually and fully forgetting Himself (in order to become another, because only by forgetting himself he could start a new life of another). In other words, in his Consciousness, which is Knowledge-Power, He withdrew Himself from the Knowledge of Himself. The Supreme Knowledge-Power appears in this first Creation as a gradual disappearance of knowledge, whereas the aspect of power is still present and carries out the Creation. This was his first Involution. We call it an involution because it was out of him, where he didn't know about himself anymore, so it was outside of his awareness, so to say.

## III THE SECOND INVOLUTION

"When the first Creation was done, it became as if unsteady, *shithilam*, so the Supreme has entered it. He has penetrated Himself by Himself *atmanatmanam pravishat*, and the Creation became steady." From this point the Evolution starts to take place.

What is evolving then? It is He who has entered himself by himself. He is to grow through His own Denial of Himself in order to become Other, Many, Manifestation. He is becoming an individual form of the Supreme, the prince Satyavan. And this is the aim of all Creation. So if this prince Satyavan is to die, then the creation will lose its meaning and purpose.

### **The Mother's story of Creation.**

Referring to a very ancient tradition underlying the Vedic knowledge, the Mother told this story in her own way on several occasions, each time warning that it should not be taken too literally or too dogmatically, but simply as a story. Here is one of those tellings :

"When the Supreme decided to exteriorise Himself in order to be able to see Himself, the first thing in Himself which He exteriorised was the Knowledge of the world and the Power to create it. This Knowledge-Consciousness and Force began its work; and in the

supreme Will there was a plan, and the first principle of this plan was the expression of both the essential Joy and the essential Freedom, which seemed to be the most interesting feature of this creation.

So intermediaries were needed to express this Joy and Freedom in forms. And at first four Beings were emanated to start this universal development which was to be the progressive objectivisation of all that is potentially contained in the Supreme. These Beings were, in the principle of their existence: Consciousness and Light, Life, Bliss and Love, and Truth. You can easily imagine that they had a sense of great power, great strength, of something tremendous, for they were essentially the very principle of these things. Besides, they had full freedom of choice, for this creation was to be Freedom itself.... As soon as they set to work - they had their own conception of how it had to be done - being totally free, they chose to do it independently . . . and this mistake - as I may call it - was the first cause, the essential cause of all the disorder in the universe. As soon as there was separation - for that is the essential cause, separation - as soon as there was separation between the Supreme and what had been emanated, Consciousness changed into inconscience, Light into darkness, Love into hatred, Bliss into suffering, Life into death and Truth into falsehood. And they proceeded with their creations independently, in separation and disorder. The result is the world as we see it. It was made progressively, stage by stage, and it would truly take a little too long to tell you all that, but finally, the consummation is Matter - obscure, inconscient, miserable .... The creative Force which had emanated these four Beings, essentially for the creation of the world, witnessed what was happening, and turning to the Supreme she prayed for the remedy and the cure of the evil that had been done. Then she was given the command to precipitate her Consciousness into this inconscience, her Love into this suffering, and her Truth into this falsehood. And a greater consciousness, a more total love, a more perfect truth than what had been emanated at first, plunged, so to say, into the horror of Matter in order to awaken in it consciousness, love and truth, and to begin the movement of Redemption which was to bring the material universe back to its supreme origin. So, there have been what might be called "successive involutions" in Matter, and a history of these involutions. The present result of these involutions is the appearance

of the Supermind emerging from the unconscious; but there is nothing to indicate that after this appearance there will be no others... for the Supreme is inexhaustible and will always create new worlds. That is my story."

(*Questions and Answers* 16 October 1957, CWM Vol. 9 p. 205-6)

Thus we can understand that Darkness is nothing but Light carried out by Power without Knowledge, just as Suffering is Bliss, Falsehood is Truth and Death is Life carried out by Power without Knowledge of the supreme Origin.

It is interesting that when commenting on the first line of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* to Huta, the Mother gave an order in the fall of these divine emanations, saying that the first was Consciousness in Light and turned into Unconsciousness; the second was Bliss and turned into Suffering; the third was Truth and turned into Falsehood; the fourth one was Life and turned into Death.

Then in order to repair the fall of these four beings, so to say, the Supreme Mother, Aditi, delegated out of herself the force of Love which has plunged into darkness and thus has entered into the first Creation. In the Vedas it is Agni. This was the first Avatar, who lay down and hid himself within the darkness. It is because of his presence within the Creation that everyone is seeking for knowledge and evolving towards the Supreme.

### **Some outstanding features of the tale of Savitri.**

Among all outstanding characters in the history of Aryan civilisation narrated in the ancient Indian epics, Savitri is unique. She possesses not only the quality of dedication and love for her husband, which all epic heroines possess, but also a power of absolute will and action.

Savitri, like Sita, Draupadi, Shakuntala and others, is a victim of circumstances; but unlike the other heroines she does not ask or require any help from outside to free herself and her beloved from doom. Moreover even her beloved does not know about it. While in the case of Sita Rama is responsible for her liberation, and in the case of Draupadi the Pandavas are to fight for the crown to remove her misfortune, in the case of Savitri she alone has to face her doom - and what a Doom! To oppose the Lord of Death. It is the only story where Fate is changed "by an unchanging will".

Usually all the stories narrated in the Indian Epics and Puranas adopted a specific method of rendering. First we find the whole story outlined in brief, and then we enjoy watching it unfold. This was the most generally-used narrative method of the ancient epics. Knowing how the story was to end, it was interesting to see the unfolding of all the details. All the boons, curses and predictions which occur in the epics play the role of letting us know what to expect as we see them practically realised. So when Devarishi Narada proclaims that "this fate of Satyavan cannot be undone by whatever means", then that must be it! We ought to believe him, and we expect it to happen. What a surprise we experience when we see that the prediction is not fulfilled and unchangeable Fate gets changed! This is very rare for the Epic style.

The legend of Savitri is one of those rare tales where predictions of a fatal end are undone. In the case of Markandeya the change is brought about by Shiva. In the case of Savitri it is done by Savitri herself. It is this particular feature which makes Savitri unique - not only her Pativrata quality, which is usually emphasized by the later Indian tradition.

We all know the story of Savitri as it is narrated in Mahabharata. Here I would like to look at it from a slightly different perspective, as a symbol of a "divine event" in the evolution of the world.

According to Sri Aurobindo the Night which is to be illumined is "not our beginning nor our end". It is the outcome of the Supreme's involution through a progressive withdrawal of his aspect of Knowledge from his aspect of Power. The Night which lies "across the path of the divine event" is to be crossed, by the evolution of consciousness, building up the consciousness of the multiplicity, the manifestation. The night of unconsciousness and death and suffering is not meant to be the ultimate set-up of things. The myth of Savitri is about the event in the evolution of consciousness which should end the time of darkness and death and suffering, and bring mankind out of Darkness into Light, from Non-being into Being, from Death into Immortality. Savitri is the Saviour, the Divine Mother, who by herself plunging into the Darkness brings the four creator emanations, and all their creations, back to the knowledge of the Supreme in themselves; and what is even more important, she brings about the birth of a new being: the Divine Child, the Supreme Other, the Supreme Individual.

## **Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the story.**

Sri Aurobindo in his "Author's Note" to his revelatory epic *Savitri - a Legend and a Symbol* says:

*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."*

## **The myth of Savitri in Mahabharata.**

The story of Savitri, as we first find it, is narrated in Vana Parva of Mahabharata by Markandeya in answer to Yudhishtira's question about Draupadi: "Was there ever any other woman in the history of men who being dedicated to her husband suffered so much as Draupadi?" And the Rishi says, "Yes, there was one. It was Savitri."

## **About the narrator Markandeya Rishi.**

It is interesting to note that the legend of Savitri, belonging to the Vedic cycle of myths on immortality, is narrated by Markandeya, who himself, according to the Puranas, had gained the boon of Immortality from Mahadeva in the first Manvantara of this Kalpa. Having become immortal, he went into a deep trance lasting for the last six Manvantaras, awaking only now in the seventh one of our

time. He is also known as the author of the Markandeya Purana, which consists of the most magnificent and profound mantras dedicated to the Divine Mother, called Devi Mahatmya. Markandeya, the immortal worshiper of Shiva-Shakti, here in Mahabharata narrates the story about Savitri, the incarnation of the Divine Mother who conquers Death.

### **The story told by Markandeya**

The story is about a princess of Madra, Savitri, who was born as an incarnation of the Goddess Savitri, as a result of her father, king Ashvapati, performing a severe penance over 18 years, wanting to have progeny. Being pleased with his tapasya, the Goddess bestowed upon him the boon of a birth of one daughter, instead of his request of many (a hundred) sons.

Savitri was so beautiful in her youth that none could approach her for marriage, being afraid of her splendour as of a supernatural power, *devakanyeti*. So the girl had to find a husband for herself. The Svayamvaram marriage was announced and she went around the world in a golden chariot in search of her mate. She traveled through all the kingdoms, lands and forests, but there was none to match her divine qualities, until finally in the forest she meets Satyavan, the son of the blind and exiled King Dyumatsena.

When she returns to her father's palace, Devarishi Narad is visiting Ashvapati. When Savitri announces that she has chosen Satyavan, Narad exclaiimes that she has made a wrong choice, a big mistake, *dosha*. "Although he is the best among men," says Narad, "he will die in one year from now, and nothing can be done about it." After hearing such shocking news, King Ashvapati asks Savitri to find another person to marry. But Savitri refuses, saying that she cannot choose twice, when her heart and mind have once decided.

Thus she marries Satyavan and moves to his home in the forest. She serves Satyavan and his parents in every way without complaint, remembering the words of Narad and counting the days of Satyavan's life. Neither Satyavan nor his parents know anything about it. The time goes by very quickly, and three days before the destined day, Savitri performs a *mahavrata* tapasya, standing for three days and nights without sleep or food, like a pillar in deep meditation. On the morning of the fourth day, after completing the vow, she notices that

Satyavan is going to the forest to cut wood. She also goes with him, after some debate with him and his parents who want her to take rest after performing such a difficult vrata, but she requests them to let her go with Satyavan and they cannot refuse her.

In the woods Satyavan suddenly feels dizzy and lies down with his head on her lap. He feels as if thousands of knives are piercing his body and falls unconscious. Then she feels the presence of someone else. She sees approaching them a dark figure with red eyes. It is Yama, the God of Death, who comes to fetch Satyavan. He takes his soul out of his body and goes away into his kingdom. But Savitri follows him without delay. She speaks to him in perfect poetic Sanskrit, surprising him with her high knowledge and deep understanding of Dharma. So the Lord of Death, who is at the same time the Lord of Dharma, is immensely impressed with Savitri and bestows upon her a series of boons :

Return of sight for Satyavan's father, Dyumatsena;  
and return of the kingdom which he once lost;  
One hundred sons for her own father Ashvapati, the boon he  
was aspiring for in his tapasya;  
One hundred sons for Savitri and Satyavan;  
And finally the life of Satyavan.

In the morning Savitri and Satyavan return home and see that King Dyumatsena has got both his sight and and his kingdom back. Neither Satyavan nor his parents know what has actually happened. Only Rishis were aware, praising Savitri for her Divine Power of Love and Truth.

This is briefly the story, where a destiny predicted as inevitable was changed by the determination of a woman's will.

### **Vedic Symbolism of the Story.**

Here I would like to briefly elaborate on a few major characteristics of the main characters in the story, in the light of the Vedic symbolism given by Sri Aurobindo.

There are two Kings, representing the two kingdoms of Knowledge and Power.

1) Dyumatsena - the Lord of the Shining Hosts, (lit. "with the Army of Rays or Luminous Beings"), the King of Knowledge (the rays,

*gavah, usrah*, in the Vedas are the symbols of Consciousness in its aspect of Knowledge) here, in the lower hemisphere, falls blind, and thus loses his Kingdom. He has a son, Satyavan, a growing Soul of Man, a prince, a king to be, who cannot live without the support of light and truth in the darkness of this creation and therefore is destined to die within a year. Nor as a prince has he any future, for his father has already lost his kingdom.

2) Ashvapati is the Lord of Horse, (*ashva-*, horse, in the Vedas is a symbol of power, energy, force in opposition to *gauh*, cow or ray of light, as a symbol of knowledge: the cow is to be in front of the horse, the Knowledge is to rule the Power). Here in the lower hemisphere Ashvapati is involved in Tapasya, concentrated spiritual effort, dedicated to the Divine Mother, Savitri, 'goddess of the supreme Truth', calling for Her to support his spiritual work on earth with heirs. Otherwise his work has no future, since he has no son to continue it.

3) The Goddess Savitri, having promised Ashvapati any boon he would ask for, did not give him the progeny he wanted, because she knew that without Dyumatsena first regaining his sight and his kingdom there would be no future for it, and all the endeavours of Ashvapati would be fruitless. This is the reason why her human embodiment Savitri asks first from Yama for the return of Dyumatsena's sight and his Kingdom, and only afterwards for the heirs for Ashvapati. The goddess actually fulfills his wish by giving him a daughter Savitri, who saves King Dyumatsena from his blindness and reestablishes his Kingdom of Knowledge, and thus opens up the opportunity for Ashvapati, the King of Power, to have a hundred sons.

Once this has been granted, she asks for children for herself and Satyavan: the Divine Race on earth. This is granted by Yama as inevitable after she has gained the three previous boons. This might give us the impression that Yama did not notice, or was, so to say, cheated by Savitri. For each time he says: "Choose any boon except the life of Satyavan", Savitri asks a new boon; and after the first three boons she asks for "a hundred sons for me and Satyavan". Yama agrees to grant her this boon. It is not that he does not understand what he is doing, but because the first three boons have prepared the

conditions for the Divine Race on earth. Only then does Savitri ask for the life of Satyavan, the future King of Creation. This boon means a conversion of death into its origin.

We can understand these boons in terms of symbolic action of the Divine Mother upon the four fallen Divine Beings (according to the Mother's story of Creation):

- a) Return of sight and kingdom for Dyumatsena, the Lord of Knowledge, could be seen as a symbol of return of "Consciousness in Light" from the state of Darkness;
- b) A hundred sons for Ashvapati, the Lord of Power, might be understood as a symbol of the return of Bliss to its Origin. In Markandeya's story it is mentioned that Ashvapati, being a perfect King, loved by all his subjects, suffered a lot, *samtapam upajagmivan*, from having no progeny, *anapatyam*. In order to recover from that suffering he performed his tapasya for 18 years. (It is interesting to note that the world of Bliss, Ananda loka, being emanated from SAT and CIT, is the world of the multitude of souls, the world of eternal and infinite becoming, we may say. In the Puranas it is called Maharloka or Janar-loka, the world of Vastness or the world of Genesis.)
- c) A hundred sons for Savitri and Satyavan might be a symbol of a conversion of Falsehood into Truth, a symbol of the Supramental Manifestation upon Earth, with all its multitude of souls. Here Savitri is the Divine Mother and all men are her children: psychic beings.
- d) Granting of life to Satyavan, so that the Soul of Man will not die; it is a symbol of conversion of Death into its counterpart - the Divine Life.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother spoke about a pre-Vedic and pre-Chaldean tradition. The story of creation, for example, told by the Mother is based on knowledge from that prehistoric tradition. The myth of Savitri also has some features which cannot be fully understood within the Vedic tradition. It is only in the most archaic images and symbols of the oldest parts of the Veda that we can find a clue to these symbols in the tale of Savitri. Sri Aurobindo writes in The Secret of the Veda:

*In images of an energetic incongruity reminding us of the sublime grotesques and strange figures that have survived from the old mystic and symbolic art of the prehistoric world, Vamadeva describes the Purusha in the figure of a man-bull, whose four horns are the four divine principles, ... "*

(SV 308)

*"For all this creation has been, as it were, ejected into the subconscious by the four-horned Bull, the divine Purusha whose horns are infinite Existence, Consciousness, Bliss and Truth.*

(SVp. 307)

We can clearly see the correspondence of these four with SAT-CHIT-ANANDA-VIJNANA of the later Vedic and Vedantic tradition. These four horns of divine Purusha are perhaps the prehistoric symbols of those four original divine beings, mentioned by the Mother in her story of Creation. Infinite Existence corresponds to Life in the Mother's story, and all others follow the same order.

There are some interesting implications following this kind of identification. The order of these beings falling into their opposites and the order of their recovery is the same, it is: Consciousness, Bliss, Truth and Life. Life or infinite Existence (SAT) is falling last, and it is being recovered last. Consciousness is falling first and is recovered first, which is fully understood within the Vedic tradition.

The conundrum of the Savitri story, regarding the fourth boon of 100 sons for her and Satyavan, is impossible to understand unless we see a bigger picture. How could she ask for the sons from Satyavan, if his very life had not been granted? And how could the Lord of Death grant her such a boon, if he refused to give her Satyavan's life?

It is only when we know that the Existence, SAT, is to be recovered last, that we understand what has actually happened. For infinite Existence consists of all other aspects of Consciousness, Bliss and Truth (Supermind), and cannot manifest without them being manifested first in the world.

The Truth or Supermind, as the Divine Manifestation in Matter (100 sons of Savitri and Satyavan), needs to be granted before the Infinite Existence can be effectuated. This was the secret knowledge, which made the narration of Markandeya seem irrational from the point of earthly wisdom. But from the point of the infinite it is a perfect account. It also suggests that the whole transformation will be fulfilled before it becomes finally effective and visible. It is probably this which makes Sri Aurobindo write about it in such a mysterious way:

*A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,  
A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,  
A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors  
And beauty conquer the resisting world,  
The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,  
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss  
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.  
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."*

(Savitri p. 55)

## ***Savitri Bhavan Second Building completed***

In February we announced the starting of a second-phase building for Savitri Bhavan. At that time we were hoping for a grant towards the building cost from the Department of Culture, Government of India. That grant did not materialise, but nevertheless, thanks to the generous support of numerous well-wishers, it has been possible to complete the building within the planned time. A consecration ceremony will be held on Sunday November 21st 2004.

The purpose of this building is to house and display the series of 470 paintings created by the Mother with Huta during the 1960s, and named by the Mother "Meditations on Savitri". In 1967, when all of these paintings had been exhibited in the Ashram, and were being kept at Golconde, Huta communicated to the Mother her strong feeling that "Savitri must have her own place". The Mother went into a deep concentration, then said emphatically, "It will be." When Savitri Bhavan was started, Huta felt that this was the "own place" which the Mother had promised for Savitri. So beyond all expectation, this great treasure was entrusted to our care. In our brochure published last year we wrote :

*In June 2001 the entire set of 468 oil paintings illustrating the whole of Savitri, entitled by the Mother "Meditations on Savitri", was entrusted to our care, along with facsimiles of the Mother's original sketches, written instructions and comments, copies of her recorded recitations of the selected passages, and of her recorded explanations of Savitri. This is a unique treasure, which will be a goldmine of insight to future scholars seeking to gain a deeper understanding of Sri Aurobindo's vision. To house and display this priceless collection under secure and state of the art conditions, as well as providing the necessary curatorial and research facilities, is at present our highest priority.*

Now a building is available where the paintings can be displayed. In order to make it fully functional and safe for them, special lighting will be needed to protect the oil-paint and canvas from harmful ultra-violet rays, and suitable display arrangements will have to be installed. That is the next priority, and we look forward to the day when these unique paintings will be able to spread their vibrations freely to all. We request the help and support of all Savitri-lovers in completing this important project.



## *About Savitri Bhavan*

We dream of an environment in Auroville  
that will breathe the atmosphere of Savitri  
that will welcome Savitri lovers from every corner  
of the world  
that will be an inspiring centre of Savitri studies  
that will house all kinds of materials and activities  
to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of  
Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic  
that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that  
has come from the Sun

We welcome support from everyone who feels that the  
vibration of Savitri will help to manifest a better  
tomorrow.