

# Invocation

*Savitri*

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B H A V A N

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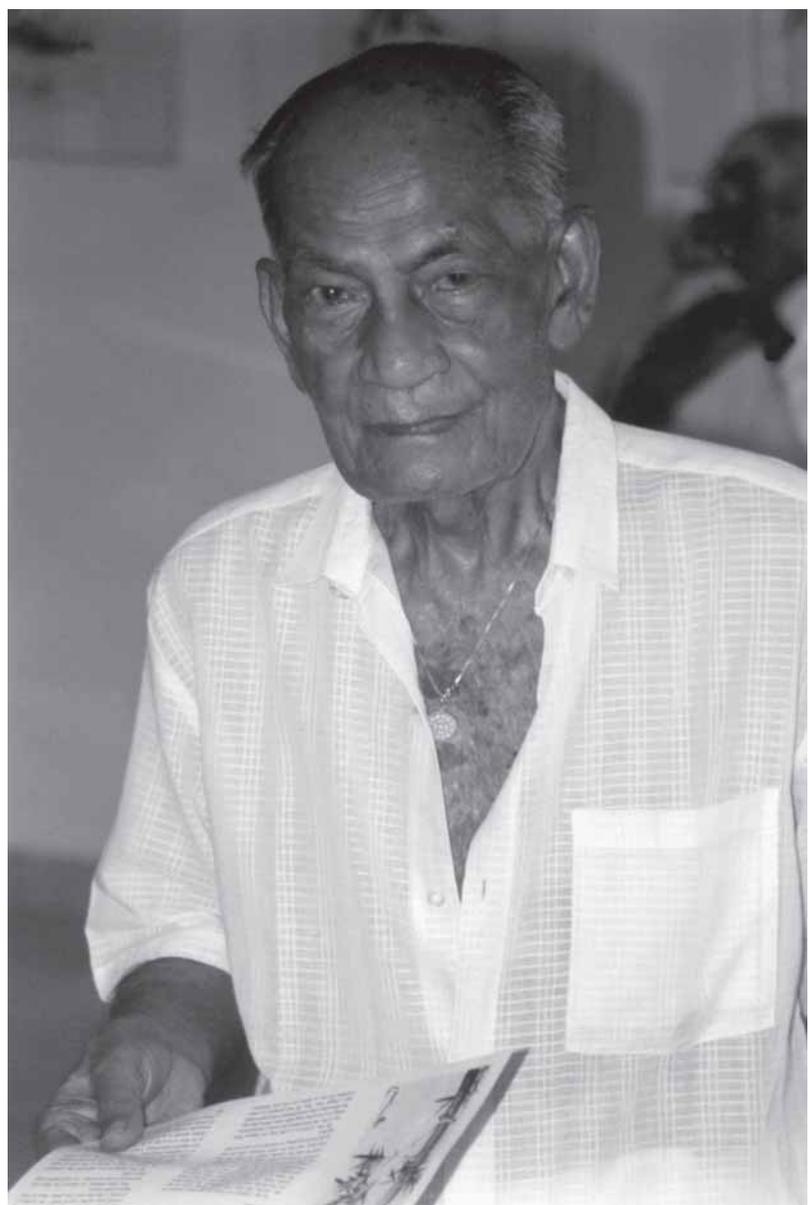
### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ***Warrior Soul***

*My life is as a slow unveiling  
Of the imaged beauty of thy Light,  
Like a dry century of darkness  
Ransomed from the coils of night.*

*A dimmest star on a fringe of sky  
Is glowing like an incense-flame  
And spreads its diamond hint of splendour  
In a shrine that bears thy haloed Name.*

*White petals of my voiceless love  
Thy luminous feet adorn,  
Where flowers of a heavenly hue  
In silence bow, from silence born.*

*Still, as the flaming vision grows  
And the rapt Godward consciousness,  
I hear a sharp and stabbing cry  
Tearing my soul's intensities.*

*It is the giant cry of death  
Who lures me like a serpent-eye  
Into his tombed oblivion  
Like a star fallen from thy sky.*

*I will rise yet healed of my mortal wounds  
To thy dome of jewelled ecstasy,  
A warrior-soul invincible,  
Chainless, orbed with infinity!*

**NIRODBARAN**

*From "Sun Blossoms" : Poems by Nirodbaran, Bombay 1947*

## *Remembering Nirodbaran*

Our very dear eldest brother Nirodbaran left his body peacefully on July 17, 2006 – just four months before his 103rd birthday. We cannot mourn the passing of one who had lived such a long and richly blessed life, knowing that surely his soul is where he always wished to be, where he belonged, close to the Master and the Mother. We can only be grateful for the great privilege we enjoyed, of some closeness to him in his last years, and his unstinting support and encouragement for the dream of Savitri Bhavan.

Nirod-da loved Auroville, and was happy whenever there was an opportunity for him to come out to meet Aurovilians. He used to visit the Matrimandir often, but also readily accepted invitations to get to know other parts of Auroville. And his special relationship with *Savitri*, as Sri Aurobindo's scribe during the later stages of its composition, is well known. In his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* Nirodbaran has given a uniquely intimate picture of how Sri Aurobindo worked on the poem during the 1940s and right up to a couple of weeks before leaving his body on December 5, 1950. So Nirod-da's interest in and support for our project was a very great encouragement to all involved in its development.

In 1994, when Savitri Bhavan was hardly even a dream, the Study Circle used to meet at the Laboratory of Evolution in Bharat Nivas. Nirod-da was one of the first speakers who visited us there.

Then came the Foundation Day — November 24, 1995. In the presence of many well-wishers from the Ashram and Auroville Nirod-da invoked the Presence and Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and laid the Foundation Stone for the new project — the real beginning of Savitri Bhavan.

After that the weekly Study Circle started meeting under the trees on the site. Members also started planting the garden together. A next step came with the raising of a simple keet shelter on the site. Nirod-da was one of the first guest speakers there. Construction of the First

Phase building was started in December 1998. Nirod-da enthusiastically inspected the on-going work during a visit in February 1999.

August 8th, 1999 saw the Inauguration of the First Phase. On this happy day, Nirod-da first planted a 'Supramental Sun' (kadamba) sapling, then cut the ribbon and led us into the new building, where he lit the lamp and gave a short talk. He concluded with these words :

*There is no doubt about it that Savitri Bhavan will go on growing, and soon we shall all be very happy to receive again another invitation in four or five years' time. But by that time my soul will be, I hope, with the Lord. That is all I have to say.*

After that there were many visits over the next few years. In April 2001 Nirod-da brought a group of friends to see the exhibition of paintings by Chinese sadhak Hu Hsu, which had been loaned to us by the Ashram Art Gallery, and organized by Franz. That day, we had a picnic tea in the garden.

On March 5th, 2003 Dr. Nadkarni gave the concluding session of his series of Savitri study camps in the garden. Nirod-da joined the audience, and chatted with friends under the trees after the talk.



*March 5, 2003*

But after his 100th birthday in November 2003 Nirod-da's health declined. When our Second Phase building was inaugurated on November 21st, 2004 – five and a half years after the inauguration of the first building – Nirod-da was not well enough to attend the ceremony. Sudha lit the lamp on his behalf. In the evening, General Ashoke Chatterji brought him in his car to see the building. He looked into it through the open doorway without getting down from the car. This was his last visit to Savitri Bhavan.

On August 20th 2006 some of Nirod-da's family members and close associates gathered to share sweet memories with us. We felt his smiling presence in our midst.



*Nirod-da's niece Dolly speaking on August 20, 2006*

One of Nirod-da's closest friends was Professor Arabinda Basu, Whenever he came to give a talk at Savitri Bhavan, Nirod-da would come with him. So it was appropriate that on this occasion, Arindam-da should speak. The text of his talk follows.

# *The Object of the Integral Yoga*

*Talk by Professor Arabinda Basu*

*August 20, 2006*

Children of the Mother, many of you have heard lectures on, or read articles about, the theme of this evening's discourse. I have chosen to speak on this topic for two reasons.

First, for about the last two years I have myself heard many lectures and read several articles on this topic, but it has always seemed to me that these essays at explaining the object of the integral yoga, though very learned, have missed the fundamental point.

Secondly, it was a very favourite subject of Nirodbaran. He was a poet who wrote poems the ideas of which are very substantial and full of devotion, and they have high poetic quality both in English and Bengali. He was also a biographer, and a writer of literary essays. His collection of Bengali compositions, *Rachara-Bichitra*, is marvellous in thought and style. And of course his volumes *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo*, and *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* are works which will keep his name remembered for a long time. But his true interest was yoga, and he tried to the last days of his life to understand the principles and practice the disciplines of the Integral Yoga. He discussed what Sri Aurobindo preached and practiced endlessly with people young and old to whom he could open his mind and heart. Therefore, it is in the fitness of things that this evening's discourse should be on the object of the Integral Yoga.

In a letter, the last line of which clinches the issue by saying : '*The Divine alone is our object*' Sri Aurobindo writes,

*The object of the yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its*

*object is not to be a great yogi or a Superman (although it may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for Moksha though liberation comes by it and all else may come but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object.*

(SABCL 22-23-24:503)

It can be clearly seen that the emphasis is on the Divine. Sri Aurobindo says that an aspirant has to enter into the Divine's Presence and Consciousness. He also has to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone. There are seekers who have devotion to and love for the Divine because they want power, glory, position, money, fame and all kinds of worldly benefits. This is very far from the real aim of the yoga. The next part of the sentence brings in an original point which is the distinctive mark of the integral yoga. It is, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine. Not only that, the aim also includes the idea that the aspirant should seek to be the instrument of the Divine in his will and works and life. Sri Aurobindo gives a whole list of what the practitioner of the integral yoga must not want to be. It must not be his aim to be a great yogi or a Superman, or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. The next sentence strikes a note which may seem very strange to seekers of Moksha or liberation. Sri Aurobindo says the aim is not Moksha, though liberation does come about by the yoga. And he adds that all else may also come, but says that these must not be the integral yogi's object.

It has been said in the quotation given above that the object of the yoga is not to become a Superman. It may be asked, and with justification, why Sri Aurobindo gives so much emphasis on the ascent to the supramental level of consciousness. Let us first make it clear that to realise the Divine it is not necessary to attain the supermind.

*The spiritual realisation can be had on any plane, writes Sri Aurobindo, by contact with the Divine (who is everywhere) or by perception of the Self within, which is pure and untouched by the outer movements. The*

*supermind is something transcendent – a dynamic Truth-Consciousness which is not there yet, something to be brought down from above.* (Ibid:19)

Sri Aurobindo has said a number of times that the supermind is completely free from Ignorance. That is why it is imperative that a sadhak must realise the Self which is above and beyond the Ignorance. And this can be done, as we learn from the quotation given above, on any plane of consciousness. Indeed Sri Aurobindo has also said that the attaining of the experiential knowledge of the Self can start on the higher mental level. As he says, there is a kind of liberation in the Higher Mind also. But it must also be pointed out that this knowledge is not complete, and therefore the liberation from Ignorance which it gives is not perfect. Since we have said above that the supermind alone is completely free from the Ignorance, the perfect and complete knowledge of the Self and the Divine can be accomplished on the supramental plane of consciousness alone. It is because of this that it is essential in the integral yoga to ascend to the supramental plane of consciousness. It is, as Sri Aurobindo says, only the supramental that is All-Knowledge. All below that, from supermind to matter, is Ignorance. It may be asked that if all below the supermind is Ignorance, how can there be any knowledge of the Self, however incomplete, obtained by the Higher Mind? But here we have to take note of a very important point in both the philosophy and the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo. It is that Ignorance is growing from level to level towards the full Knowledge. There may be knowledge before supermind, but it is not All-Knowledge. That is why in order to have the complete and integral knowledge of the Divine, it is essential to ascend to the supermind.

It has been said above that one of the objects of the integral yoga is to love the Divine for the Divine's sake. But that is not the total aim of the yoga. The yoga also calls upon its practitioner to be tuned into the nature of the Divine and to be the instrument of the Divine in his will and works and life. The power of the yoga has to be applied to the radical change of his nature. This is the great ideal of the transformation of human nature, of man's mental, vital and physical instrumentation. This can be done only by the transforming power of

the supermind, which is identical with the complete and integral knowledge of the Divine.

The physical transformation means making all the cells of the body fully conscious and thus spiritual. We may recall in this connection Sri Aurobindo's prophetic line:

*Even the body shall remember God.* (Savitri, p.707)

Remembering is a conscious act. Matter can remember only if it becomes conscious. This implies that the cells of the body will be able to know what they are in essence. They are formations of conscious energy. We may say that they will be liberated in the traditional sense of the term, because they will have self-knowledge. Conquest of death is a consequence of this self-knowledge which will come as a result of the transformation of the physical cells by the supramental consciousness and knowledge-will.

The yoga aims at the total transformation of the nature of the Ignorance which rules the world now and of which human nature is a part. But this is a means towards the complete manifestation of the Divine on the earth. Sri Aurobindo has written about the transformation of earth-consciousness. This is a very difficult point in his philosophy and a most difficult thing to accomplish in his yoga. It wants to pull the elements of the Ignorance out of the cosmic Nature. This is because, according to Sri Aurobindo, the Divine intends to make a new self-discovery under conditions which obtain on the earth alone and not on any other plane of consciousness. The realisation of the integral Divine does not only mean to make real to oneself the different aspects of the Divine on its own plane of existence. It also means the realisation of the Divine's new aspect of manifestation in Matter made conscious and spiritualised by the transforming power of a supramental Knowledge-Will: the new intended self-discovery of the Divine as the material Divine, if I may so express the idea. And this ideal is also included in realisation of the supramental transformation of consciousness and the comprehensive concept of the integral Divine.

Now, in the light of what has been said, the statement of Sri Aurobindo that the Divine alone is the object of the yoga takes on new dimensions and significance. Nevertheless, whatever additional significance is implied by the aim of the realisation of the material Divine does not alter the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's categorical statement *'The Divine alone is the object of the yoga.'*

Sri Aurobindo has mentioned the conquest of death as one of the results of the integral yoga. Much has been made of this idea by lecturers and writers on Sri Aurobindo's yoga. It is true that Sri Aurobindo has written about the conquest of death and physical immortality in *The Life Divine*. It is not necessary to elaborate this point here. But it should be pointed out that though Sri Aurobindo believes in the possibility of physical immortality, he has also said that it is something minor, the last result of the supermind.

*What is vital, Sri Aurobindo has written, is the supramental change of consciousness – conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important – a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values – it would mean that the seeker was actuated, not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital clinging to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body – such a spirit could not bring the spiritual change.*

(SABCL 22-23-24:1233)

In conclusion it must be pointed out that Sri Aurobindo firmly believed not only in the possibility but also in the achievement of conquest of death. Sri Aurobindo has written,

*... the endeavour towards this achievement is not new and some yogis have achieved it, I believe – but not in the way I want it. They achieved it as a personal siddhi maintained by yoga-siddhi – not a dharma of the nature.*

(Ibid: 95)

Here the words '*dharma of the nature*' are most important. This means, as I understand it, that the yogis who accomplished the conquest of death did so individually and did not achieve what they achieved in a way that the result of it could be part of the nature and thus become available to other seekers and sadhaks. But, as I have indicated above, the physical transformation will be the means of a new self-discovery by the Divine of Himself here on earth. The practitioner of integral yoga will also realise that new aspect of the Divine, as an essential part of what Sri Aurobindo means by '*The Divine alone is our object*'.



# ***The Traveller of the Worlds: approaching the second Book of Savitri***

*Talk by Dr. M.V. Nadkarni*

*March 5, 2006*

We are gathering here after a gap of three years. We concluded our first reading or study of *Savitri* in 2003. Then I turned my attention to *Essays on the Gita*. For the last two or three years I have been doing *Essays on the Gita*. To me, everything that Sri Aurobindo wrote needs to be celebrated, so I've been doing it. But *Savitri* is a special book; you can't keep away from it for very long. And if you remember what the Mother once said about *Savitri* you know how true it is. She said :

*Savitri is a revelation, it is a meditation, it is a quest of the Infinite, the Eternal. If it is read with this aspiration for Immortality, the reading itself will serve as a guide to Immortality. To read Savitri is indeed to practise yoga, spiritual concentration; one can find there all that is needed to realise the Divine. Each step of yoga is noted here, including the secret of all other yogas. Surely, if one sincerely follows what is revealed here in each line one will reach finally the transformation of the Supramental Yoga. It is truly the infallible guide who never abandons you; its support is always there for him who wants to follow the path. Each verse of Savitri is like a revealed Mantra which surpasses all that man possessed by the way of knowledge, and I repeat this, the words are expressed and arranged in such a way that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to the origin of sound, which is OM.*

So this February I once again took up *Savitri*. We began the study camp on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and as usual we met for two sessions every

morning except on February 28<sup>th</sup> which was observed here in Auroville as well as in Pondicherry as the Golden Jubilee of the Supramental Manifestation on Earth.

This time, instead of starting our study from Book One, Canto One, I decided to take up Book Two. This was for a number of reasons. First, among the twelve Books that make up *Savitri*, Book Two is probably the least studied or written about. Secondly, I was not very happy with the way we dealt with it during our first reading. And very often you will find people who have no opening to *Savitri*, no understanding of *Savitri*, cite passages from Book Two to make the point that Sri Aurobindo was no poet, that *Savitri* is no poetry. But you will see that of all the three Parts of *Savitri*, the First Part that consists of Books One, Two and Three was entirely written by Sri Aurobindo in his own hand. Many parts of *Savitri*, as we all know, were written down by Nirodbaran to Sri Aurobindo's dictation. But the first three Books were written down by Sri Aurobindo himself. He made several copies of them. So they have received the maximum amount of attention from the poet himself.

Now the difficulty that arises in understanding Book Two is that it deals with a most uncommon kind of experience. It talks about worlds that you and I have no access to. And because we have no access to these worlds, we tend to imagine that these worlds don't exist. We may think that they are all a fabrication of Sri Aurobindo's imagination and that he just weaves words after words after words – because this is the longest book. As you know it's about 210 pages long, 15 cantos long. But Sri Aurobindo has told us, with particular reference to this book, that

*Savitri is a 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 pointed out there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of poetry.*

In the 15 cantos of Book Two Sri Aurobindo tries to convey his experience of several worlds other than this terrestrial world. The

language he uses is austere and direct because it tries to capture the very essence of his experience of these worlds. I personally believe that some of the finest examples of his poetry are to be found in this book.

Evolution is generally a topic for scientific study, scientific analysis. Nobody else has looked at it as a high drama of evolutionary struggle, as a great drama that is enacted on the stage of this Earth, in this world. Sri Aurobindo brings us the excitement of this drama. It is this that he wants to convey to us.

If you go through these 15 cantos your way of looking at the world gets changed completely. It is not a scientist's view of the world, it is not a philosopher's view of the world. As you read it more and more, you begin to see that it is God's own view of the world.

Literature very often has this gift to make to us: normally we are all caught up in our personal way of looking at the world. However well-informed you are, however well travelled you are, it is very hard to cast off the shackles of one's own egoistic perspective on life. Literature very often gives us a temporary freedom; we begin to see the world through the eyes of Tolstoy, the eyes of a French writer, or the eyes of an African writer. That is the benefit, that is the advantage of reading literature. But no other writer gives you this vast perspective. When you read Sri Aurobindo, when you read *Savitri*, you suddenly feel you are looking at the world from God's own perspective. So there is hardly anything you cannot sympathise with, hardly anything you do not feel has some sense behind it. All the great tragedies, all the great black things that happen in this life ... beyond all this you see a great light dimly glowing. That is the perspective which *Savitri* gives, and that I think is the greatest benefit we derive from *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo was writing *Savitri* during the darkest days in human history. The Second World War was being waged, and if you look at the literature produced in Europe at that time it is full of dark forebodings. Many people came to the conclusion that humanity had no future if Man can behave like this. In those 8 to 9 years the whole crop of European youth was just wiped out. So that was a depressing period, and many people thought that probably Man is going to destroy his own species. It was at that time that Sri Aurobindo was writing this, and he knew that it would not be a best seller. But as he was writing it, I feel that he was impregnating the occult worlds with

vibrations of hope, vibrations of joy and vibrations of the certitude that this human struggle is not in vain. It will be a difficult struggle, it will be a long struggle: Nature has taken billions of years to bring us to this level. But, after all, it is a struggle guided by the Lord. The Lord is the charioteer of the struggle, and we are bound to win. It is this kind of a faith, this kind of a confidence, that the reading of *Savitri* gives you – and particularly this part, which is generally regarded as the story of evolution, with the survival of the fittest etc. which is a gloomy tale ... . Lo and behold, Sri Aurobindo gives us a totally different perspective on this. That is the reason why I decided, in spite of my inadequacies, to turn to Book Two.

Now you can't just jump into Book Two, Canto One, because it is preceded by the five Cantos of Book One; and I know that there are many people in the audience who were not here the first time this was done, maybe seven years ago. So I decided to review Aswapati's yoga as a whole, and the first two sessions were devoted to a wide-ranging survey of *Savitri* as a whole, so that people could know what the story is about, what the issues are and so on. Once we have this background then we can focus on a smaller part of *Savitri*.

Richard Hartz has pointed out somewhere that it is strange that the two principal events in the story of *Savitri*, namely the death of Satyavan which is described in the Book of Death, Book Eight, and his resuscitation which is described in Book Twelve, The Epilogue, are the shortest of the twelve Books of this epic. Sri Aurobindo devotes a Book to each of these events but they are the smallest of the Books. Not only are they the smallest of the Books, but also these Books are just the ones that have not received the same kind of thorough revision which all the other Books have received from him. So Sri Aurobindo's relative lack of interest in these Books suggests that neither the common fact of death nor the rare phenomena of a return to life was what interested him the most, but rather the forces behind these surface happenings. The entire epic poem *Savitri* delineates what these forces are and what yogic sadhana is necessary to make the ideal of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother a reality.

The combined capacity of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother brought down the Supramental Consciousness on Earth in 1956, and recently

we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of this event, probably the greatest in human history so far. Yet something is still missing. The complete siddhi of Savitri's yoga and also of Aswapati's yoga is yet to come. Savitri is certain that this will come. So was Sri Aurobindo. So was The Mother. This victory will come. And the Supreme assures us, assures Savitri towards the end of the epic:

*All things shall manifest the covert God,  
All shall reveal the Spirit's light and might  
And move to its destiny of felicity.  
Even there shall come as a high crown of all  
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.* (p. 708)

The end of Death has not yet come about. Satyavan was resuscitated, but that was another deal. Immortality in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, in Sri Aurobindo's way of looking at things, is not a gift somebody can give you; one has to earn it by doing this enabling sadhana and this sadhana is still there to be done by us.

The Supreme also lays down two conditions that must be fulfilled before such a great fulfilment can be achieved. By the great fulfilment I mean the conquest of death and the death of Ignorance. This again is very clearly laid out on the same page:

*But first high Truth must set her feet on earth  
And man aspire to the Eternal's light  
And all his members feel the Spirit's touch  
And all his life obey an inner Force.*

Two conditions: first, Truth must set its feet on earth. That has happened. The Mother proclaimed that on 28 February 1956 the Supramental had descended on Earth. But what about the second part, the part that you and I are supposed to play? Of these two conditions, the first has been fulfilled, the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother has made high Truth set her feet on earth. But Man – that is you and I – has still to fulfil the second condition, which is to let all our members feel the Spirit's touch and our life obey the inner Force. The Grace from above has acted. It is the activation from below which is still weak and faltering. So this is what I said in the introductory talks, the two talks on the first day.

After this introductory talk on the first day we turned our attention to Aswapati's yoga, which is of utmost significance to us because, in a large measure, Aswapati's yoga was Sri Aurobindo's own yoga. The description of this yoga begins with Book One, Canto Three and extends to the end of that Book, covering Cantos Three, Four and Five. Then come the 15 cantos of Book Two.  $15 + 3$  is 18, then add the four cantos of Book Three, making 22 cantos in all: a little more than 300 pages just devoted to the yoga of Aswapati. So you can see how important Aswapati's yoga is to this enterprise.

Now is there any system behind it, any gradation of the different parts of Aswapati's yoga? Yes, Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters has given us guidance. He says that Aswapati's yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual fulfilment as an individual and this is described in "The Yoga of the King". "The Yoga of the King" is the title of Cantos Three and Five of Book One. The canto sandwiched between them, Canto Four, has a different title. It is called "The Secret Knowledge". But the first part of Aswapati's yoga is described in Cantos Three and Five of Book One. Next he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness, and this is described in the Second Book. Aswapati explores all the worlds as a representative of mankind. Finally he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and a new creation. This is described in "The Book of the Divine Mother", which is Book Three with its four cantos.

"The Yoga of the King" has two parts. The first is described as "The Yoga of the Soul's Release from Ignorance". That is described in Book One, Canto Three. The second part of this yoga is called "The Yoga of the Spirit's Freedom and Greatness" – Canto Five. In between them there is Canto Four which is "The Secret Knowledge". On occasion during the last 10 days I have drawn your attention again and again to the fact that *Savitri* has its roots in the Vedic tradition; and the very words "secret knowledge" also come from the Vedic term *ninya vacamsi*. Sri Aurobindo has taken that title and given it to this Canto.

What I did then was to try to give a brief review of Cantos Three, Four and Five. A man saner than me would not have tried to do this. It is impossible! You get stuck in any passage. There are so

many wonderful passages that on occasions I felt completely helpless and didn't know whether we would ever be able to go beyond Canto Three. But somehow I prayed and strength was given to me. These three cantos are so rich in every respect that it was very difficult to do what I wanted to do, just a quick summary. You can't do a quick summary of Sri Aurobindo; it is impossible.

You know, very often people tell me "You have given so many talks on *Savitri*; please tell me in five minutes what *Savitri* is all about, I'm very busy". That is the problem. To each of these three cantos I devoted sometimes two sessions, sometimes three sessions ... which means that a major part of these last 10 days was devoted to just a quick run-through of Cantos Three, Four and Five. It would be impossible here today even to try to indicate in broad outlines the contours of this phase of Aswapati's yoga. What I shall do instead is read one passage from each one of these cantos, so that will bring back to your mind some of the things associated with this passage. And then I shall say in one or two sentences something about the content of each canto.

Canto Three: this begins by announcing that the world's desire brought about Savitri's birth. It begins by announcing that Savitri's birth takes place in response to the world's desire or aspiration. Who embodies this aspiration? Who embodies this call of the Earth to the Divine? And then we are told that Aswapati does it. Who is Aswapati? We are given a brief introduction to Aswapati. I will read a few lines about Aswapati.

*One in the front of the immemorial quest,  
Protagonist of the mysterious play  
In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms  
And limits his eternity by the hours  
And the blind Void struggles to live and see,  
A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,  
Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.  
His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres  
Into our province of ephemeral sight,  
A colonist from immortality.* (p.22)

In other words, what Sri Aurobindo is trying to say is that not only was Savitri an avatar, in some sense Aswapati was also an avatar. He is a spirit who has come specially from a special world to colonise this world with truth, the integral truth. Aswapati's yoga begins with a description of that. Let me read the very first passage which introduces this theme of what Aswapati's yoga is all about and that is all I have time for today. This is a very well-known passage, on page 23.

*This bodily appearance is not all;  
The form deceives, the person is a mask;  
Hid deep in man celestial powers can dwell.  
His fragile ship conveys through the sea of years  
An incognito of the Imperishable.  
A spirit that is a flame of God abides,  
A fiery portion of the Wonderful,  
Artist of his own beauty and delight,  
Immortal in our mortal poverty.  
This sculptor of the forms of the Infinite,  
This screened unrecognised Inhabitant,  
Initiate of his own veiled mysteries,  
Hides in a small dumb seed his cosmic thought.  
In the mute strength of the occult Idea  
Determining predestined shape and act,  
Passenger from life to life, from scale to scale,  
Changing his imaged self from form to form,  
He regards the icon growing by his gaze  
And in the worm foresees the coming god.*

Once Aswapati realises that he is not the bodily appearance, that there is something in him called the spark of the divine, that there is something called the soul or the psychic being, he widens his being and goes beyond his ego and loses his kinship with mortality and his mind begins to expand. The cosmic worker now begins to work on him and, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, turned his mud-engine to heaven-use. Humanity does not limit any more his outer or inner being. Latent powers awake in him. He becomes a seer, a shining guest of time. He enters a world of still consciousness and experiences peace that

passes all understanding. He now begins to see that this world is only a small result of a stupendous force. His spiritual journey is described and how he attains various spiritual siddhis. Inspiration and Intuition now become his second nature.

We then move on to Canto Four. This is described as “The Secret Knowledge”. It is a wonderful summary of the inner workings of this creation. Aswapati now realises that this world is not what it seems on the surface, namely a brute mechanic accident, but a miracle evolving gradually toward its full blossoming. There is a wonderful section in this canto which describes this whole creation as the play between Purusha and Prakriti on different planes. Let me quote here one of my favourite passages from this canto which talks about the way the Divine always comes down to guide this world. This is on page 55.

*Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.  
When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast  
And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,  
As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread  
Of one who steps unseen into his house.  
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*

This place is a very wonderful surrounding in which to read passages like this. I realise it now and regard myself as especially blessed to

have this opportunity of reading it here.

Now the last Canto we reviewed before we started on Book Two: Canto Five : a brief word about that. This canto describes how Aswapati rises beyond the bounds of nature. He could now see behind the appearances of nature and also see how the Divine Mother works under the hard conditions of night and ignorance. He has now a great aspiration to bring the world of glory he has already seen down on earth. He now also begins to understand the logic of the infinite. As he begins his ascent to a great spiritual height he becomes aware of a might that descends in him, of currents of light and power and delight. Descent is a very favourite phrase in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. In this yoga all we are supposed to do is to open ourselves up so that the descent can take place, so that we do not offer any impediments to the descent of the power and one such descent is described here. This is in the same canto, on page 81.

*As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure  
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,  
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,  
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,  
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs  
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain  
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:  
His nature shuddered in the Unknown's grasp.  
In a moment shorter than death, longer than Time,  
By a Power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,  
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,  
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,  
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force  
Hurried into unimaginable depths,  
Upborne into immeasurable heights,  
It was torn out from its mortality  
And underwent a new and boundless change.*

The siddhi that Aswapati acquires is described very briefly in these lines on page 91, at the very end of Canto Five.

*Affranchised from the net of earthly sense  
Calm continents of potency were glimpsed;  
Homelands of beauty shut to human eyes,  
Half-seen at first through wonder's gleaming lids,  
Surprised the vision with felicity;  
Sunbelts of knowledge, moonbelts of delight  
Stretched out in an ecstasy of widenesses  
Beyond our indigent corporeal range.*

Now you must be wondering why I called it this course “Looking at Book Two” when I am still talking about Book One. It is because we cannot understand what these ‘Worlds’ are, why Aswapati is travelling through them, unless we have a certain background of his yoga. And if you have concluded that I didn’t make much progress with Book Two then you are very right. I was ultimately able to cover only one Canto of Book Two to my heart’s satisfaction. What I have told you about already was the background we covered before we could make a start on Book Two.

Before we take up Book Two, which is, as I said, a description of Aswapati’s exploration of the different worlds, a number of questions arise and we must find reasonable answers to these questions. Where are these worlds? Where do you get the ticket for this journey; which airline, whatever? What are they made of? And if it is so difficult to explore these worlds why did Aswapati undertake it? What was the need for him to undertake this exploration?

All these questions have been answered by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*. Chapter 21 of Book Two of *The Life Divine* is called ‘The Order of the Worlds’ and there these questions have been answered. Sri Aurobindo begins by saying that mankind from the beginning of its existence has believed in the existence of other worlds and in the possibility of communication between their powers and the human race – until the rationalistic period of human thought began to sweep this belief aside as an old-fashioned superstition. He says that all religions in all ages have believed in the existence of other worlds. Only nowadays we have a new definition of reality: that which is concrete, that which can be touched is real. That means, in other words, that only what is made of matter is real. If something

is not made of matter, it is therefore not real, not true. But those other worlds are not made of matter; they are made of substances other than matter. What are these substances? If you study this particular chapter it would be clear. Sri Aurobindo's story of how the world was created is also told very briefly. He, like the "Purusha Sukta", describes how the Supreme Divine was fascinated by his own shadow, as The Mother puts it, and wanted to explore it. And in order to do that he took a plunge into it and became the Inconscient.

Notice that when I am asking these questions I am submitting to my humanness, because we would like to find out any reason for doing things. Why should there be a reason for doing things? Why do artists sing, why does a dancer dance? If he is a real dancer and if he is a real musician he doesn't know why he does it, except he has a delight and he wants to manifest it, he wants to express it. That is why the Divine manifested himself. And how did he manifest? Well, he took a plunge and became the Sea of the Inconscient, the *apraketam salilam*. That is what the "Purusha Sukta" talks about – he took a plunge into the Sea of the Inconscient. Sri Aurobindo says that it is reasonable to assume that this plunge was not a sudden precipitous dive. What he assumes is that this was a step by step descent. The Supreme Consciousness, the Sat-Chit-Ananda, makes a step-by-step descent. Gradually and slowly he loses his glories, his perfection, and puts on at the same time more and more layers and waves of imperfection. This is how he descends, this is the World-Stair. The "Purusha Sukta" talks about 7 stages. According to the "Purusha Sukta" the lowest step is Anna (Matter) then Life, Mind, Vignana (what Sri Aurobindo translates as the supramental layer of consciousness), Jana (bliss), Tapas (Consciousness-Force) and Satya (Truth or Existence). These steps form the ladder by which the Divine descended and became the Inconscient. Sri Aurobindo also assumes that there was a parallel ladder created for his ascent. This is a double ladder, a ladder for descent and another ladder for ascent. Because the Divine is at the heart of the Inconscient, the Inconscient cannot remain inconscient forever. There has to be a return journey. As he goes back he takes the other ladder, the ladder of ascent, from matter to life, life to mind, mind to supermind. This is the path he takes as he goes up. This is the scheme that the "Purusha Sukta" describes and Sri Aurobindo also adopts it. He describes it in other places, and

particularly in Book Two, Canto One he tells the same story. I shall read that part, from Book Two, Canto One.

*Earth by this golden superfluity  
Bore thinking man and more than man shall bear;  
This higher scheme of being is our cause  
And holds the key to our ascending fate;  
It calls out of our dense mortality  
The conscious spirit nursed in Matter's house.* (p.99)

You cannot suppress the aspiration for the Divine no matter where you are or who you are, because essentially you are made of the Divine. You can hide him for some time, suppress him for some time. You know that they have done it everywhere. And wherever there is a suppression of God, God rebounds with greater force. People have tried to suppress him, but you can't suppress him for very long no matter where you are. That is why, if you read Sri Aurobindo, you feel that one does not need to feel despondent.

The world has not yet come to us, the world has not yet come here. Some advisor to the European Common Market who came here said that if the world comes to know about Auroville the Indian Government will have to deploy its entire army to prevent people rushing into Auroville. They don't yet know what a wonderful thing this is. Similarly everybody will come to God. It is only a question of time. Regard yourself as very lucky that you got here before others came. There are no roads, there is clean air. Once all those people come, all this will be story of the past.

There is this unsuppressable urge for the Divine in all of us. As long as it is there, nobody is lost forever. In Sri Aurobindo's terminology and philosophy there is nothing like "He is lost forever, he has gone forever, he is in Hell forever". For one thing, Hell does not exist except the Hell we create for ourselves. This is why there is this constant aspiration in man, no matter in what conditions he finds himself. Sri Aurobindo says :

*The living symbol of these conscious planes,  
Its influences and godheads of the unseen,  
Its unthought logic of Reality's acts*

*Arisen from the unspoken truth in things,  
Have fixed our inner life's slow-scaled degrees.  
Its steps are paces of the soul's return  
From the deep adventure of material birth,  
A ladder of delivering ascent  
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.*

And the part here:

*Once in the vigil of a deathless gaze  
These grades had marked her giant downward plunge,  
The wide and prone leap of a godhead's fall.*

And this is a very famous sentence:

*Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.* (p.99)

This life has become possible because the Supreme has become inconscient. The Supreme has become all of us. And so, since it is the Supreme which has become all of us, we have to realise our real selves some day.

*The great World-Mother by her sacrifice  
Has made her soul the body of our state;  
Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness  
Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove  
The many-patterned ground of all we are.*

Now we know how the worlds came about, and that the worlds are made of substance which is other than matter, and since it is subtler than matter you require a certain inner capacity even to experience these worlds. But, just because you can't see them, it doesn't mean that they are powerless to act on you. They are acting on you. This is what is happening all the time. The worlds are acting on us. The worlds are acting on this Earth and Sri Aurobindo is saying this: These worlds – and they are not only worlds and powers, they are also beings – may have nothing to do with ourselves and our lives. They may exercise no action upon us. But often also they enter into secret communication with Earth existence. They obey or embody and are the intermediaries

and instruments of the cosmic powers and influences of which we have a subjective experience. Or they act by their own initiative upon the terrestrial world's life and motives and happenings. It is possible to receive help or guidance, or harm or misguidance, from these beings. It is possible even to become subject to their influence, to be possessed by their invasion or domination, to be instrumentalised by them for their good or evil purpose. At times the progress of earthly life seems to be a vast field of battle between supra-physical forces of either character; those that strive to uplift, encourage and illumine, and those that strive to deflect, depress, prevent or even shatter the upward evolution or the soul's self-expression in the material Universe. These forces, adversary forces, evil forces, whatever, they descend here at times and in a concentrated way. Very often people find it difficult to explain the atrocities of the Second World War and the terrible things that happened in Europe then, except to say these must be the result a descent of evil and hostile forces here on Earth to set back the evolutionary clock.

This has happened again and again in human history and so Sri Aurobindo has always wondered why there have been so many avatars, so many saints, people who have given new scriptures to mankind, people who have lived such exemplary lives. There is Mahatma Gandhi, there is the peace prize, there is this man, that man, but on the whole humanity has not changed much. Human nature remains exactly the same. There must be something impeding, obstructing our progress towards God. What is it, where is it? This was Sri Aurobindo's quest.

If you find these worlds, there is no government authority to which you can write "I find these worlds a world of evil; please do something about it". You have to go there yourself to cleanse the Augean stables. That is what Sri Aurobindo did for so long. You find, written in his letters something like "People think I'm lost in the Emyrean, I'm lost in waves of bliss and ecstasy of the spiritual kind. No; I am digging in a filth of horror, that's what I've been doing".

These are the worlds of falsehood, the worlds of evil, and they keep affecting us, they keep impeding us. And that is the greatest contribution of Sri Aurobindo. Not that he built the Ashram, not that he gave inspiration for Auroville ... the greatest contribution is that he made it possible for the Ashram and Auroville to thrive by clearing away the impediments in the occult world. That was his great work. Even the writing of *Savitri* became secondary to that. Nirod-da has

mentioned in his writings, “I used to go him in the morning with a pencil and my notebook and on certain mornings Sri Aurobindo had no words to dictate”. Where was he? He was attending to his work, the work that had to be done on the occult level to ensure a future for mankind. It is in these worlds that he travels, it is these worlds that he explores. And for somebody like Sri Aurobindo they are objective worlds. He goes there and digs so that the river can flow. There is a beautiful poem of his called “A God’s Labour” in which all this is portrayed. That is why this whole idea of the exploration of the worlds is important.

Aswapati has been depicted as a seeker of integral Truth who seeks to colonize this world with that Truth. Obviously he cannot find it here in the gross physical world. He therefore begins by looking for it in the other worlds. His first idea was, ‘Maybe there is still something missing in this world, which I may find in this world.’ But instead of finding only good forces he also finds hordes and hordes of evil forces which are impeding our progress, and he gets busy with those.

Sri Aurobindo says, somewhere in the same book :

*In this slow ascension he must follow her pace  
Even from her faint and dim subconscious start:  
So only can earth’s last salvation come.* (p.135)

Why is it that nobody has yet been successful in solving the problem of evil in this world? Because nobody has discovered where evil comes from. So far spirituality has believed that it doesn’t matter where the evil comes from, because ultimately our interest is to abandon this ship as lost and go to heaven or Nirvana or the Kingdom of God or whatever. Sri Aurobindo’s enterprise is totally different. There is no other world to which we want to go. We want to colonise this world. He has said “The heavens we have always possessed. It is earth that we have yet to possess and the aim of my yoga is to make heaven and earth equal and one” This is what he wants to cultivate, he wants to bring this world to perfection, and that explains his vast yoga, that explains his 40 years of incessant labour in that place called Pondicherry. This the world has not understood. And that is why *Savitri* is the best autobiographical window on Sri Aurobindo’s life.

All that needed to be said as a kind of a background. Now I should conclude by giving you a brief summary of Canto One of Book Two. As I have said, at the end of Book One we see Aswapati standing in a region at the top of the Overmental world but he has not yet seen the Supramental world – that he sees later in Book Three, Canto Three. From there he looks out and he suddenly begins to see God in the very act of creation. He sees the world being created, he witnesses all this, and that forms the first section of Canto One of Book Two. In the second section, comes the story of how the world was born and the descending stair and ascending stair I have already spoken about. Then there is something else Sri Aurobindo mentions, which is the macrocosm, all these worlds of consciousness. Scientists seem puzzled by the fact that man is just a speck of dust in this vast universe which has several hundreds and thousands of suns; they have planets, and we are on one small planet called Earth; we are two-legged animals on this earth. How do we ever hope to understand the world which is so vast? What is it that gives us the right to say ‘I’m going to explore the world?’ Here Sri Aurobindo says that we can understand the world because a copy of the macrocosm is implanted in the microcosm. That is, our individual consciousness also has a structure which reflects the structure of the universe, its gradations, its stair of worlds. Since we have this microcosm which has similar vibrations we are able to understand the world. The world is not just the earth. There is something called Consciousness surrounding us; below us, above us and on all sides; we are constantly prompted by it. All this he describes in this canto.

On our ninth day we concluded Book Two, Canto One. There was one more day left. On that day what did we do? Of course we enjoyed ourselves; we had devotional music and so on, but there were a couple of sessions left. After the description of The World-Stair in Canto One, Canto Two of Book Two deals with the subtle physical world. The subtle physical world is probably the second world. Before that comes the gross physical material world. Sri Aurobindo describes it in many places.

It is very interesting that, as Sri Aurobindo was growing up in England and then later here, it was a time when Materialism was at its peak. He had seen Materialism in its strongest form. He had met some of the advocates of Materialism, he had read some of the books,

and he takes up this whole gospel of Materialism, the gospel of the gross physical world as the sole reality, the idea that the physical world is the only world (which is what many people believe) and he describes various aspects of this whole scheme. It is this that is mainly discussed in the dialogue, the conversation, between Savitri and the god of Death in Book Ten Canto Four. So we reviewed the gospel of Materialism as treated in *Savitri* and its various facets. Materialists believe that all idealism is stupidity, all idealism is moonshine, that love is nothing but a burning of the nerves, etc. We saw all these things and how this whole program was built and how the whole thing collapses. As I said, there is nothing wrong with materialism. I wish India would go through a strong phase of materialism. The only problem with materialism is that it trivialises life; it gives you nothing to live for. This what Savitri says, and I talked about it at some length on the last day of our camp.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for keeping me company not only in Pondicherry but also here in Auroville. We recently celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the descent of the Supermind. Remember what the Mother said: Most of us have not yet seen it, have not yet felt it, but she said, 'Behave as if it is true, a fact. It has happened and since it has happened our enterprises will succeed.'

Savitri Bhavan will blossom into a wonderful centre and all the dreams and aspirations of the team here will come true because the supermind is already here on Earth and supermind will bring all the resources needed, all the people needed. The job of people like me is to be Town Criers calling out, "There is Savitri Bhavan! Please go there and take whatever it has to offer!"

Thank you very much.

# *Narad comes chanting through the large and lustrous air*

*Talk by R.Y.Deshpande*

*13 April 2006*

*Professor Deshpande, who teaches Physics to students of the Higher Course of the Ashram School, has given us a series of talks focussing on the first section of Canto One of Book Six of Savitri. A transcript of the first talk, which took place in January 2006, appeared in issue 25 of Invocation. Here is an edited version of the second, held in April. The topics of these talks, and many others relating to this section, have been explored in wide-ranging detail and depth in Professor Deshpande's recently published study: Narad's Arrival at Madra, ISBN: 81-7058-839-1, published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Puducherry, 471 pages, Price: Rs 150.*

Today we shall try to examine a specific passage from *Savitri*. It belongs to the Book of Fate, in fact the opening passage of 32 lines which comes on page 415. It is a short passage, just four sentences, but loaded with far-reaching implications. It is swift in its movement, it is lyric-mystical, it is charged with the incandescent occult, it has deep metaphysical connotations, carries timeless spiritual truths in it.

The passage begins with a description of Narad stepping out one fateful morning from his home in Paradise. He is attracted by the golden summer earth and is now on his way towards Aswapati's palace. The passage runs as follows:

*In silent bounds bordering the mortal's plane  
Crossing a wide expanse of brilliant peace  
Narad the heavenly sage from Paradise  
Came chanting through the large and lustrous air.*

*Attracted by the golden summer-earth  
That lay beneath him like a glowing bowl  
Tilted upon a table of the Gods,*

*Turning as if moved round by an unseen hand  
To catch the warmth and blaze of a small sun,  
He passed from the immortal's happy paths  
To a world of toil and quest and grief and hope,  
To these rooms of a see-saw game of death and life.*

*Across an intangible border of soul-space  
He passed from Mind into material things  
Amid the inventions of the inconscient Self  
And the workings of a blind somnambulist Force.*

*Below him circling burned the myriad suns:  
He bore the ripples of the etheric sea;  
A primal Air brought the first joy of touch;  
A secret Spirit drew its mighty breath,  
Contracting and expanding this huge world  
In its formidable circuit through the Void;  
The secret might of the creative fire  
Displayed its triple power to build and form,  
Its infinitesimal wave-sparks' weaving dance,  
Its nebulous units grounding shape and mass,  
Magic foundation and pattern of a world,  
Its radiance bursting into the light of stars;  
He felt a sap of life, a sap of death;  
Into solid Matter's dense communion  
Plunging and its obscure oneness of forms  
He shared with a dumb Spirit identity.*

We should read the passage again and again. It is so marvellous! When we read it aloud, a kind of powerful atmosphere forms around us, an atmosphere full of peace and brightness. So many things have been said in this brief description. Its rapid dynamism is compelling, its rush from one thing to the next has an epic breath, also an epic majesty.

But what could have prompted Narad to visit Aswapati? Why does he undertake the task of identifying himself with the dumb Spirit, which is also a difficult task? He is a celebrated sage and his home is

high up in Vaikuntha, the Abode of Vishnu, Vishnu the Puranic Sustainer of the Worlds. Does it mean that his visit is in some context of Vishnu's work? What could that context be? What is the work that Vishnu is busy with? His one single concern is the progressive spiritual evolution of the earth. He comes here from time to time, *yuge-yuge*, comes as an Avatar for this purpose. So Narad's visit too must be connected with that evolutionary advance.

Narad comes chanting through the large and lustrous air, chanting the Name of Vishnu, chanting always *narayana-narayana, narayana-narayana, narayana-narayana*. In that Name he is also carrying a mission. He has to deliver the Word of Fate; he has to set free the spring of cosmic Fate, set destiny free. The poet says that he has to strengthen the will of Savitri, turn it to steel. It is a big job. It is a responsible job, a tough job also. But Narad does it in the name of Vishnu. It is in that greatness that he comes here.

During his session with the royal parents he also does a few more things. He justifies the ways of God to man; he explains the riddle of this world and tells how the divine Purusha, the incarnate Being makes a sacrifice for this mortal's lot. He prophesies the dangerous brink on which one day the embodied Force will stand, to win all or lose all for man. She will stand there :

*Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,  
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole  
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.* (p.461)

Savitri has discovered love. She met Satyavan in the Shalwa forest and they have decided to be together. They have found their ancient identity and there is no power that can cut the relationship apart. But Narad also sees the "*panther doom*" hiding in that shadowy place and thinks it appropriate to make Savitri aware of it. She has discovered love; she must know death also. He tells in unequivocal terms that

*Twelve swift-winged months are given to him and her;  
This day returning Satyavan must die.* (p. 431)

Or, as it is told in the Mahabharata story, *savatasarema*

*kshinayurle hanyasm karisyati*, 'his life weakened here Satyavan will die at the end of the year'. And there is nothing which can stop it. "Satyavan must die"—tolls the bell throughout the epic. Narad has made it known. He has the ability to see all the three divisions of time, past-present-future, and he thinks it wise to inform the concerned about this death. He also tells emphatically that this death is the spirit's opportunity, that this is a welcome death. With it Savitri becomes aware of the future – and begins with it her Yoga.

Narad is attracted by the golden summer earth and he decides to make a visit there. But this attraction seems to be rather paradoxical. He is accustomed to move on the paths of the immortals, the celestial paths, and now he opts to go to a place where only "*toil and quest and grief and hope*" prevail. What kind of attraction does he feel for such a place, for a world of toil and grief? A world where is played the see-saw game of death and life? This earth is full of labour, packed with pain, this earth is a narrow house of sorrow and suffering.

The Buddha spoke of distress and desire, *duhkha* and *trishna*. Self-denying devotees have called it *duhkhalaya*, this life filled with agony, the cycles of birth and death repeating endlessly, without any prospect of escape. Shankara the illustrious Mayavadin's cry was heart-piercing: *idi samsaram bahudukham*. For Schopenhauer life was essentially tragic. Keats has a romantic-poignant phrase in his *Hyperion*, "*this nest of pain*". Indeed, this place seems to be so, hurtful and unhappy. And the archetypal cosmic is brought out more forcefully by Savitri's "*this haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain.*"

It is interesting to compare the last two characterisations, *en passant*, in terms of their literary aspects: If "*this nest of pain*" is intensely lyrical, "*this haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain*" is majestically wide-epical. If one belongs to the emotive-individual, the other has a vast cosmic sweep, full of anguish yet filled with soothing peace. In the line "*this haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain*" each word is in its perfect place and nothing can be interchanged; nor can we have, for instance, "*this den of Ignorance*" instead of "*this haunt of Ignorance*". There is in it also an assuring optimism that makes the description as if less frightening to us. This mortal world is full of labour and pain and travail, and yet there is the attraction for it! Narad

feels a kind of compulsion to visit it. What could be that compulsion? What is that attraction?

*Attracted by the golden summer-earth...  
He passed from the immortal's happy paths  
To a world of toil and quest and grief and hope,  
To these rooms of a see-saw game of death and life.*

“Narad stands for the expression of Divine Love and Knowledge”, Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter. If Narad brings with him the knowledge of the death that Savitri has to meet, he also comes with love to meet her, to pay his respects to her. She is his main “attraction” here. Indeed, it is Savitri’s presence here on earth which makes the earth attractive. The presence of the supreme Shakti in the physical is something most unusual, exceptional, something which even the gods and goddesses cherish to behold. We know what the Mother has said about her appearance at the Balcony or at the time of giving blessings in the Meditation Hall. She has also spoken a number of times of Durga visiting her during Puja days, and this went on for several years. She said that gods and goddesses used to crowd the sky to have her Darshan. It was a privilege for them to see her. Surely these gods and goddesses must have crowded the Shalwa forest also when Savitri and Satyavan met there for the first time. Presently, Savitri is most beautiful in the joy of her discovery of love. I think it must have been a privilege, a fulfilment for Narad to have Savitri’s Darshan at this moment of time. No surprise that he just hastens to earth! He undertakes the difficult task of assuming a physical form to meet her.

Narad leaves his home in Paradise, crosses the expanse of brilliant peace, passes through the large and lustrous air, past the immortal’s happy paths until he is here, in the world of grief and toil and quest and hope. The soul-space is left behind and from the world of Mind he has stepped into material things. He sees here around the work of the inconscient Self and the somnambulist Force, Achetana Purusha and Andhah Prakriti. Finally there is his communion with the dumb Spirit.

While Narad is descending down these lower and lower regions he is also chanting the Name, *narayana-narayana*. Etymologically,

*narayana* means *nara-ayana*, where man moves, towards where he goes, that part, destination, place, object of attainment. That is what he has to be. So Narad's visit to Aswapati is in that context of *narayana-hood*.

But does Narad leave his home with the definite intention of visiting Aswapati, holding a kind of responsibility, a certain charge? Or is it that while he is moving around, chanting the name of Vishnu, he sees the golden summer earth and decides on the visit? Attraction or the set mission? Drift or direction? But both in the deeper sense are, I suppose, inseparable, they are one and the same, the mission and the attraction.

*Attracted by the golden summer-earth...  
He passed from the immortal's happy paths  
To a world of toil and quest and grief and hope,  
To these rooms of a see-saw game of death and life.*

The deeper sense is connected with the see-saw game of death and life. I think this is very significant. It is more significant than the trouble and turmoil in which we live here, in these narrow rooms. But is it "*see-saw game of death and life*" or is it "*see-game of death with life*"? There is a considerable difference between the two. The latest edition of *Savitri* has "*see-saw game of death with life*". We know that the Book of Fate was started in 1945 and completed in about a year. It was done practically by dictation. Therefore the "*see-saw game of death and/with life*" line belongs to the dictated passage. It seems that in the dictated manuscript the phrase is "*game of death with life*". When this was copied, "with" was represented by a shorthand symbol. The typescript made from this has "*game of death and life*". Did the typist change or mistake the shorthand symbol for "with" to "and"? This could be. But it could also be that the matter was referred to the author, a possibility which cannot be off-hand dismissed. In any case, the benefit of the doubt must be given to him, as this was not altogether unusual.

But let us see the implications of "and" which seems to be more appropriate. After all, Death sprang up as a dark answer from the

Inconscience when Life entered the material world. We have a number of references to this effect in *Savitri*. Thus, Savitri tells the dark ironic critic of God's work that she now knows that

*The great stars burn with my unceasing fire  
And life and death are both its fuel made.  
Life only was my blind attempt to love:  
Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory....* (p. 638)

The Mother in her talk dated 8 September 1965 explains the passage as follows.

*Here Savitri maintains that LIFE ONLY was her attempt to love. It was a blind attempt, and so limited to life only. But it was IN DEATH that she won the victory. Until so far she lacked Death and she has to conquer Death in order to conquer Life. That's the idea.*

Would not these nuances be lost in the phrase “game of death with life”? Death must be vanquished; there must be no more Death. In the sequel, it is the principle of Love that is transformed into flame and finally into light. It is the flame that is transformed into light. It is that which materialises and not the other way around. Which also means that such a transformation is the climbing of Death to Immortality, as we have in this passage :

*He sang the Inconscient and its secret self,  
Its power omnipotent knowing not what it does,  
All shaping without will or thought or sense,  
Its blind unerring occult mystery,  
And darkness yearning towards the eternal Light,  
And Love that broods within the dim abyss  
And waits the answer of the human heart,  
And death that climbs to immortality.* (p. 416)

But let us move on; let us trace the journey that was undertaken by Narad. It is a long journey. It starts with the spiritual, Narad as Man divine; finally it culminates in the material, Narad walking into the

palace hall assuming a human body. He prepares himself to take the physical form in which he shall enter the palace hall. He has crossed the soul-space, and from Mind moved into material things. And then

*Below him circling burned the myriad suns.*

The “myriad suns” burning below him, these are the suns which govern the process of the spiritual becoming the material. Narad knows the alchemy and prepares himself to undergo the transmutation. He does it by the Sankhya process of materialisation. The Mother says it is a difficult process; it is a painful process also. Narad is willing to undergo the whole sequence. He has an attraction and he has a mission to carry out. And he is willing to pay the price required for that. He is a “slave of God” and so, it is his God’s work he is doing. He accepts the difficulty. He accepts the travail. So Narad is here in the company of Aswapati. He is here just before the return of Savitri from the Shalwa woods. He has timed his visit well.

But what are these myriad suns? If the stars twinkle in the night, our sun blazes in the day. For the astronomer there is only one sun in the sky; the rest are all stars, millions and millions of them, of all sizes and all luminosities. Narad does not see them. His journey is in the day, and he is attracted by the golden summer earth. So what are these myriad suns?

In *Savitri* the word “suns” as plural appears 45 times, in the revised edition 46 times. There are “dazzling suns”, “magnificent suns”, “mystic suns”, “living suns”, “cosmic suns”, “deathless suns”, “purple suns”, and so on and so forth. There are also “unreal suns”, “misleading suns”, “material suns”. We have also the ‘thousand suns’ of the Gita, *divi suryasahastrasya bhavedyugapadutthita*, (X:12). This was the verse quoted by Oppenheimer, the leader of the Atomic Project during the Second World War. He was witnessing the first-ever atomic explosion on 16 July 1945 at Alamogordo. With that success Oppenheimer became the American Prometheus.

Let us have a brief look at the occurrence of “suns” in *Savitri*. This is interesting in many ways and possibly it can prove to be profitable as well. The yogi-poet is using the plural “suns” very consciously.

There is undoubtedly a purpose in it. We have right in the beginning the following passage:

*As in a dark beginning of all things,  
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown...  
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force  
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns  
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.* (p.1)

But the most beautiful is this:

*She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.  
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,  
A power of silence in the depths of God;  
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,  
The magnet of our difficult ascent,  
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,  
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,  
The joy that beckons from the impossible,  
The Might of all that never yet came down.* (p.314)

“*The Sun from which we kindle all our suns.*”

And then, “*There are vasts of vision and eternal suns.*” (p. 659) It is interesting to note that we have “*vasts of vision*” and “*unrealised Vasts*”, – “vasts” as plural. In *Savitri* it appears 35 times. So do “*infinities*” 6 times, and “*eternities*” 9 times. We have 3 “*calms*”, such as :

*A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms  
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.* (p. 346)

What are these calms? Possibly, there is the calm of knowledge, and the calm of joy, and of beauty, love, passion, the calm of strength, wisdom, skill, perfection, harmony. In the *Future Poetry* there are five Suns of Poetry—the Sun of Truth, the Sun of Beauty, the Sun of Delight, the Sun of Life, and the Sun of the Spirit. There are also five Roses: Rose of Bliss, Rose of Light, Rose of Power, Rose of Life,

and Rose of Love. The ancient Vedic tradition speaks of twelve Adityas, twelve Suns; their names are: Dhata, Mitra, Aryama, Rudra, Varuna, Surya, Bhaga, Vivasvana, Pusha, Savita, Tvashta, and Vishnu. In the Gita Sri Krishna says that among the Adityas he is Vishnu. Each one of these Suns or Adityas represents a certain quality and cosmic function. Thus Love and Light are represented by the Sun as Mitra. In the form of Bhaga he is the Lord of Enjoyment, as the Increaser, he becomes Pushan.

Emperor Akbar got compiled a list of one thousand names of the sun for prayers four times in a day, morning, noon, evening, and midnight. There is also the complete yogic-physical exercise, Surya-Namaskar. A set of Surya-Namaskars has twelve names of the Sun whose powers are invoked while doing it; the set can be repeated a number of times depending upon one's capacity.

Well, this all-pervasiveness of the sun is understandable. However, let us quickly see some of the spiritual aspects of the Sun. In the Isha Upanishad there is the invocation to the Sun for the revelatory knowledge by whose action we can arrive at the highest truth. In the *Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo explains that the Sun, Surya, is the seer, the revealer. His Truth takes into its illumination all forms of things. But the significant description is about the eighth son of Aditi, Martanda. He should appeal to us more than the other ones. We are told that by seven she moves to the gods, but the eighth son is Martanda, of the mortal creation; with the seven she moves to the gods, to the supreme life, the original age of the gods. But Martanda is brought back out of the Inconscient into which he had been cast; he presides over mortal birth and death. Arisen this sun mounts to the supramental Truth. This is the Vedic way of narrating the Savitri-story, the household story as we have in the Mahabharata. The story has a splendid charge, the charge of the mortal world becoming divine. In it Satyavan is subject to death. In the Mother's language, he is the divine Love who plunged into the depth of the Inconscience when the horror of separation from the supreme Source was perceived. Satyavan—he is the permanent Avatar, says she.

But what about the seven sons with whom Aditi moves to the supreme life? Are they not the seven Suns of the Supermind? In the Vedic experience Supermind as the creator in its manifold aspects in the unity of the Transcendent is what the Sun represents. These

seven suns belong to that description. Sri Aurobindo lists them with further details about their actions in the yogic centres of the subtle body. These are:

The Sun of Supramental Truth,—Knowledge-Power originating the supramental creation. Descent into the Sahasradala.

The Sun of Supramental Light and Will-Power, transmitting the Knowledge-Power as dynamic vision and command to create, found and organise the supramental action. Descent into the Ajna Chakra, the centre between the eyes.

The Sun of Supramental Word, embodying the Knowledge-Power, empowered to express and arrange the supramental creation. Descent into the Throat Centre.

The Sun of Supramental Love, Beauty, and Bliss, releasing the Soul of the Knowledge-Power to vivify and harmonise the supramental creation. Descent into the Heart-Lotus.

The Sun of Supramental Force dynamised as a power and source of life to support the supramental creation. Descent into the Navel Centre.

The Sun of Life-Radiances (Power-Rays) distributing the dynamis and pouring it into concrete formations. Descent into the Penultimate Centre.

The Sun of Supramental Substance-Energy and Form-Energy empowered to embody the supramental life and stabilise the creation. Descent into the Muladhara.

Could these be the suns seen by Narad while passing from Mind into material things? No, his suns burned below the soul-space. The Supramental Suns are the Transcendental Suns. Narad has crossed the soul-space and he sees below him circling these myriad suns. Possibly these myriad suns could be the reflections of the Supramental Suns, not they themselves directly burning here in the Sankhya world of material creation.

Narad is about to enter into the etheric sea, and just there burn these myriad suns. They appear to govern the transition from the spiritual into the material. This is a difficult process; a painful process also,

the spiritual becoming the material. In fact, at the moment there is no mechanism for the Supramental Suns to enter directly into the earthly physical. There is no mechanism by which the superman divine can become man on earth. It looks paradoxical that the spiritual can become the physical, but not the supramental. One day it will happen; but it cannot happen at the present juncture. Manomaya Purusha is not ready to receive or give rise to Vijnanamaya Purusha. The Rishi's cry is for the supramental Sun to bring to us the great Light, to bring in that strength the vast mass of bliss; he prays for vision upon vision of the beatitude to break upon us. But it cannot yet take itself a physical form. That was the work the Mother was busy with.

Let us go back to the passage describing Narad undergoing the spiritual-material Sankhya transition. Let us read it again:

*Below him circling burned the myriad suns:  
He bore the ripples of the etheric sea;  
A primal Air brought the first joy of touch;  
A secret Spirit drew its mighty breath,  
Contracting and expanding this huge world  
In its formidable circuit through the Void;  
The secret might of the creative fire  
Displayed its triple power to build and form,  
Its infinitesimal wave-sparks' weaving dance,  
Its nebulous units grounding shape and mass,  
Magic foundation and pattern of a world,  
Its radiance bursting into the light of stars;  
He felt a sap of life, a sap of death;  
Into solid Matter's dense communion  
Plunging and its obscure oneness of forms  
He shared with a dumb Spirit identity.*

We have here the five classical elements appearing in succession: Ether – Air – Fire – Water – Earth, or Akash – Vayu – Agni – Apas – Prithvi. These are the well-known five irreducibles of Matter, *panchamahabhutas*, the Great Five Elements, fundamental elements but not to be confused with the elements of modern science. There are plentiful Vedic descriptions associated with these five elements.

The five qualities attributed to them are: Sound – Contact – Form – Fluidity – Solidity, Shabda – Sparsha – Roopa – Rasa – Gandha.

We might combine this description with the Puranic description. In the Puranas Vishnu is depicted in different forms, each corresponding to one of the five elements. The names he assumes are, respectively: Vasudeva – Sankarshana – Pradyumna – Aniruddha – Narayana. The associated objects are: Conch – Discus – Mace – Lotus – Globe, Shankha – Chakra – Gada – Padma – Prithvi. The first four are in the four hands of Vishnu and the fifth, Prithvi or Earth or Globe, is between his two feet.

With the five elements there is also the Greek association. These five elements are linked with the five Platonic solids as follows: Ether = Dodecahedron; Air = Octahedron; fire = Tetrahedron; Water = Icosahedron; Earth = Cube.

Perhaps you are aware that there has been an extensive study made with respect to these five elements in different occult-spiritual, religious, as well as in secular systems. But let us take just one example, from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book III. It belongs to the story of creation narrated by the deep theological mind. In it Uriel narrates to Satan how, at the command of the Creator the great World-Order arose out of Confusion:

*I saw when at his Word the formless Mass,  
This world's material mould, came to a heap:  
Confusion heard his voice, and wilde uproar  
Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd;  
Till at his second bidding darkness fled,  
Light shon, and order from disorder sprung:  
Swift to their several Quarters hasted then  
The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Aire, Fire,  
And this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n  
Flew upward, spirited with various forms,  
That rowld orbicular, and turned to Starrs  
Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;  
Each had his place appointed, each his course,  
The rest in circuit walles this Universe.*

The Angel Uriel is the Regent of the Sun, the Light of God. He is one

of the seven Spirits that stand within the sight of God. But he is beguiled to speak jubilantly about the works of the Creator in order to glorify him. Obviously, Uriel is an overmental being.

Well, this Sankhya description of Matter-formation is all fine, but what about the method by which the material creation can come into existence? Narad knows it and he adopts it for his purpose. Materialisation of the spiritual is yet a mystery to us. However, we can get some idea of it from what Sri Aurobindo has explained at a number of places. He has given details in the *Essays on the Gita*, *The Life Divine*, in his writings on the *Upanishads*, in the *Letters*, and in fact in *Savitri* on several occasions. But let us read what he has written in his commentary on the Kena Upanishad. He writes:

*... vibration of conscious being is presented to itself by various forms of sense which answer to the successive operations of movement in its assumption of form. For first we have intensity of vibration creating regular rhythm which is the basis or constituent of all creative formation; secondly, contact or intermixture of the movements of conscious being which constitute the rhythm; thirdly, definition of the grouping of movements which are in contact, their shape; fourthly, the constant welling up of the essential force to support in its continuity the movement that has been thus defined; fifthly, the actual enforcement and compression of the force in its own movement which maintains the form that has been assumed. In Matter these five constituent operations are said by the Sankhyas to represent themselves as five elemental conditions of substance, the etheric, atmospheric, igneous, liquid and solid; and the rhythm of vibration is seen by them as Shabda, sound, the basis of hearing, the intermixture as contact, the basis of touch, the definition as shape, the basis of sight, the upflow of force as Rasa, sap, the basis of taste, and the discharge of the atomic compression as Gandha, odour, the basis of smell. It is true that this is only predicated of pure or subtle Matter;*

*the physical matter of our world being a mixed operation of force, these five elemental states are not found there separately except in a very modified form.*

*(The Upanishads 1981 ed. p.152-53)*

In an interview with Pavitra, dated 8 May 1926, Sri Aurobindo explains as follows:

In the West the higher minds are not turned towards spiritual truth but towards material science. The scope of science is very narrow: it touches only the most exterior part of the physical plane. And even there, what does science really know? It studies the functioning of the laws, edificates theories ever renewed and each time held up as the last word of truth. We had recently the atomic theory, now comes the electronic.

According to the experience of ancient Yogis, sensible matter was made out of five elements, *bhutani*: *Prithvi*, *Apas*, *Agni* (*Tejas*), *Vayu*, *Akasha*.

Agni is threefold:

1. ordinary fire, *Jala Agni*,
2. electric fire, *Vaidyuta Agni*,
3. solar fire, *Saura Agni*.

Science has only entered upon the first and the second of these fires. The fact that the atom is like the solar system could it lead it to the knowledge of the third. Beyond Agni is Vayu of which science knows nothing. It is the support of all contact and exchange, the cause of gravitation and of the fields (magnetic and electric). By it, the action of Agni, the formal element, builder of forms, is made possible. And beyond Vayu is the ether, Akasha. But these constitute only the grossest part of the physical plane. Immediately behind is the physical-vital, the element of life buried in matter. J. C. Bose is contacting this element in his experiments. Beyond is the mind of matter. This mind has a far different form than the human mind, still it is a manifestation of the same principle of organisation. And deep below there are two more hidden layers.... That is the occult knowledge

concerning the physical plane only. Science is far behind this knowledge.... Apas is the element that makes life possible—the desire which is the source of life—Agni is the element which renders form possible and Prithvi is the compacting element which concretises.

Narad takes a physical form by exercising his spiritual will. We have to understand that there can be different agents entering into the play. There can be mental will, vital, or even physical will. There can be the will of the luminous knowledge-being also, or that of the spiritual self; it could be a free soul's will. But in all the situations the five great elements, *panchamahabhutas*, are the basic ingredients of the bodily existence. Each has its characteristic form; each has its own functional role, its own *modus operandi*. The Avatar uses his supreme Will and comes here by projecting his higher Prakriti into the lower. A free being can prepare a form or body using his spiritual will. Narad is one such. But in all the cases there is replication of the grand process by which the Spirit becomes Matter, attains communion with it. Narad's godly form, *devarupam*, has now become the form of man, *manuyarupam*. This is a form which can be easily recognised by us, and it is in it that he makes his entry into the palace of Aswapati.

I think, we may quickly look here into another aspect, the aspect related to the Mother's work. She made an important discovery which she disclosed on 1 July 1970. She said that it is the psychic being which will materialise itself and become the supramental being. It is the psychic being which survives death. So, if it materialises itself, it means the abolition of death. The Mother's new body was aimed at that. Perhaps that is the process. Now it is the New Body which will do whatever is to be done. It is not an inert lump of matter; it is charged with luminous dynamism of the Divine. It is going to exert pressure upon the material in the evolutionary process.

There are also other aspects, of the Chakras or the centres of occult energy in the subtle-physical body. Man is presently endowed with seven Chakras only. But two Chakras below the feet and three above his head have yet to get formed and become operative. This is what the Mother was told by Théon. It was her experience too. For these Chakras to come into operation it is necessary to do another

type of occult-spiritual yoga-tapasya. It is only then that the physical can respond to the working of the higher consciousness-force. This indeed became the main thrust of the Mother's yoga-tapasya during the last fifteen years or so of her work.

Narad has no idea about these aspects, though he is aware of the "dangerous brink", of the moment when all will be won or all will be lost for man. Narad is a spiritual being stationed high above; he is an overmental being and his concern, his operation is in that relationship only, in its possibilities. In fact, had he been a supramental being he would not have been able to come here and visit Aswapati.

By the end of Book Six the heavenly sage from Paradise has accomplished his task: he has delivered the Word of Fate; he has justified the ways of God to Man, proclaimed the bright prospects of ecstasy and transfiguration. He had timed his visit well, reaching Aswapati's palace in Madra just one hour before the return of the princess. Narad has done his job ably and now he is ready to depart, to go back to his home in Paradise.

*He spoke and ceased and left the earthly scene.  
Away from the strife and suffering on our globe,  
He turned towards his far-off blissful home.  
A brilliant arrow pointing straight to heaven,  
The luminous body of the eternal seer  
Assailed the purple glory of the noon  
And disappeared like a receding star...*

He has returned with the epic speed of sight and sound. But the stamp of his mission is permanent in the spiritual chronicles of the earth. He has gone, but still

*A high and far imperishable voice  
Chanted the anthem of eternal love.* (p. 462)

Having completed his mission, which is a threefold assignment, the sage goes back to his happy and agreeable country, *istam desam*, as the Mahabharata would say. He must have resorted to the same

technique by which he had prepared his physical form. The dissolution of that form must be by the reverse Sankhya process of materialisation.

On his way to the earth Narad sang five songs. During the return journey it is the anthem of eternal love that he is singing. While coming down he saw the cosmic Being, Virat Purusha, at his cosmic task. He sang of Ignorance and Fate; he sang the name of Vishnu and the birth; he sang of darkness yearning towards the eternal Light, and death that climbs to immortality; he sang of the Truth that cries from Night's blind deeps, and consciousness waking in beasts and men;

*He sang of the glory and marvel still to be born,  
Of Godhead throwing off at last its veil,  
Of bodies made divine and life made bliss,  
Immortal sweetness clasping immortal might,  
Heart sensing heart, thought looking straight at thought,  
And the delight when every barrier falls,  
And the transfiguration and the ecstasy.*

*And as he sang the demons wept with joy  
Foreseeing the end of their long dreadful task  
And the defeat for which they hoped in vain,  
And glad release from their self-chosen doom  
And return into the One from whom they came. (p.416-17)*

The four great Asuras who had gone very far away from the Supreme, who had separated themselves from the Supreme, are now happy to return to the Supreme. Narad is singing the arrival of such a moment. Such is the power of Narad's song: that the demons should weep with joy. When did he compose that song? Or who composed that song for him? We do not know. How long it must have taken for Narad to sing the five songs? Perhaps four hours. Could that be the time Narad had taken to travel from his home in Paradise to Aswapati's palace? Could that be the time for the spiritual to become the physical? But let me leave these questions for you to answer. At the time of his departure he simply says: Let noble and auspicious things be to all! *sarvesam bhadram astu vah!* Let us simply say, Salutations to Narad! Salutations to Narad!

# *Vedic symbols in Savitri*

## *Sri Aurobindo on Symbols*

A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation.... But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality. There are, however, different kinds of symbols:

1. Conventional symbols, such as the Vedic Rishis formed with objects taken from their surroundings. The cow stood for light because the same word 'go' meant both ray and cow, and because the cow was their most precious possession which maintained their life and was constantly in danger of being robbed and concealed. But once created, such a symbol becomes alive. The Rishis vitalised it and it became a part of their realisation. It appeared in their visions as an image of spiritual light. The horse also was one of their favourite symbols, and a more easily adaptable one, since its force and energy were quite evident.

2. What we might call Life-symbols, such as are not artificially chosen or mentally interpreted in a conscious deliberate way, but derive naturally from our day-to-day life and grow out of the surroundings which condition our normal path of living. To the ancients the mountain was a symbol of the path of yoga, level above level, peak upon peak. A journey, involving the crossing of rivers and the facing of lurking enemies, both animal and human, conveyed a similar idea. Nowadays I dare say we would liken yoga to a motor-ride or a railway-trip.

3. Symbols that have an inherent appositeness and power of their own. Akasha or etheric space is a symbol of the infinite all-pervading eternal Brahman. In any nationality it would convey the same meaning. Also, the Sun stands universally for the supramental Light, the divine Gnosis.

4. Mental symbols, instances of which are numbers or alphabets. Once they are accepted, they too become active and may be useful.

Thus geometrical figures have been variously interpreted. In my experience the square symbolises the supermind. I cannot say how it came to do so. Somebody or some force may have built it before it came to my mind. Of the triangle, too, there are different explanations. In one position it can symbolise the three lower planes, in another the symbol is of the three higher ones: so both can be combined together in a single sign. The ancients liked to indulge in similar speculations concerning numbers, but their systems were mostly mental. It is no doubt true that supramental realities exist which we translate into mental formulas such as Karma, Psychic evolution, etc. But they are, so to speak, infinite realities which cannot be limited by these symbolic forms, though they may be somewhat expressed by them; they might be expressed as well by other symbols, and the same symbol may also express many different ideas.

*(Letters on Yoga SABCL 22-23-24, p. 954-55)*

A symbol expresses ... not the play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images – the more these images have a living truth of their own which corresponds intimately to the living truth they symbolise, suggests the very vibration of the experience itself, the greater becomes the art of the symbolic expression. When the symbol is a representative sign or figure and nothing more, then the symbolic approaches nearer to an intellectual method, though even then it is not the same thing as allegory. In mystic poetry the symbol ought to be as much as possible the natural body of the inner truth or vision, itself an intimate part of the experience.

*(SABCL 9:361)*

... here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality, and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind the “day” of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out.

*(Letters on Savitri)*

# *Night And Dawn (Part I)*

## *Comparative Studies of Vedic Imagery in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.*

*By Vladimir Iatsenko*

*Vladimir is a researcher working at Savitri Bhavan. These notes are based on a chapter from a study which we hope to publish in book form soon.*

There are many myths in the Veda which describe the Beginning of Creation from different angles or stages. Some of them start with the description of the Supreme Person, Atman, Self,<sup>1</sup> others of the Impersonal Spirit, Brahman,<sup>2</sup> some start from Nothingness or Darkness,<sup>3</sup> which they call “night”, *ratri*, or *apas*, *apraketam salilam*<sup>4</sup> “dark waters”, or sometimes as *mrityu*<sup>5</sup>, “death”, etc. They all refer to different stages of Creation, where Darkness or Nothingness was depicted as our beginning, but not as our Origin. We can easily reconcile these myths, knowing that Darkness was the result of the Fall of the Supreme Light, (Involution).<sup>6</sup>

**The Origin of Night.** The Night was born from the Truth, as the outcome of the Supreme Consciousness-Power, Tapas, and from the Night then all the Manifestation came into being:

*ṛtaṁ ca satyaṁ cābhīddhāt tapaso 'dhyajāyata  
tato rātry ajāyata tataḥ samudro arṇavaḥ*

*“From Tapas the Law and the Truth were born,  
From there **the Night was born**, and from there the  
Waters of Ocean!”<sup>7</sup>*

*samudrād arṇavād adhi samvatsaro ajāyata  
ahorātrāṇi vidadhad viśvasya miṣato vaśī  
sūryā-candramasau dhātā yathāpūrvam akalpayat  
divam ca pṛthivīm cāntarikṣam atho svaḥ*

*“From the Waters of the Ocean the Year was born – the  
Lord of all cyclic changes. The Creator established Days*

*and Nights, fashioned accordingly the Sun and the Moon, Heaven and Earth and the Space in between, and then Svar.”* <sup>8</sup>

There are many passages in *Savitri* which have a similar view, that Night is a passage on the path rather than the ultimate origin of things:

*It was the hour before the gods awake.  
Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge.*<sup>9</sup>

The word “across” implies that “the path of the divine Event” was before and will continue after the Night has passed, it is neither original nor final. As later Sri Aurobindo will say in *Savitri*:

*Night is not our beginning nor our end; ...  
We came to her from a supernal Light,  
By Light we live and to the Light we go....*<sup>10</sup>

This *divine Event* symbolizes the realization of His Original Intent to become Another,<sup>11</sup> to become Many,<sup>12</sup> to experience Himself in Unity and not only in His Supreme Identity, in the words of the Mother. Therefore Night was seen as a device, so to say, to shape out the otherness of self, and once that can stay constantly in time and space as the Psychic Being, the Night will not be needed any longer and will be over-passed.

According to the Veda there are actually two Nights<sup>13</sup>: one is born from the Truth, and other is created later by Time (a Year) together with a Day. In both cases the Rishis use the same word – Ratri.

Sri Aurobindo explains this phenomenon in *The Secret of the Veda*: “Utter Night out of which the worlds arise is the symbol of the Inconscient. That is the inconscient Ocean, that the darkness concealed within darkness out of which the One is born by the greatness of His energy. But in the world of our darkened mortal view of things there reigns the lesser Night of the Ignorance which envelops heaven and earth and the mid-region, our mental and physical consciousness and our vital being.”<sup>14</sup>

“These later nights” – says Sri Aurobindo – “are other than those utter darknesses which are dreaded as the occasion of the enemy, the haunt of the demons of division who devour; these are rather the pleasant nights, the divine and blessed ones who equally labour for our growth.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Some special characteristics of Night.**

*Hiranyastupa Angirasa* while invoking different Gods for help and assistance calls also for Night. It is Night, who introduces a soul to the world, or rather, provides a place for a soul in this Manifestation:

*hvayāmyagniṁ prathamam svastaye  
hvayāmi mitrāvaruṇāvihāvase  
hvayāmi rātrīṁ jagato niveśanīm  
hvayāmi devam savitāram ūtaye*

“I call for Agni first, for well-being!

I call for Mitra-Varuna for protection here!

***I call for Night, (as) the entrance to the manifest world!***

I call for God Savitar, for (his) assistance.”<sup>16</sup>

The word *niveśanī* literally means “introducer to” or “founder of”, from the Causative of root *ni-viś*, to enter into, to descend, to settle down, to be founded. So the Rishi calls for Night to help him get his foundation in Manifestation, to get his place here in the world.

*The unconscious world is the spirit’s self-made room,...*<sup>17</sup>

The Night was also seen like a robe or a cloak, a garment for the One dwelling within:

*apa kṛṣṇām nirṇijam devy āvaḥ  
The Goddess (Dawn) has thrown away the black garments.*<sup>18</sup>

*The Wisdom was near, disguised by its own works,*

***Of which the darkened universe is the robe.***<sup>19</sup>

*One lucent corner windowing hidden things*

*Forced the world’s blind immensity to sight.*

***The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak***

*From the reclining body of a god.*<sup>20</sup>

In this light it is interesting to review the first stanza of the Isha Upanishad:

*īśā vāsyam idam sarvam yat kimca jagatyām jagat*  
“All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatever exists  
in the Universe”<sup>21</sup>

where *vāsyam*, future passive participle from root *vas*, can be translated as (1) that which should be or will be inhabited, (2) worn (as a garment) or (3) illumined by the Lord from within. From the last meaning “to shine” (*ucchati*, *uvāsa*, etc.) the name *uvas*, dawn, and *vasu*, a class of shining gods, is derived. So the first verse of Isha Upanishad implies that “all this” is to be “illumined”, “glorified” by the Lord from within.

Thus “the Night conceals” the Spirit “the wonderful fire”<sup>22</sup> within her robe, working out the Mystery of the Supreme taking on material form.

**A fire in the Night is its mighty action’s blaze.** <sup>23</sup>

*A secret splendour rose revealed to sight  
Where once the vast embodied Void had stood.*

**Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.** <sup>24</sup>

So the most secret function of Night is to nurse the Future Miracles of Light:

***Night**, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven  
In silver peace, **possessed her luminous reign.**  
She brooded through her stillness on a thought  
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,  
And **in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.***<sup>25</sup>

Sri Aurobindo comments on the nature of the Night in the Vedas :  
“Night holds hidden in her bosom her luminous sister...”<sup>26</sup>

*rātrī vi akhyad āyatī / purutrā devī akṣabhiḥ / **viśvā adhi**  
**śriyoḍdhita**  
ā urv aprā amartyā / nivato devy udvataḥ / **jyotiṣā**  
**bādhate tamaḥ***

“The Night, approaching, looked wide with (her many) eyes,  
**she put on all the glories!**”

“The Goddess Immortal has filled the wide space, the depths  
and the heights! **She oppresses Darkness with Light.**”<sup>27</sup>

The Night is opposing *tamas*, the ultimate Darkness, with the light of her sister Dawn concealed within her. She establishes it here in the Darkness:

*nir u svasāram askṛta / uṣasam devy āyati / aped u  
hāsate tamaḥ*

“The Goddess, approaching, hid her sister Dawn, and away indeed the darkness will go!”<sup>28</sup>

### **Night and Dawn.**

The Vedic symbol of two sisters Night and Dawn (*naktoshasau*) is therefore crucial for understanding the symbolism of spiritual evolution and of the two oceans of the superconscious and the inconscient, Heaven and Earth, the concept of Knowledge and Ignorance (*vidya* and *avidya*), and the Vedic myths of Creation, where Night was seen as a means of shaping out the Multitude by impregnating the light into the darkness. Night has therefore a divisive character; it divides, separates and shapes the oneness into manifoldness in terms of providing it with a specific separate context: body (residential place and instrumentation). Night and Dawn are two sisters doing the same work, having the same Intention:

*idam śreṣṭham jyotiṣām jyotir āgāc citraḥ praketo  
ajaniṣṭa vibhvā*

*yathā prasūtā savituḥ savāyam evā rātry uṣase yonim  
āraik*

*ruśadvatsā ruśatī śvety āgād āraik kṛṣṇā sadanāny asyāḥ  
samānabandhū amṛte anūcī dyāvā varṇam carata  
āmināne*

*samāno adhvā svasror anantas tam anyānyā carato  
devaśiṣṭe*

*na methete na tasthuḥ sumeke **naktoṣāsā samanāsā virūpe***

“The best of Lights has come, the beautiful vision is widely born!

As if compelled by Savitar the Night has vacated her Womb to the Dawn.

Shining, with the shining Calf, the White she has come, and the Black vacated for her (their) common places of dwelling.

(For they are) bound together, (both) Immortal, following each other! Day and Night are moving (always) changing (only) the colour!

Common is the Infinite Path of these two sisters, they move on orderly (as they were) taught by God (Savitar)!

They do not mix with each other, they do not stop their movement, being perfectly measured, **the Night and Dawn have the same Mind, differ (only) in form.**<sup>29</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes: “Night and Dawn are then of different forms but one mind and suckle alternately the same luminous Child. Then the revealing lustres of the brighter goddess are known in the pleasant nights even through the movements of the darkness. Therefore Kutsa hymns the two sisters, “Immortal, with a common lover, agreeing, they move over heaven and earth forming the hue of the Light; common is the path of the sisters, infinite; and they range it, the one and the other, taught by the gods; common they, though different their forms.” For one is the bright Mother of the herds, the other the dark Cow, the black Infinite, who can yet be made to yield us the shining milk of heaven.”<sup>30</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Secret of the Veda*: “Dawn daughter of Heaven and Night her sister are obverse and reverse sides of the same eternal Infinite.”<sup>31</sup>

*śyāvī ca yad aruṣī ca svasārau mahad devānām asuratvam ekam*  
“The Dark and Red are the two sisters, which is One Great Power of the Gods!”<sup>32</sup>

*pade iva nihite dasme antas tayor anyad guhyam āvir anyat sadhrīcīnā pathyā sā viṣūcī mahad devānām asuratvam ekam*  
“As if inside the wonderful secret place these two, whose one (side) is hidden and the other is visible! The Path leads to one aim in opposite directions! Great is the One Power of the Gods!”<sup>33</sup>

“For Dawn in the Veda is the goddess symbolic of new openings of divine illumination on man’s physical consciousness. She alternates with her sister Night; but that darkness itself is a mother of light and always Dawn comes to reveal what the black-browed Mother has prepared.”<sup>34</sup>

Dawn and Night are shaping out a whole variety of things in Manifestation:

*nānā cakrāte yamy ā vapūḍṣi tayor anyad rocate kṛṣṇam anyat*

“The Twins have made all varieties of forms; the one is shining and the other is black.”<sup>35</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes: “But this great work is to be done according to the ordered gradations of the Truth, in its fixed seasons, by the twelve months of the sacrifice, by the divine years of Surya Savitri. Therefore there is a constant rhythm and alternation of night and dawn, illuminations of the Light and periods of exile from it, openings up of our darkness and its settling upon us once more, till the celestial Birth is accomplished and again till it is fulfilled in its greatness, knowledge, love and power.”<sup>36</sup>

*padyā vaste pururūpā vapūḍṣy ūrdhvā tasthau tryaviḍ reriḥāṇā*

“The one, who is at the bottom, wears a wide variety of shapes, and the other, who stands high, leaning to a Protector of the three worlds!”<sup>37</sup>

“They are the two cows full of nourishing milk”, *sudughe payasvatī*<sup>38</sup>, *dhenū*, fostering, feeding, *dhāpayete*,<sup>39</sup> the Divine Child growing in time and space, “a luminous calf” *ruśadvatsā*...; *pūrvī śisūḍ na mātarā rihāne* “the two mothers full (of milk) kissing the baby.”<sup>40</sup>

***Where the God-child lies on the lap of Night and Dawn  
And the Everlasting puts on Time’s disguise.***<sup>41</sup>

*sa rocayaj januṣā rodasī ubhe sa mātror abhavat putra īdyaḥ*  
“It is he who made them shine, by his birth, – both the Rodasi (Heaven and Earth), he became the Son of the Two Mothers, most beloved.”<sup>42</sup>

The gods also desire to sit on the lap of Night and Dawn:

*ā vāḍ devāso uśatī uśanta urau śidantu subhage upasthe*  
“The gods desire you two, o Desirous ones, let them sit on your vast lap, o Blissful ones!”<sup>43</sup>

For they are “the two young mothers of the Truth”: *yahvī ṛtasya mātarā*<sup>44</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains the profound psychological meaning behind their symbolism and how easily it was misunderstood by the modern mind:

“Dawn and Night,” runs an impressive Vedic verse, “two sisters of different forms but of one mind, suckle the same divine Child.” We understand nothing. Dawn and Night are of different forms, but why of one mind? And who is the child? If it is Agni, the fire, what are we to understand by Dawn and Night suckling alternately an infant fire? But the Vedic poet is not thinking of the physical night, the physical dawn or the physical fire. He is thinking of the alternations in his own spiritual experience, its constant rhythm of periods of a sublime and golden illumination and other periods of obscuration or relapse into normal unilluminated consciousness and he confesses the growth of the infant strength of the divine life within him through all these alternations and even by the very force of their regular vicissitude. For in both states there works, hidden or manifest, the same divine intention and the same high-reaching labour. Thus an image which to the Vedic mind was clear, luminous, subtle, profound, striking, comes to us void of sense or poor and incoherent in sense and therefore affects us as inflated and pretentious, the ornament of an inapt and bungling literary craftsmanship.”<sup>45</sup>

*(To be continued.)*

#### **Notes :**

<sup>1</sup> *Aitareya Upanishad 1.1.1-4; Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.1-3.;*

<sup>2</sup> *Maitrayani Upanishad 6.17;*

<sup>3</sup> *Rig Veda 10.129.1-2; Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.7; etc.*

<sup>4</sup> *Rig Veda 10.129.1-2; Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.5.1; Taittiriya Aranyaka 1.23; Jaiminiya Upanishad 1.56.1, etc.*

<sup>5</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.2.1*

<sup>6</sup> *Savitri p. 601, See also Rig Veda 10.190.1-2*

<sup>7</sup> *Rig Veda 10.190.1*

<sup>8</sup> *Rig Veda 10.190.2-3*

- <sup>9</sup> *Savitri*, p.1
- <sup>10</sup> *Savitri*, p. 601
- <sup>11</sup> See Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.1-3: *sa dvitīyam aicchat*.
- <sup>12</sup> See Taittiriya Aranyaka, *bahu syām*.
- <sup>13</sup> *Rig Veda 10.190*
- <sup>14</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 481.  
It is interesting to note that the word **rātri**, night, etymologically can be derived from the root **rā**, to grant, impart, yield, bestow, or from the root **ram**, to rejoice, to rest, and can be translated as “bestower of wealth”, or “giving rest”.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 482
- <sup>16</sup> *Rig Veda 1.31.1*
- <sup>17</sup> *Savitri*, p.601
- <sup>18</sup> *Rig Veda, 1.113.14*
- <sup>19</sup> *Savitri*, p. 313
- <sup>20</sup> *Savitri*, p. 3
- <sup>21</sup> *Ishopanishad 1.1*
- <sup>22</sup> *Savitri*, p. 314
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p. 56
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 679
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 724
- <sup>26</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 482
- <sup>27</sup> *Rig Veda 10.127.1-2*
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 10.126.3
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid*, 1.113.1-3
- <sup>30</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 482
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid*, p. 481
- <sup>32</sup> *Rig Veda 3.55.11*
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid*, 3.55.15
- <sup>34</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 273
- <sup>35</sup> *Rig Veda, 3.55.11*
- <sup>36</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 482
- <sup>37</sup> *Rig Veda, 3.55.14*. Cf. also about two primary hotars, where one is at the navel of the Earth (in the altar, according to Sāy.) and the other is abiding over three hills, *yajantau .. nābhā pṛthivyā adhi sànuūu triūu, RV 2.3.7*
- <sup>38</sup> *RV 2.3.6*
- <sup>39</sup> *RV 3.55.12*
- <sup>40</sup> *RV 7.2.5*
- <sup>41</sup> *Savitri*, p. 36
- <sup>42</sup> *RV 3.2.2*
- <sup>43</sup> *RV 10.70.6*
- <sup>44</sup> *RV 1.142.7*
- <sup>45</sup> *Secret of the Veda*, p. 365

Be wide in me, O Varuna;  
Be mighty in me, O Indra;  
O Sun, be very bright and luminous;  
O Moon, be full of charm and sweetness.  
Be fierce and terrible, O Rudra;  
Be impetuous and swift, O Maruts;  
Be strong and bold, O Aryama;  
Be voluptuous and pleasurable, O Bhaga;  
Be tender and kind and loving and passionate, O Mitra.  
Be bright and revealing, O Dawn;  
O Night, be solemn and pregnant.  
O Life, be full, ready & buoyant;  
O Death, lead my steps from mansion to mansion.  
Harmonise all these, O Brahmanaspati.  
Let me not be subject to these gods, O Kali.

SRI AUROBINDO  
*Essays Divine and Human, CWSA 12:429*

# *Vedic Symbols in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*

*Talk by Professor R.L. Kashap*

*November 16, 2005*

*Vedanga Vidvan Dr. R.L. Kashyap is the Honorary Director of the Sri Aurobindo Kapali Sastry Institute of Vedic Culture (SAKSI) in Bangalore. He is the author of many books on the Vedas, and is passing his great learning on to the younger generation through workshops and classes. But among Aurobindonians, he is also known for his unique insights into Savitri. We were fortunate to have him with us at Savitri Bhavan in November 2005.*

Our topic this evening is the connection between *Savitri* and the Veda.

When we speak of the Veda, we speak of the Veda mantras, the Veda samhitas. They are four, by name : Rig Veda, Ajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda. But we are going to find again and again that it was a single collection before it became four, and later, they are overlapping collections. The Rig Veda, for which Sri Aurobindo wrote many translations, has basically 10,552 mantras. Each verse is called a mantra – but not all verses are mantras ... I will come back to that topic a little later. Since each is a couplet, we are talking about roughly 20,000 lines, and if we add other mantras, there are about 20,000 additional mantras, it is roughly 40,000 lines; *Savitri* is 24,000 lines. So trying to connect the 24,000 lines of *Savitri* with the 40,000 lines of the Veda in one hour, is like asking “See India in 5 days and 2 hours” – that sort of thing. So please understand that what you are going to get is just a few hints on this broad topic of how to connect, how to understand the Veda.

A few words about myself : our Institute, the Sri Aurobindo Kapali Sastry Institute of Vedic Culture, was started in 1997. I was in the States for about 35 years. I got my PhD from Harvard, in 1965. I was a Professor not of Vedas or Sanskrit, but of electrical and computer engineering from 1966 to 1999. That’s a long time. It was

there in the States that I met Madhav Panditji. He gave me hints on how to read *Savitri*, a long time ago, 25 years ago. In 1966 when I had just finished my PhD, I had gone to a conference in Los Angeles. It was not the first conference I had gone to, in the evening one of my old friends was there, so we took a stroll, and we landed in a secondhand bookshop. The bookseller saw my name, and he said “Sir, there are two very good books for you”. One was *Savitri*, the two volume *Savitri* with no introduction, just the pure text, the 1950 version. And the other was Sri Aurobindo’s *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. I bargained the price and took them home. I read a few lines of *Savitri*. It didn’t make much impression. Afterwards the whole thing was opaque, therefore I kept it aside. Whenever I wanted to I turned back to it, but only when I met Panditji in ’77, he gave me some few hints on how to handle *Savitri*. That’s all he gave, but it was sufficient for me. Again, with the Veda the same problem: I read Sri Aurobindo’s preface to *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* – that was the other book I bought that day. Again, it didn’t make that much impression, because he was saying that the Veda is a spiritual document. That was a piece of information that I knew very well – that the Veda is a spiritual document, that the Vedic gods are not different things .... I had not read anything of the opinions of the Indologists, therefore I was saved by my ignorance and quite happy. Therefore to me what I read in Sri Aurobindo didn’t make all that much difference, except his English and his translations which were not too transparent to me, so again this book too was in some sort of a limbo. Then around 1965 I became a professor at Purdue, and by 1969 I got my tenure, so I had a little bit more time. Then I systematically began reading the Indian Sanskrit works and that sort of thing. Of course the Upanishads, the Veda, the Vedanta of Shankaracharya, then I came back to the Veda and to Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*.

The first line of *Savitri* , as you know, runs :

*It was the hour before the Gods awake.*

But that too didn’t create such a great impression on me, because that is in some sense a fairly common idea. For example, when I was a young person, an old lady behind our house used to sing a song in Kannada. Basically it runs,

*Get up, Narayana, get up!*  
*Lakshmiramana, get up*  
*Sri Venkateswara, get up!*  
*What should you do? You should do samudra mathuna,*  
*You should really start the whole process of creation,*  
*You have to get up!*

Therefore the idea of the gods waking up was not entirely new to me. I read further in the book, “The Issue” and so on, but I was not clear what is he getting across. Again the same problem with Savitri. Of course, like everybody else I knew the outline of the story of Savitri. Again that also didn’t help.

When I met Madhav Panditji in 1977 he gave me two hints about how to read *Savitri*. He said, “Don’t start from page 1 – that’s the wrong place to go. Start from the middle of the book, the Book of Fate, and the second part of it ‘The Problem of Pain’. Then go to the Book of Yoga, then you can go back to the first page.” The second thing he said was “You need to get a handle on the Veda, make sure that you connect some of the earlier hymns in the Veda to the ideas in *Savitri*.” And especially, he said, the Worlds and that sort of thing. The most important thing that he said was “If you have to read and understand the depths of the ideas in the Veda, you have to read Kapali Sastriar’s *Siddhanjala*.” The *Siddhanjala* is in four parts. The first part is an introduction to the spiritual interpretation of the Veda. He is the only person in the Sri Aurobindonian Circle who basically has refuted all the criticisms against Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of the Veda. He has done that. He took the bull by the horns and went on explaining them one by one. So Panditji told me, “Only when you get a handle on that will you really be able to understand.” And he told me that Kapali Sastriar has written a detailed commentary on the first 121 suktas. Each sukta has about 10 mantras, so we are talking about 1200 mantras. This was a big enough handle by which I could get a hold on the Vedas. These two hints were sufficient for me. Just as he had suggested, I started reading *Savitri*: the Book of Fate, the Problem of Pain, and the Book of Yoga, and then I went back to Book One and found it very fascinating, no problem at all, it was smooth sailing. Whenever I got time I was reading the Veda also, the two went back and forth, so those hints he had given me proved a great help in making a connection between these two great texts.

So first of all let us get a little handle on the Veda. Unfortunately in the Indian traditions, the word ‘veda’ is used very loosely. It is considered simply as ‘knowledge’. That is not what is meant here. Rather it is meant to designate specific groups of mantras. A mantra is not simply a verse. This is very important. We speak of the 10,000 mantras of the Rig Veda. Most of you will have read Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Future Poetry* and also his various commentaries on Vedic texts.

Each mantra has three components: there is the component of sound. That is why we insist that it must be chanted properly – because each word has a power of its own. Second, each mantra has a meaning – *artha*. The meaning is not simply a composite of the words. Rather, when you know the words and read it correctly there is an explosion as it were in your mind. That is what the Sanskrit grammarians called the *spḥota*. That is the meaning. But why should we need both of them? Because each mantra represents a revelation to the rishi of a *darshana*, of, shall we say, a supraphysical event as it were. And this mantra is a compressed version of that *darshana*. Therefore when you recite it correctly, knowing its meaning, both of them, then the decompression starts and the *darshana* becomes revealed to you. Therefore we have to understand the points: why we have to recite it properly, to take the trouble of knowing the meanings of the words, and of course reading with devotion is an essential part of the thing, then you get the *darshana*. So these are the three steps in the understanding of the mantra. Whenever we speak of mantras, this is the common factor of all of them.

That being the case, each mantra has its own power of suggestion. Remember, the Rig Veda is not a prose composition. People say there is heavy repetition. No, it is not repetition. The idea is that when a poet wants to say certain things, he will take the latter half of an existing mantra, introduce it as it were, repeat it as it were, and then continue it. Therefore, when we speak of mantra, Sri Aurobindo calls it ‘the word of Illumination’.

As you know, Sri Aurobindo had a favourite theory, that to understand the Veda, you take each letter of the alphabet, the a, the i, the u, the ri, and all of them, especially the vowels but also the consonants, each gives as it were a root meaning of its own. It is from that you have to understand the word, not really by what commentator A or

what commentator B has said. For example, all the words which start with 'ri' deal with some aspect of the Truth, *rta* the truth in the moment; *rik* – illumination, *rishva* – the power, etc. It is the same thing for all of them. You take all the things connected with 'u' - they are all connected with something going up: *udgita* – the mantra which rises, *udgata* – which goes up. Each vowel has a meaning of its own. And that is how we have to capture and understand the Veda.

Let me come back to *Savitri* now.

Sometimes it is said that Sri Aurobindo started composing *Savitri* during the early part of his stay in Baroda. But that does not really make sense, for two reasons. First, there is one very strong piece of evidence. In the *Record of Yoga*, in the second volume, in the undated entries of 1912-13, there is a list of all the things Sri Aurobindo planned to write, a big list; and *Savitri* is not in the list. *Essays on the Gita* is there, *Ilion* is there, the *Synthesis* is there, *The Life Divine* is there, but *Savitri* is not in that list. In 1914 Sri Aurobindo already started writing *The Life Divine*, he started the *Synthesis*, he already started on them. But there was no place in these works where he could in some sense give his, shall we say intuitions, his illuminations, his revelations on the details of the manifestation, details of the world. We should always remember that again and again Sri Aurobindo says that before he came to Pondicherry he had all the major experiences: the experience of the purusha, *nirguna*, *saguna*, all of them, and then he was asked, 'What is the reason you came to your yoga?' He said, 'My business is to understand the constitution of Man, the constitution of the world, how is it made, and what are the connections between them.' Therefore he wanted, in some sense, to put them down in a systematic way.

As you know, it is not correct to say that Sri Aurobindo got all his inspiration from the Vedas and the Upanishads – quite the contrary. But in some sense, when he read a particular mantra of the Veda or the Upanishads then it connected with his own revelations in some sense, broadened them as it were, and therefore he had collected all of these. To express all these insights he needed a vehicle, and for that he chose *Savitri*.

The first mistake people can make regarding *Savitri* is to assume that it deals with the story of Savitri as told in the Mahabharata, Vana

Parva. That is a fundamental mistake. It is true that the particular sage, the particular person who recites to Yudhisthira the story about the power of conjugal felicity, had the intuition of the Savitri story. But most of you here will have read some lines of *Savitri*, and you know that when the intuition comes in, it can be properly interpreted only when it comes through the ‘*soundless corridors of the mind*’ – a mind that is not cluttered up with pre-conceptions. When the mind is cluttered with preconceptions, even when an intuition comes – what does it do? It is like on a post office desk: it puts its black imprint over the beautiful stamp, and the whole thing is defaced. And that is more or less what happened with the Savitri story.

Sri Aurobindo always says that when you go to the Veda or the Upanishads or anything else, you have to pay particular attention to the names. And what are the names in *Savitri*? There is Savitri, Satyavan is almost a minor figure, and then we have Aswapati, and of course we have Death. Savitri’s mother’s name is not even mentioned, even though she gives a long speech in Book Six. The key figures are Aswapati and Savitri – and Death. Sri Aurobindo always uses the word Death. This is very important. He does not use the name Yama, even though in the Indian tradition Yama is considered the god of Death, because the two concepts are quite different. The idea of Yama in the Veda is much more complicated. I will come back to it in a minute.

What happened here in the Mahabharata story is that it was made into a story of conjugal felicity. It is not about the power of Death at all. You should understand how she gets the reprieve of Satyavan. She asks for sons. Yama says ‘You will have them.’ Then she puts a technical point. She says, ‘I am a chaste woman. So if my husband Satyavan is not alive, how can I get the children?’ So Yama consents and therefore releases her husband. Remember this is not a victory over Death. It is what you may call, shall we say, you know in English we say, if a prisoner is there, he is not permanently released from prison, he is given a temporary release, on parole. So in the Mahabharata version of the legend, Satyavan is only released on parole. Afterwards he dies and the whole story continues. So the rishi got the intuition, but interpreted it in a very narrow sense, the sense of a power of *prathivrata*, the power of how a lady can save her husband’s life – nothing more and nothing less.

When Sri Aurobindo saw the name Aswapati it rang different bells in his mind, in his consciousness, as you can see if you read his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

### **Aswapati**

The basic core of the mantras of the four Veda Samhitas – Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda – their period could be 4,000 BC or even earlier. That was a period of great intuition. Of course we cannot say that everybody living at that time had it; the rishis had it, their disciples had it, but the ordinary mortals had some exposure to it. Agni is the Lord of the Will, Indra is the Lord of the Mind, Saraswati is the Goddess of Inspiration, Aditi is the Goddess of Infinity ... they had their intuitions about it. That is the only way that you can explain a fact which Sri Aurobindo hammers again and again – that all the greatest creativity in India can be traced back to the Vedas and to no other source. Science, Art, Music, everything else – it is all in the Veda and all later developments are developments out of that. That point Sri Aurobindo mentions in so many places.

The Vedic period may have lasted three or four thousand years or I don't know how long, but like everything else, it had to degenerate. So after it had come down, wise people said, 'You know, we have lost something. Can we not recover the wisdom?' The books which they wrote are called the Brahmanas. Brahmana implies that it has to do with the Cause. In the Vedas '*brahma*' means a mantra – it is important to remember this. At that time the Vedic rituals were very dominant, therefore their main purpose was to understand the inner meaning of the rituals – the *antaryagna*. That was the purpose of the Brahmanas. And they are interesting books, with a lot of stories, and this and that. But people were not satisfied with that. They said, 'We need a little bit more'. And that more is *Aranyaka*. *Aranya* is normally translated as 'forest'. But that is not it. *Rana* in the Veda means 'delight'. *Ar*, *arya* always means 'effort' – the effort to distil the delight – that is *Aranya*. These *aranyakas* had a twofold role. One was the role of extending the brahmana idea of interpreting the rituals; but most important was the other role of understanding the meanings behind what we call the secret words, the *rahasya*, and putting them in the language of the intellect. The great weakness of the Veda is that it puts everything into a symbolic language. That is its weakness and its strength. It is a strength

because it prevented other people defacing it; it is a weakness because most people could not understand it. And the end of these Aranyakas are the Upanishads. So when we think of the Veda books, it is not one book. If we think of a simple matrix – I hope most of you know what a matrix is – with four rows :

Mantra Samhita	Brahmana	Aranyaka	Upanishad
<b>Rig Veda</b>	Aitereya Brahmana	Aitereya Aranyaka	Aitereya Upanishad
	Kaushitaki Brahmana	Kaushitaki Aranyaka	Kaushitaki Upanishad
<b>Yajur Veda : Krishna (Taittiriya)</b>	Taittiriya Brahmana	Taittiriya Aranyaka	Taittiriya Upanishad
	Satapatha Brahmana	–	Brihadaranyaka
<b>Shukla :</b>			
<b>Sama Veda</b>			Chhandogya
<b>Atharva Veda</b>			All other Upanishads

### *Types of Vedic Literature*

Four by four. So we are speaking of 16 types of books – very important point.

For example, for the Rig Veda we have the Aitereya Brahmana, Aitereya Aranyaka, Aitereya Upanishad; Kaushitaki Brahmana, Kaushitaki Aranyaka and Kaushitaki Upanishad.

With Yajur Veda unfortunately it is more complicated. We have the two recensions called the ‘Krishna’ and ‘Shukla’ Yajurveda. The ones that belong to the Krishna Yajurveda are the Taittiriya mantra samhita, Taittiriya Brahmana, Taittiriya Aranyaka, and the last part of the Taittiriya Aranyaka is the Taittiriya Upanishad. Similarly the Shukla Yajurveda has the Shukla Yajurveda mantra samhita, then it has the famous Shatapatha Brahmana. It has no aranyaka. And the last part of the Shatapatha Brahmana is the famous Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The Sama Veda has the Chhandogya Upanishad, and Atharva Veda has all other Upanishads.

Therefore the Upanishads are in some sense correctly called *veda* plus *anta* – the end parts of the Veda – except that they are written in a language in which intellect plays a part, and not so much symbolism is there.

Even though we speak of four major Upanishads, even though we can speak of the 108 Upanishads – there is a list of 108 – twelve are famous because Shankaracharya commented on them. But if you take these twelve and bind them in a single book in Devanagari script, you find one thing: the Brihadaranyaka occupies 100 pages,

Chhandogya occupies 100 pages, and all the others together occupy 65 pages. The point to understand here is that unless you get a handle on these biggies, (Brihadaranyaka and Chhandogya), you are not going to go very far – although of course. The Isha Upanishad is very great and Sri Aurobindo has commented upon it.

So one of Sri Aurobindo's Five-Year Plans was to write a commentary on the Upanishads also. He has not completed all of it. But the first phrase of the Brihadaranyaka made a big impression on him: the problem of *aswa*. In Sanskrit *aswapati* is there. We simply translate *aswa* as 'horse', there is the end of it. No, no, no, that is a mistake.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has six chapters, as it were, each divided into several subsections, each subsection has several mantras, I shall be quoting the first chapter, first section, first mantra. It represents the *aswa*, the sacrificial horse, as the entire manifestation.

### *Aswasya medhasya shiraha*

What is the face of it? Usha : *Ushava ashwasya medhyasya shiraha*. Who is Usha? – the sacrificial dawn. She is the face of it. Then what is the sun? *suryo chaksho* : the sun is the eye of the horse. And so it goes on : What is all the rain we get? It is the waste products of this horse. And this is the entire horse of the manifestation.

So we should get a hint that when Sri Aurobindo speaks of *Aswapati*, he is not speaking of the ordinary horse, not even only of the life energy. In some sense he is dealing with a different power, the energy of the entire manifestation.

### **Death**

A second point which has always attracted me comes in the first book, second section, first mantra. There the rishi says he wants to connect this manifestation with destruction. Anything that manifests has to die. There is nothing like a permanent creation. There is a creation, there is a preservation, there is a destruction. Therefore how does the destruction start? That is 1.2.1 : *ashanaya hi mrtyuhu*. *Mrtyuhu* – death : What is death? Hunger which is death. So the death we are speaking of is not just a simple matter of the heart stopping or the kidneys failing. It is our hunger : 'I want this ...' which never stops. *ashanayahe mrtyuhu* : the hunger which is Death.

Kapali Sastriar quotes the famous passage of Taittiriya Upanishad 2.3. He says that we should understand that we always make a distinction between enjoying the food – food in the largest sense, not only what we eat through the mouth, but whatever we take in through the ear, eye, everything. *atyyate iti attihi* : ‘Remember you are eating and also remember that it is eating you’ “The eater eating is eaten,” what Sri Aurobindo mentions in so many places. He calls it ‘the terrible phrase’. So you have to connect the idea of the manifestation with the idea of destruction.

And this phrase about the eater eaten is not just terrible – the same principle is everywhere. You take for example the 7<sup>th</sup> mantra in the first book, 1.7 We recite a mantra to Indra, and we say ‘Indra is great’ – but the point is that Indra gives the words to chant, Indra impels the words to come out of your mouth, therefore at the same time it is Indra who is chanting and Indra who is the chanter. The idea behind all of these statements is that there is a single principle that goes on and on here and there and everywhere.

### **The Worlds**

So when we speak of Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse ... normally when we speak of *aswa*, the limited idea, there is always the idea of a vital energy. As you know we are made up of 7 worlds – 8 worlds are sometimes mentioned, but 7 is more common. There is the world of Matter – *anna*, there is the world of all our vital energies, *prana*, – there is the lower vital and the upper vital as you know, all our high ideals and that sort of thing are the upper vital, cravings are the lower one, all of it comes under the *prana*, – and then there is the Mind. The Mind as you see is made up of the *indriyas*, the five senses which control them, plus the *manas*, which exudes our actions, plus the *buddhi*, the power of judgment – What should I do, this or that? – plus everything in which it floats called *chitta*. This is our Mind. Sri Aurobindo says, take the animal. The animal when it sees with the eye, that is the decision-maker. The sense is the decision-maker. But when we come to the human being, there is a difference. The *buddhi* takes a decision, and asks the *manas* to carry it out. And so we have *anna*, *prana*, *mana*, these are the three lower principles. Corresponding to them we have the three higher principles, *sat* – existence, *chit*, consciousness-force, and *ananda*, bliss. Sri Aurobindo

always says the foundation of the world is ananda. The Taittiriya Upanishad says *Anandena khalu imani sarvani bhutani jayante*. The whole world comes out of this ananda, *anandena jivanti*.

To make a loose comparison, when we speak of *sat* it is something that has formed everything else. Therefore connect the *sat* with Matter, *chit* with the prana and *ananda* with the mind. What is the difference between the top three and the bottom three? The bottom three are also divine powers, except they have forgotten that they have come from a divine source. They have forgotten that there is a unity among them, so they are always fighting. The vital is fighting, 'I want this I want this.' Mind is saying, 'No you have a heart problem don't eat it.' The body says, 'I can't handle your demands'. So they are always fighting. Why does death come? Death comes because the soul has decided that the body simply cannot handle any more experiences. The soul says I quit and as a result the death starts, not the other way round. So that being the case, there is an intermediate plane, known as the *mahas*. The Upanishad calls it *mahas*, The Veda calls it *vignana* – that is the fourth world. The point is that when the original manifestation takes place, Sacchidananda, when it comes to the *mahas* the unity is intact. It remembers from where it has come, it is intact. When it comes from there to *anna-prana-mana* that unity vanishes. Therefore, when we speak of the recovery of the Supermind, what are we saying? We want to recover the integral features, to remember. There is a permanent memory in our consciousness. *Anna-prana-mana* comes directly from that. That internal knowledge is not the ordinary knowledge. It is something else, Sri Aurobindo calls it the Great Knowledge

Each of these different worlds have their structures, *loka* is the world. It is built by a consciousness, and simultaneously it has a structure of its own, and its own powers which rule it, the gods and the godheads and all that sort of thing.

Sri Aurobindo wanted a place where he could put down all the intuitions he had in these seven planes. That is the connection between the Veda and *Savitri*.

The whole of the second book of *Savitri*, Aswapati's book, is concerned with the description of the world-stair. Not just a simple description, A is here, B is there, but in some sense, how we ascend it – point number one. Number two, what is the goal of this human

life? That is the whole point. For both of them, the World-Stair if you can imagine, the World-Stair really goes from one peak to another. What is the earliest reference for that? It is in the Rig Veda, in the very early part, the First Mandala, 10th Sukta, second mantra. This is dedicated to Indra.

You know in the Veda Agni – especially for a person like Sri Aurobindo, Agni had a great fascination, because Agni in some sense represents the secret of all work, the guidance in work. You see, according to Sri Aurobindo, any work requires three things. It needs the knowledge of the work, it needs force, energy, and when we do any work we demand enjoyment. So when you say, Oh I can't work properly, what is the reason? I don't get the benefit, therefore somebody else gets the benefit. Or in the beginning I don't have the proper knowledge, or the force in between, that is, the will-power. When Agni comes, in it is the will-power connected with wisdom: *krato*, *kavi-kratu* – *kavi* is the wisdom, *krato* is the will power. Therefore in some sense harmonising the three is Agni's business, even though he supplies primarily the will power, the middle part in some sense. So, Sri Aurobindo's favourite idea in relation to education, where he says you need a body of knowledge, the *shastra*, then the guru, and third you need what is called the *utsaha*, the enthusiasm, and fourthly we need what is called Time – patience – *kala*, it has its own dynamics as it were. The *utsaha* is the one which empowers your willpower. As a matter of fact one of the popular books in the West is, you know, – we have all heard of the idea of the Art of War, but there is a flipped idea, the War on Art. This author says, if you take all the people in this world, how many of them have started learning music, or learning hatha yoga, how many have started on this or that : they go to the first class, then drop off, 99% of all the new projects started off always end up incomplete. Therefore the universe is as it were having a war on all art. That is the idea. The idea of Sri Aurobindo is that this happens because you have not cultivated the Agni power. The Agni power is always awake even when you are sleeping, it doesn't leave you alone, it always pushes you, pushes you, pushes you. Indra is the god of the Divine Mind. So this mantra, this 1.10.2 is for Indra.

People think that Vedic Sanskrit is exceedingly simple Sanskrit. You have to understand, and you should not, repeat not, confuse it with the Sanskrit of our Kalidasa, Bhasa and company. These are all authors of what is called Classical Sanskrit. Don't ever confuse them, they are quite different acts. We also speak of the Dravidian languages, Kannada, Tamil and everything. People think that they are all different from Sanskrit. They are different from the Sanskrit of Kalidasa etc. but they are intimately related to the Sanskrit of the Vedas. This is the reason we speak of a single origin of all the Indian languages. It is not that all of them are derived from Sanskrit, but that the same creativity that created the Vedic Sanskrit was also there at the origin of the Dravidian languages. Sri Aurobindo gives several different examples. For example, one of the important words – *appa*. In Tamil it means 'father', same thing in Kannada also. Clearly there is no such word in Sanskrit. So does it mean that Sanskrit and Tamil are quite different languages? Sri Aurobindo says, No – there is always a cognate, *apya*, which means son – someone close to you. That word is there in the Veda itself.

To understand the Veda mantra, simply split it into four parts. Each part has three or four words. If you spend a little time you will be able to understand. Repeat it slowly, once, twice, thrice, get a handle on it. For example, *yat sano sanum aruhat*. That is the first part. '*sano*' means peak. '*aruhat*' means climbing. Our life is climbing from one peak to another peak.

Fifty years ago when I was a student in India, the lecturer told us, "With this book you are not going to reach the peaks of Physics, you are going to reach the plateaus from which the peaks are visible." That is the whole idea. You go to the first small peak as it were, only when you have reached it you know what more should be done. A person who stays always at the bottom does not even know. What is the second part? *Bhuri aspasta kartram*. You know what is yet to be done. You know which peak to aim for next – you have to continue in music or in computers. Then what happens? *Indra artham chetati* The power of Indra will guide you. *Cetam arthati* means 'bring into your consciousness what should be done'. And the fourth point: he doesn't simply give you the hint. The rishi says he comes with his troops to help you.

*Yat sano sanum aruhat bhuri aspasta karvam  
Indra artham cetati yuthena vrishnir eجاتit.*

He comes with his helping power. He sends the helping power to you.

In the Veda two ideas are always there, right? The idea of climbing, and the idea of a boat journey. For example 1.99.1, *jatavedhase*: our life is like going in a boat *naveva sindhum*. And then he speaks of rebirth as an educational tour. Dhirgatamas is a poet in the first Mandala who is known for exceedingly complex symbolism, whatever he writes. And he writes in his first Mandala, 140<sup>th</sup> Sukta, 12<sup>th</sup> mantra, that our whole life is not a journey in a single boat, we go in one boat, we finish the task, then take another boat, and do another task, then third boat, and so on. These are the voyages of the spirit.

Both these ideas are there in the Veda, climbing the peak, and voyaging. And remember the voyage image is the one Sri Aurobindo uses in the fourth canto of *Savitri*, The Secret Knowledge.

So the point is that the understanding of these seven worlds is in some sense even more detailed in *Savitri*. Even the Puranas don't go into all the details Sri Aurobindo gives in the Second Book, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds.

A few words on some of the worlds will be useful for you. For example, there is a canto called The Paradise of the Life Gods. It is very interesting because, do you know what the word paradise comes from? Paradise comes from two words : *para* + *desha* . Paradise is the other world. The Paradise of the Life Gods – who are these? In the Indian tradition, we speak of the gandharvas and apsaras, who spend all of their time singing and dancing. They were very popular with Kalidasa for obvious reasons, and it is these people who are in this paradise of the life gods.

Then later you come to the Heavens of the Ideal. To understand what these are, you have to go forward to Book Ten, Canto 2, The Twilight of the Ideal. There it starts. It is in the morning of the gods – that's how the line begins. Then Death says 'You see, look at all the bright ideas you people have, look at what happens to them.' The argument which our *Mrtyu*, our Death doesn't understand is of course that the new idea is not a repetition of the old idea. It is built on the strength of the old idea. Therefore we are always having a progression, up and up and up.

Then of course at the end Aswapati comes to the Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge. And there, in some sense, we have an exposure of the world of Swarga – how perfection can be there.

Sri Aurobindo spends a comparatively small amount of time on that. Remember how much time he spends on the Little Life and the little gods and that sort of thing, and the amount of time he spends on the gods of the Falsehood – a really long amount of time. He had to spend that time because in the Veda there is a repeated reference to this battle between the gods and the hostiles. Who are these forces who prevent us from carrying out our higher aims? These are what we call the hostile forces, who do not want to see people climb up. They always put some sort of an obstacle on the ladder. Therefore only when you overcome the obstacle, then a new power comes to you. The argument is that Agni or Indra does nothing to help you overcome the obstacle, but once you use the will-power to overcome the obstacle then you understand, you have learned something and you get a new power. There is always the idea that the gods are silent. That is not quite so, the gods are always somehow active; but in some sense, until you get the hang of how to do this sort of work, always obstacles are there. So Sri Aurobindo had to spend a lot of time on these worlds of the Falsehood.

The point he wants to make is, in the classical Vedanta they always seem to have the idea that good and bad are simply the converse of each other. No – he doesn't say that. Confusion is there, but there are all the powers of falsehood that are actively engaged in obstructing progress. You really cannot deal with those guys by human effort alone. Therefore our prayers go to Indra again, 'Come and help us, come and help us!'

So the entire reading of the Second Book of *Savitri* in some way links you up with the details of the so many different worlds, which are hinted at in the Veda. Again and again I repeat 'hinted'. The Veda is not a prose book. You can't say, go here and go there, you will get answers. No, you have to search. For example, I told you about the mantras – you have to search for them. People ask, 'Doesn't the Veda ever mention the idea of a liberation somewhere?' Yes, it is mentioned in the book of the Atris 5.46.1. There it says 'Whether we are reborn or whether we want to go away from the manifestation entirely – *vimokshanam* – even then, O Agni, we need your help.' Some want to have complete liberation. They don't want to come back here. Other people, like us for example, we want to have birth because each birth is an experience for getting more and more

perfection. And that's the only reason why we see a person at the age of 4 becoming a great musician – because he has carried over in some sense his attainment of perfection in the earlier birth. He stops, he becomes something else, maybe he becomes a mathematician, or he becomes a sculptor. So it goes on and on and on. Therefore we look forward to a new life because we are moving from one perfection to another perfection.

## **Fate**

Then when you see the Book of Fate, there's a very interesting point. Always when we speak of Fate in English, people don't know what it really means. There was a book written in 1851, 150 years ago, by a man called Poccoke. It has now been reprinted fortunately. Now this is the question, you see. When you go to words in English like Smith, or Cartwright or Wheelwright, you know exactly what that word means, Cartwright, he is the guy that fixes the cart, Wheelwright makes wheels, Smith.... But, Poccoke says, when you go to Greek, for example, none of the Greek words ever give a hint as to what their components are and he says the reason is that you can't find the components in the Greek language, but if you go to the Sanskrit roots then we get a little hint how to handle them

So about Fate : as you know, in Sanskrit we don't have the sound 'f' at all. This sound is absent in Sanskrit. In Kannada and other languages, what is the translation of Fate? It is The Unseen Path: *adrishtapatha*. *Patha* is the path. *Adrishta* it is not seen, it is not clear to us. This P of patha becomes 'f' = Fate. The problem of Fate is the problem of the path you are going to follow. And that is exactly the theme of this whole Book. Why do we take a certain path? And, conversely, why do we not take certain other paths? That is the problem of Fate. And automatically, obviously, we don't take certain paths because we are frightened of the pain. *Pain is the hammer of the gods / to beat a dead resistance in the mortal heart* as Sri Aurobindo would say. Therefore the problem of Fate or of the Path and the problem of Pain are intimately connected.

This problem of the path was one that was very clear to the hearts of the rishis. For example, as you know, when Hindus are cremated they recite a mantra. And that mantra is in some sense meant for all people – it can be used also by the living. *Agne naya supatha raye*

– O Agni! Carry us along the good path to the wealth, the felicities, *asman viswani deva vayunani vidvan*. In the next part, it says, we have a tendency to do bad things automatically. *Juhuranameno. juhuranam* is a tendency, *eno* is an inharmonious action. Therefore *nama uktim vidhema* – we repeat these mantras. The idea of all these mantras to Agni is ‘lead, lead, lead’. When we ask ourselves to be led in ignorance, you set the ground rules: you will be led in ignorance. But if you appeal to a higher power, depending upon your surrender the power acts. And surrender is one of the most important words in the Veda. For example we say *namaste* – *namaha te* – *namaha* means surrender. The idea of *namaha*, of surrender, is the background of many of the Veda mantras.

### **The Soul-Powers**

And one more point. In the Book of Yoga, you find these three great madonnas – the Goddess of Suffering, the Goddess of .... You should understand that these have a close connection, not directly with the Veda, but with Sri Aurobindo’s insights.

Kailasa – most of you will have heard the word. Kailasa is supposed to be a mountain in the Himalayas where Lord Shiva resides. But Kailasa as a word has no meaning in Sanskrit. In one of his notations in the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo splits it. He sees it as Ka-i-la-sa. This is the way it is written in Sanskrit. Ka, he says, stands for Kali, i stands for Ishwari, Maheshwari, la stands for Lakshmi, and sa stands for Saraswati. Ka – i – la – sa.

In the Veda, first the One is there, that is the power of the Ishwari, she is the Power of the One, the one who accepts all the people. Then the Kali force comes in. that is the second Mother, and the third power is the joint power of Lakshmi and Saraswati. So the Ka-i-la-sa connotation is there also.

### **Death again**

To understand the last part of *Savitri* you have to remember that Sri Aurobindo very carefully avoids the word Yama. In the Veda Yama is the son of Vivaswan, one of the Solar powers. Therefore in some sense he is a supramental power. Just as Sri Aurobindo clearly says, we need Agni – whatever people may say, he is not an overmental god, Sri Aurobindo says in his commentary on 1.77. that in our attempts to go from the Mind to the Supermind we need

the assistance of Agni, and that's how he quotes the five Sukta mantras there.

In the Veda, Yama is the god of death, but not as he is portrayed in the Puranas. You should not confuse the Vedic gods with their Puranic namesakes. They are all different in function, they are a different business and that's all.

When you come to think of Death, who are the people who have actually handled the problem of Death? Of course Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad. He goes there, he asks him, he says I'm not interested in your boons – basically he gets the knowledge of death. And remember Death gives Nachiketas three boons, and one of the boons is how he can come back to the earth. So the idea here is that death is not an involuntary journey – it is a voluntary journey. You don't find that idea anywhere else in the Upanishads, but in the Veda you do, in the Tenth mandala 135<sup>th</sup> Sukta. And thanks to the one who has discovered it, that is Kapali Shastriar. It is in Kapali Sastri's book. He has published *Texts on the Upanishads*. The question is there, the holy man mentions a vehicle, a one-pointed vehicle which moves upward, which has no wheels, which can go back and forth, from there to here and from here to there. It is a short mantra. Kapali also doesn't give very many details about it, but he points it out for people who are interested.

Therefore when we are thinking of death we ask the question, not of people who talk about death but of those who have the power of returning from death and going back there again. There is a close connection with what is called in the Indian philosophical tradition the Jivanmukta – a person who can die, but that is a little different concept which need not detain us here.

The point about Death in *Savitri* is that he is what we might call a typical god. That means he has forgotten the origins of the totality. He is not like Agni and Indra of the Veda. He has forgotten. Each part, remember, is infinite in itself. Sri Aurobindo always speaks of how the whole manifestation is combining the infinite vowels with the finite power of the consonants. That is how manifestation comes. For example if we take an ordinary word like *Ka*, k is the consonant, a is the vowel. The vowel is the powerful thing. *Ka* + i becomes ki, etc. This is at the superficial level.

The whole point of Sri Aurobindo's writing in the last three cantos of Book Ten is to show that even though he developed the scheme of the Ideals and that sort of thing, even though they die away, still the whole problem of the perfected life, and perfected mind and perfected prana they are very much there, they are always ascending. That is Savitri's restatement of the problem and again and again and again. To focus only on the destruction there, of course the form has to be destroyed, but that is not the end of it.

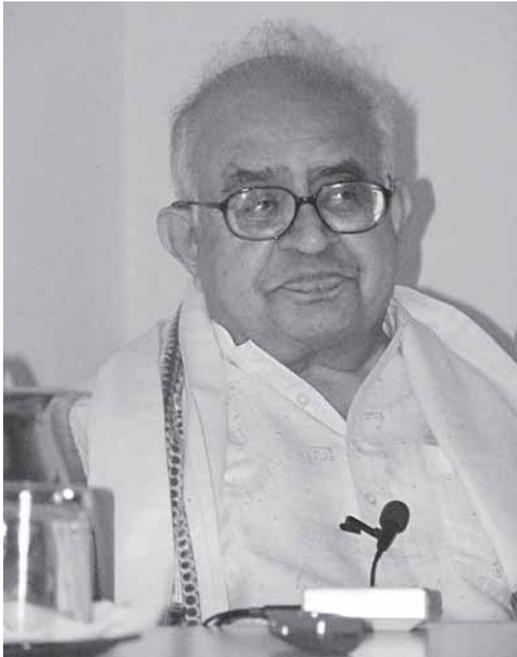
This point comes so many times in the Veda. In the Rig Veda we have what are called the Five Suktas, they are usually used at birth, death, in what we call *antiyesti*. They are nos. 13, 14, 15, 17, 18

This point is again hinted there. Yama is the consoler god in one of those texts. In the Veda, it is very interesting, Yama in many places is what we call the Ordainer, the one who controls everything. So that's how, for example in the first mandala when we speak of Yama, Yama Matarishwan, basically we use that – only as the Ordainer, who ordains the process of the ending. Not that he is destructive.

And then there is what we may call the power of the Death, which is really a power of the ignorance, which carries out the actions depending upon those people who have not reached this level of consciousness. That's how the Veda speaks of the distinction between the *devayana* and the *pitriyana* and that sort of thing. It does mention this point here and again. Ultimately the idea is that for people who have realised it this idea of immortality is there, but death is no more than a marker, like a milestone – when you come to the 10<sup>th</sup> mile, then 20<sup>th</sup> mile, 30<sup>th</sup> mile etc. Birth is also no more than a marker. But when you have not yet come to that stage, then of course it is painful and everything else, and we go to the *pitriloka* and that sort of thing. The Vedas have no place for what is popularly called in India *naraka* – Hell and that sort of thing. There is simply no mention of this word *naraka*. It does mention of course what is called in the Isha Upanishads, the sunless worlds. Sri Aurobindo mentions that in his commentary on the Isha Upanishad, *asurya loka* – the sunless worlds. He does spend some time on that sort of thing. But *naraka* is a purely Puranic concept. A person like myself cannot say whether they exist or not. They are really beyond my comprehension. For that you have to read the words of the Mother and that sort of thing. I can only tell you what the Veda has to say.

So, summing up what I have been saying about the connection between the Veda and *Savitri*, the first thing you have to do is to separate yourself from the focus of the traditional legend on Chastity. You may also have heard this story about Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna, as you know, died of cancer. When he was dying of cancer his wife Sarada Devi, who was also a remarkable spiritual personality, performed *panchami tapas*. *Panchami tapas* means when you sit in the middle and you have four fires surrounding you and it is mid-day, the fifth fire is the sun above. She did tapas like that for a few days. And suddenly she heard a voice saying ‘In this world, what is a husband? What is a wife?’ Then she stopped, and she went back to Ramakrishna and he said, ‘You did all this, and what did you get? Nothing.’ This illustrates the traditional idea that wifely chastity can protect the husband from death.

Therefore all these different ideas, you can read them in the Veda here, you can read them in *Savitri* there. So surely the good Lord will guide you in all of your endeavours. If these suggestions are of any help to you, I am happy.



# *News of Savitri Bhavan*

## *May - December 2006*

The most striking development at Savitri Bhavan during this period has been the completion of the first section of the main building of our complex. This handsome new building was officially inaugurated on September 29 by Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation.



*The new building August 2006*



*Dr. Karan Singh giving the inaugural speech on September 29, 2006*

Construction is now going on, to realise a second, bigger, section.

## **Meditations on Savitri collection**

In August we were able to show the fourth film in the new 'Meditations on Savitri' series, which is being created by Manohar from new digital photographs of Huta's beautiful paintings. The fourth film covers the first half of Canto Four of Book One of *Savitri*, 'The Secret Knowledge'. On December 4<sup>th</sup> the fifth film was shown, covering the second part of the Canto.

Meanwhile Giorgio Molinari, the photographer who prepared those new photographs, has provided us with very high quality prints in actual size of the paintings of Books Three to Five. These reproductions are now on display in the Exhibition Hall. New prints will be displayed as they become available, to create a permanent rotating exhibition.

## **Reading Room**

The following new study aids were added to the Reading Room Collection :

### **Translations** (in alphabetical order of Language)

#### **French**

Lafond, Guy, *Savitri: une legende et un symbole*, 2005, Montreal Canada, Christian Feuillette.

Panier, Janine, *Sri Aurobindo Savitri, livre 1,2,3,4,5* [Computer print out – work in progress].

#### **German**

Steiger, Peter *et al.*, *Savitri: eine sage und ein Gleichnis*. 3<sup>rd</sup> revised [bi-lingual] ed., 2005, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

#### **Italian**

Yudi, *Savitri: una leggenda e un simbolo, part 1 (Book 1 & Book Two Cantos 1-9)* [photocopy of a handwritten ms - work in progress]

#### **Kannada**

Domanlal (Dr.C.B. Patil), *Sri Aurobindara Mahakaya Savitri* 1998. Bijapur

**Russian** Melgunov, Dimitri , *Savitri, Book One, Canto One, The Symbol Dawn*, 2006, St.Petersburg, The Translator  
*Savitri Book Four, Canto One, The Birth and Childhood of the Flame*, 2006, St. Petersburg, The Translator

**Spanish** Kevala, *Savitri : Una legenda y un Simbolo: Primere Parte Libro 1, El libro de los comienzos; Libro II, El libro del Viagero de los Mundos, Cantos I al VI*, 2005, Barcelona, Spain, Fundacion Centro Sri Aurobindo

**Telugu** Rao, K.V *Sri Aurobindo "Savitri", Devarshi Naradudu* [Book Six Cantos 1 and 2], 2006, Hyderabad, The Mother's Integral School

**Studies** (in alphabetical order of Author)

**Deshpande, R.Y,** *Narad's Arrival at Madra*, 2006, Puducherry, SAICE

**Gupta, Nolini Kanta,** *On Savitri*, 2001, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram

**Hemsell, Rod,** *Sri Aurobindo and the Logic of the Infinite*, 2006, Auroville, The Author

**Iyengar, K.R.S.,** *Dawn to Greater Dawn: six lectures on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*, [Photocopy of the original] 1975, Madras, MatriBhavan

*Ushadayam Nundi Mahoudayam Varaku* [Telugu translation of the above] by D. Shathiyavani Ganesh Kumar, 2006, Rajamundry, The Translator

## *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.

***HOW TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF SAVITRI BHAVAN***

***Savitri Bhavan is entirely dependent on donations and financial help from all well-wishers is most welcome. Please consider in what way you could help the Dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality***

**To all our donors and well-wishers**

Thank you for your support to the work of Savitri Bhavan.

Please note that the Auroville Administration is requesting that from October 1, 2006 onwards all donation cheques or drafts should be made payable to

**Auroville Unity Fund (SAIIR)**

They may be sent to Savitri Bhavan as usual.

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*Savitri*  
*is a Mantra*  
*for the transformation*  
*of the world*

The Mother