

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N
Study notes No. 27

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Suffering was lost in her immortal smile.

Savitri, p. 314

Spiritual and Occult Truths *as revealed by the Mother to Huta*

*Life, death, — death, life; the words have led for ages
Our thought and consciousness and firmly seemed
Two opposites; but now long-hidden pages
Are opened, liberating truths undreamed.
Life only is, or death is life disguised,—
Life a short death until by life we are surprised.*

SRI AUROBINDO
(SABCL 5:54)

I came across the condensed version of the book *Life after Life* by Dr. Raymond Moody Jr. in *Reader's Digest*, August 1977. This book has created a sensation. In a world enveloped in scepticism but with a soul still craving for certitudes beyond the material scene, Dr. Moody appears to have brought deep comfort. This result has value but the very fact of it also shows the limitation of the public's sense of reality. The world which sits around the television-set feels that a revelation has been made. But indeed no more than the surface of mystery has been scratched.

What the Doctor gives are merely a few experiences outside the body on a level of existence to which the normal human consciousness has access. There is a profounder and finer possibility of reaching the actuality of strange things after death. Besides, the normal consciousness is not likely to grasp, even on the level accessible to it, the subtler shades of what occurs when one goes out of one's body.

The Mother has written in *Questions and Answers* 1957-1958, p.302:

...The body seems to you something very simple, doesn't it?

It is a body, it is "my" body and after all has a single form — but it is not like that! There are hundreds of entities combined there, each unaware of the others, but all harmonised by something deeper which they do not know

and having the perception of a unity only because they are not conscious of the multiplicity of the elements and their divergence.....

Sri Aurobindo says in *Letters on Yoga*:

The physical is not the only world; there are others that we become aware of through dream records, through the subtle senses, through influences and contacts, through imagination, intuition and vision. There are worlds of a larger subtler life than ours, vital worlds; worlds in which Mind builds its own forms and figures, mental worlds; psychic worlds which are the soul's home; others above with which we have little contact. In each of us there is a mental plane of consciousness, a psychic, a vital, a subtle physical as well as the gross physical and material plane. The same planes are repeated in the consciousness of the general Nature. It is when we enter or contact these other planes that we come into connection with the worlds above the physical. In sleep we leave the physical body, only a subconscious residue remaining, and enter all planes and all sorts of worlds....

SABCL Volume 24, pp. 1499-1500:

The Mother wrote to me in one of the letters which have appeared in *White Roses*:

...This subtle physical (or true physical) is a world where things are and happen somewhat like in the physical here but with a harmony, a beauty and a truth that do not yet exist upon earth....

Dr. Moody has stated in *Reader's Digest*, p.168, about the carrier of experience after death: "...I shall call it the 'spiritual body'." In fact, the body he speaks of is what in Yoga is called the "subtle body".

In the beginning of 1962 the Mother and I had already started expressing through paintings the visions of *Savitri* – the great epic poem written by Sri Aurobindo. The Mother explained to me from the spiritual and occult point of view these lines of Book One, The Book of Beginnings, Canto Three:

*The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent:
Overpassed was this world of rigid limiting forms:
Life's barriers opened into the Unknown.*

(p.25)

She said:

There are actually twelve bodies in the human being. I go out of my physical body, leaving one body after another of the twelve within and enter the subtle worlds and come back gradually to the world of Matter – that is to say, the physical body.

I become aware of all the details of my bodies when finally I come back. When I see the beauties and wonders of the higher worlds, I think of expressing them in painting by various colours – blues, golds, pinks and whites, with certain vibrations of the Light – all in harmony – forming the New World... .

I should mention here that all the talks of the Mother which I recorded were always submitted to her afterwards for confirmation. She read my script carefully and wherever necessary made corrections.

The above talk reminds me of one of Sri Aurobindo's poems – *The Life Heavens*:

*... Sounds, colours, joy-flamings. Life lies here
Dreaming, bound to the heavens of its goal,
In the clasp of a Power that enthral's to sheer
Bliss and beauty body and rapt soul....*

(SABCL 5:574)

Apropos of the plane of which the poem describes the best part, I may cite the question once put to the Mother in connection with the possibility of incarnation on earth by the beings of the lower strata of that plane:

Have these vital beings a psychic being?

The Mother replied:

No, I said that the first thing they have to do to incarnate is to drive away the psychic being of the person whom they possess. That may happen from the very birth. There are children who are almost still-born; they are taken to be dead and suddenly they revive – this means that a vital being has incarnated in them. I have known such cases. This may happen also in the course of an illness: someone is very ill and gradually he lets go the contact with the psychic being, then, in a swoon or some other similar state, he cuts the contact entirely and the vital being rushes into the body. I have known cases of this kind also. Or it may be a slow action: the vital being enters into the atmosphere of the person, goes on influencing him and finally brings about illness, attacks, specially mental illness; then a time comes when the connection with the psychic being is entirely cut and the vital being takes possession of the body. There are cases of people falling very ill and coming out of the illness altogether different from what they were. Very often it is this that happens.

You have said that these beings of the vital are attracted by the spiritual life. Why?

They are attracted, but this does not mean that they have decided sincerely to follow the spiritual life. The chief characteristic of these beings is falsehood: their nature is made of deceit. They have a power for illusion; they can take the appearance of divine beings or higher beings, they can appear in a dazzling light, but truly sincere people are not deceived, they immediately feel something that warns them. But if one likes the marvelous, the unexpected, if one loves fantastic things, if one likes to live a romance, one is likely to be deceived.

Not long ago there was a historical instance, that of Hitler, who was in contact with a being whom he considered to be the Supreme: this being came and gave him advice, told him all that he had to do. Hitler used to retire into solitude

and remain there as long as it was necessary to come into contact with his “guide” and receive from him inspiration which he carried out later very faithfully. This being which Hitler took for the Supreme was quite plainly an Asura, one who is called “the Lord of Falsehood” in occultism, but who proclaimed himself the “Lord of Nations”. He had a shining appearance, he could mislead anybody except one who really had occult knowledge and could see what was there behind the appearance. He would have deceived anybody, he was truly splendid. Generally he used to appear to Hitler wearing a silver cuirass and helmet; a kind of flame came out of his head and there was an atmosphere of dazzling light around him, so dazzling that Hitler could hardly look at him. He used to tell Hitler everything that had to be done – he played with him as with a monkey or a mouse. He had decided clearly to make Hitler commit all possible extravagances till the day he would break his neck, which did happen. But cases like this are frequent, though on a smaller scale, of course.

Hitler was a very good medium, he had great mediumistic capacities, but he lacked intelligence and discrimination. This being could tell him anything whatever and he swallowed it all. It was he who pushed Hitler little by little. And he was doing this destruction, he did not take life seriously. For these beings men are very tiny things with whom they play, as a cat plays with a mouse, till finally they eat them up.

Questions and Answers, 1950-51, pp. 164-166

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Life Divine*:

A survival of the material body by the personality implies a supraphysical existence, and this can only be in some plane of being proper to the evolutionary stage of the consciousness or, if there is no evolution, in a temporary second home of the spirit which would be its natural place of sojourn between life and life, – unless indeed it is its original world which it does not return into material Nature....

... Where then would the temporary dwelling in the supraphysical take place? What would be the soul's other

habitat? It might seem that it ought to be on a mental plane, in mental worlds, both because on man the mental being the attraction of that plane, already active in life, must prevail when there is not the obstacle of the attachment to the body, and because the mental plane should be, evidently, the native and proper habitat of a mental being. But this does not automatically follow, because of the complexity of man's being; he has a vital as well as a mental existence, – his vital part often more powerful and prominent than the mental, – and behind the mental being is a soul of which it is the representative.

There are, besides, many planes or levels of world-existence and the soul has to pass through them to reach its natural home. In the physical plane itself or close to it there are believed to be layers of greater and greater subtility which may be regarded as sub-planes of the physical with a vital and a mental character; these are at once surrounding and penetrating strata through which the interchanges between the higher worlds and the physical world take place. It might then be possible for the mental being, so long as its mentality is not sufficiently developed, so long as it is restricted mainly to the more physical forms of mind and life activity, to be caught and delayed in these media. It might even be obliged to rest there entirely between birth and birth; but this is not probable and could only happen if and in so far as its attachment to the earth-forms of its activity was so great as to preclude or hamper the completion of the natural upward movement. For the post-mortal state of the soul must correspond in some way to the development of the being on earth, since this after-life is not a free upward return from a temporary downward deviation into mortality, but a normal recurrent circumstance which intervenes to help out the process of a difficult spiritual evolution in the physical existence. There is a relation which the human being in his evolution on earth develops with higher planes of existence, and that must have a predominant effect on his internatal dwelling in these planes; it must determine his direction after death and determine too the place, period and character of his self-experience there....

....[The soul] may enter at once into the worlds of other-life, or it may remain first, as a transitional stage, in some region of subtle-physical experience whose surroundings may seem to it a prolongation of the circumstances of physical life, but in freer conditions proper to a subtler medium and in some kind of happy perfection of mind or life or a finer bodily existence. Beyond these subtle-physical planes of experience and the life-worlds there are also mental or spiritual-mental planes to which the soul seems to have an internatal access and into which it may pursue its internatal journey; but it is not likely to live consciously there if there has not been a sufficient mental and soul development in this life. For these levels must normally be the highest the evolving being can internatally inhabit, since one who has not gone beyond the mental rung in the ladder of being would not be able to ascend to any supramental or overmental state; or if he had so developed as to overleap the mental level and could attain so far, it might not be possible for him to return so long as the physical evolution has not developed here an organization of an overmental or supramental life in Matter.

But, even so, the mental worlds are not likely to be the last normal stage of the after-death passage; for man is not entirely mental; it is the soul, the psychic being, and not the mind, that is the traveller between death and birth, and the mental being is only a predominant element in the figure of its self-expression. There must then be a final resort to a plane of pure psychic existence in which the soul would await rebirth; there it could assimilate the energies of its past experience and life and prepare its future. Ordinarily, the normally developed human being, who has risen to a sufficient power of mentality, might be expected to pass successively through all these planes, subtle physical, vital and mental, on his way to his psychic habitation. At each stage he would exhaust and get rid of the fractions of formed personality-structure, temporary and superficial, that belonged to the past life; he would cast off his mind-sheath and life-sheath as he had already cast off his body-sheath: but the essence of the

personality and its mental, vital and physical experiences would remain in latent memory or as a dynamic potency for the future. But if the development of mind were insufficient, it is possible that it would not be able to go consciously beyond the vital level and the being would either fall back from there, returning from its vital heavens or purgatories to earth, or, more consistently, would pass at once into a kind of psychic assimilative sleep co-extensive with the internatal period; to be awake in the highest planes a certain development would be indispensable...

...The psychic entity within, ... the spiritual individual in us, is the Person that we are; but the 'I' of this moment, the 'I' of this life is only a formation, a temporary personality of this inner Person: it is one step of the many steps of our evolutionary change, and it serves its true purpose only when we pass beyond it to a farther step leading nearer to a higher degree of consciousness and being. It is the inner Person that survives death, even as it pre-exists before birth; for this constant survival is a rendering of the eternity of our timeless Spirit into the terms of Time.

SABCL 19:798-801

These lines from his *Collected Poems* are apt here:

*I saw my soul a traveller through Time;
From life to life the cosmic ways it trod,
Obscure in the depths and on the heights sublime,
Evolving from the worm into the god....*

SABCL 5:147

The Mother and I were doing the paintings of *Book Nine – The Book of Eternal Night*. When Death comes to take Satyavan's soul, the Mother told me:

The soul of Satyavan goes out of his body from the top of his head. So you must paint it accordingly.

I did so.

Sri Aurobindo has explained in *Letters on Yoga*,

At the time of death the being goes out of the body through the head; it goes out in the subtle body and goes to different planes of existence for a short time until it has gone through certain experiences which are the result of its earthly existence. Afterwards it reaches the psychic world where it rests in a kind of sleep, until it is time for it to start a new life on earth. That is what happens usually – but there are some beings who are more developed and do not follow the course.

SABCL 22:435

The Mother declares in *Questions and Answers*:

Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth; but man understands it in a different sense from the meaning Nature originally put into it. In man and in the animals that are nearest to his level, the necessity of death has taken a special form and significance to their consciousness; but the subconscious knowledge in this lower Nature which supports it is a feeling of the necessity of renewal and change and transformation.

It was the conditions of matter upon earth that made death indispensable. The whole sense of the evolution of matter has been a growth from a first state of unconsciousness to an increasing consciousness. And in this process of growth dissolution of forms became an inevitable necessity, as things actually took place. For a fixed form was needed in order that the organized individual consciousness might have a stable support. And yet it is the fixity of the form that made death inevitable. Matter has to assume forms; individualization and the concrete embodiment of life-forces or consciousness-forces were impossible without it and without these there would have been lacking the first conditions of organized existence on the plane of matter. But a definite and concrete formation contracts the tendency to become at once rigid and hard and petrified. The individual form persisted as a too binding mould; it cannot follow the movements of the forces; it cannot change in harmony with the progressive change in the universal dynamism; it cannot meet continually

Nature's demand or keep pace with her; it gets out of the current. At a certain point of this growing disparity and disharmony between the form and the force that presses upon it, a complete dissolution of the form is unavoidable. A new form must be created; a new harmony and parity made possible. This is the true significance of death and this is its use in Nature. But if the form can become more quick and pliant and the cells of the body can be awakened to change with the changing consciousness, there would be no need of a drastic dissolution, death would be no longer inevitable.

MCW 3:36-37

The last sentence reminds me of one of the Mother's comments in *About Savitri*: Book One Canto Four, which she gave in 1969. First she recited these lines from *Savitri*:

*Ever surround our brief existence here
Grey shadows of unanswered questionings;
The dark Inconscient's signless mysteries
Stand up unsolved behind Fate's starting line;
An aspiration in the Night's profound,
Seed of a perishing body and half-lit mind,
Uplifts its lonely tongue of conscious fire
Towards an undying Light for ever lost.
Only it hears, sole echo of its call,
The dim reply in man's unknowing heart
And meets, not understanding why it came
Or for what reason is the suffering here,
God's sanction to the paradox of life
And the riddle of the Immortal's birth in Time.*

(p.50)

The explanation of the Mother, which I took down on the tape-recorder, ran:

So long the physical, the body itself, did not have the contact with the Divine; consequently it does not have the hope that one day its consciousness also will be transformed and be the right expression of the Divine Life.

On the morning of 23rd April 1971 I went to the Mother. While revising the above exposition, she remarked that what she had said previously was not true now. She asked me to put a note, thus:

This can no more be said.

I believe this meant that the cells of her body had become conscious of the divine Light. I was really perplexed at that time when I took down the note the Mother dictated. But after she had left her body, she gave me numerous experiences which made me understand a little of what she had realised. None of us can claim a cellular Consciousness of the Divine, but, of course, one can feel one's very body responding to the inner realities. Though it is pretty difficult to put these realities into words, I shall try to narrate one experience of mine.

It was Tuesday 10th June 1975. Late at night I went consciously out of my body. It was my subtle body which wandered in a marvellous place – nothing was earthly. Everything in that world was exquisite, wonderful beyond words. I was enraptured by its beauties and great serenity.

I wanted some shelter where I could get a bit of repose. Meanwhile, I saw a strange kind of vehicle. Some beings were there – they looked like human beings but they were not so. I asked them to give me a lift. They said there was no place for me in that carriage. So without care I flew high into space – crossing the most magnificent trees adorned by lustrous flowers – some were golden, some were pink and white and of a silver colour. They had different shapes, but I remember distinctly the shape of magnolia. I also traversed stupendous snow-capped mountains shimmering with rainbow colours. The entire panorama was breath-taking. After that I landed near a silvery river. There I saw a white boat. I asked some beings to let me in. They refused. I thought to myself: “Why do these beings go on denying me? What have I done?” Then it dawned on me that if they had taken me with them, I would not have been able to return to my physical body. So this proved that the Mother was constantly with me.

I floated over the water without any effort, and was moving side by side with the boat. Then once again I soared up into an enormous space, crossing the fleecy clouds, glimmering stars and shining moon. The air was vibrant and perfumed.

Suddenly I thought that I should know whether my physical body was conscious of this sublime experience. I came back into my body. To my astonishment I felt concretely an overwhelming delight and happiness – every pore of my body quivered – responded and thrilled with this unknown and blissful impression. Not only that, but I felt my body ice-cold. I was shivering with chill in spite of the hottest night of June in Pondicherry. (I do not have an air-conditioner for it does not suit me.)

Now I knew that my body was aware. Once again I left my body and took off to a still higher realm. This time I heard an ethereal music from a far beatitude. I too sang in perfect harmony as I flew higher and higher. But the link between my physical body and subtle body was intact because in my sleep I felt my physical lips moving as if I was attuning myself to the notes of that music. My subtle body swam in ecstasy amidst these melodious and luminous vibrations charged with the divine Light. My flying did not stop. I entered into the domain of my soul. No words are adequate to describe the splendour of my true home....

Once again I entered my physical body. It was shaking with celestial joy and rapture. This gorgeous experience remained in my body for at least one week.

I have already mentioned one of my experiences in the booklet *Matrimandir – The Mother's Truth and Love*. I had it when the Mother was in her body. I related it to her:

On 26th December 1969 I went to the Mother to hear the New Year music. There was also a message given by Her:

The World is preparing for a great change. Will you help?

That day happened to be one of my days with the Mother. We were working on *About Savitri*. She recited from *Savitri* only one passage, for it was very long. After the work she read my prayer, and on the same sheet of paper she wrote :

It will be realised by the Supreme Power and Love.

That very night I had a wonderful vision. I went out of my body. My

subtle body went soaring up and up in an enormous space. There were the moon and stars. The atmosphere was very light, cool and soothing. I felt free like a bird. I did not realise how far I went up but now I could no longer see the moon and stars, I was beyond the heavenly bodies. There was endless space before me. Suddenly I saw something shining from the far horizon. I headed towards the glow. Now I was not soaring up vertically – my movement was as if I were swimming in a vast space. I was coming closer and closer to my destination. My first glance fell on two huge Suns. The one on the right was golden yellow and the other on the left was golden red. Their edges were touching and mingling with each other. I came still closer, crossing an immense lake which was packed with diamond-like lotuses and emerald leaves. The reflection of the two Suns added glory to the breath-taking beauty of the marvellous scene which was spread out like a panorama before my eyes.

I was now floating a little above the lake. Its coolness enveloped my subtle body. Here the Divine had strewn lavishly her exquisite Beauty and Wonder and Quietude. The divine vibrations were overwhelming. I was engulfed by the new consciousness.

I reached the Suns. Their Force and Power were absolutely still and calm. Then I saw a narrow passage between the two Suns. I entered it, and on the other side I saw a golden world. There was nothing there except golden Light. I landed slowly on the divine soil, but to my surprise I was a little above it : I could not set my feet there. I was not walking but floating in this enchanting atmosphere. I came across a few luminous beings who were active, but their activities were without any sound. Everything was heavenly. There I felt the perfect Consciousness, Harmony, Peace, Beauty and Silence. I was simply bathed in the golden Light, in the soothing vibrations of a quiet joy and happiness. I roamed here and there freely, and silently communicated with the beings. Nothing felt new or strange to me, because I identified myself completely with this magnificent World of Golden Light.

I was reluctant to come back here to the dark world of falsehood. But alas, next morning I found myself lying in my bed. I felt extremely sorry and lost, and shed a few silent tears.

At once I remembered the whole passage from *Savitri* which the Mother had recited the previous morning and on which she had given her comment. The passage recounts an experience of Aswapati, the Yogi-King, father of Savitri.

*A glimpse was caught of things for ever unknown:
The letters stood out of the unmoving Word:
In the immutable nameless Origin
Was seen emerging as from fathomless seas
The trail of the Ideas that made the world,
And, sown in the black earth of Nature's trance,
The seed of the Spirit's blind and huge desire
From which the tree of cosmos was conceived
And spread its magic arms through a dream of space.
Immense realities took on a shape:
There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown
The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born
And tries to gain from the mortal's mind and soul
A deathless body and a divine name.
The immobile lips, the great surreal wings,
The visage masked by superconscient Sleep,
The eyes with their closed lids that see all things,
Appeared of the Architect who builds in trance.
The original Desire born in the Void
Peered out; he saw the hope that never sleeps,
The feet that run behind a fleeting fate,
The ineffable meaning of the endless dream.
Hardly for a moment glimpsed viewless to Mind,
As if a torch held by a power of God,
The radiant world of the everlasting Truth
Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night
Above the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge.
Even were caught as through a cunning veil
The smile of love that sanctions the long game,
The calm indulgence and maternal breasts
Of Wisdom suckling the child-laughter of Chance,
Silence, the nurse of the Almighty's power,
The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word,*

*And of the Timeless the still brooding face,
And the creative eye of Eternity.*

Savitri, p.40-41

The Mother's comment ran :

All these images are meant to break the ordinary receptivity of the mind and to open it to the conception – vaster, truer, creative – of the Supramental.

It is only in a receptive silence, when the whole inquisitive mind stops moving, that one can feel and understand the images described in these verses.

I felt strongly that my vision of the Golden World was a glimpse which the Mother had given me, and that actually she had taken my consciousness there.

But according to our human nature, I thought that the vision might be some kind of mental formation by myself; or it could be simply a dream. I wrote to the Mother in order to make sure, because what I had seen had the look of something living which I can never forget.

She answered:

*Happily, the true worlds
and the true Consciousness
are not a dream,
but the only real Reality
for those who are sincere
and conscious.*

Happily, the true worlds and the true consciousness are not a dream, but the only real Reality for those who are sincere and conscious.

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother means that the most gross Matter of the physical body should become conscious of the divine Vibrations and the divine Light. This I understood a little by this unforgettable experience.

I can say with confidence that the work the Mother has been doing will never cease. Her living Force is at work more intensely than ever in this world for the purpose of making us – human beings – conscious of our true selves and aware of her incessant work....

In spirituality and in occultism it is not necessary to die in order to obtain any kind of experiences. One can go consciously to other worlds, with the body still alive.

In 1962, when the Mother was teaching me to express through paintings the visions of *Savitri*, it was essential for me to have a little knowledge of the occult worlds, so that I might see, feel and grasp the hidden truths of the poem and express them properly according to the Mother's wish.

During that period I had been going through a tremendous struggle both outwardly and inwardly. She made me an instrument for her various purposes. From the human point of view everything seemed quite out of place, meaningless, useless, hopeless. The Mother and I knew what I had gone through. I lived only because she tied me with her irresistible Love.

I expressed my feeling to the Mother on 13th November 1962. She answered:

Do not fear, there is nothing to misunderstand – the more one begins to have a contact with the Divine Light and Life the more one feels that this earthly life of falsehood is painful.

But this feeling must be used as a stimulant towards the transformation that makes us emerge out of falsehood into the splendour of the Truth.

The sleep of which I had spoken to you is an occult sleep in which one can obtain the capacity of going out of and into one's body at will. It requires much training generally and takes time. But for all that, the first thing to get is peace, peace, peace – inside of course. It is most important.

With all my love.

On 11th September 1963 at about 2.30 a.m. I got up with a shock of terror. I was perspiring profusely. Then I froze with fear. Afterwards I pulled myself together and started writing a letter to the Mother:

My dearest Mother,

I had a frightful dream. There was an isolated white house situated in a vast barren area with small patches of turf here and there. I was roaming about. Then I entered the house. There I saw my own people who did not recognize me. So there was no point in my lingering there. I made my exit. I saw quite a number of familiar faces.

Then to my horror I felt all my teeth fall out, grow again and fall. It was a very strange but palpable experience.

I still rambled on. My curiosity got the better of me – and I went to the basement of the house. There I perceived a tiny hole. To my sheer amazement I saw the most ugly, hideous, filthy, stinky, sticky and dangerous beings come out of it one by one, ready to pounce on me. They were in large numbers. All of them – men, women, children – surrounded me. My stomach somersaulted. I closed my eyes for a moment or two with total disgust. They were stark naked and from their private parts blood and pus were oozing. I was feeling terribly faint and sick. I wondered how they could remain all together in such a cramped recess!

A man who had a grotesque face came very close to me. My blood chilled with panic. He told me: ‘Look here, pretty one, I am the leader and the most attractive and charming among this whole lot. Marry me.’ But he was obnoxious and the ugliest of the lot. Fear was creeping up, paralyzing me. But I composed myself and answered him coolly: ‘I have no inclination to get married to a handsome man like you or to any man in fact. All I want is to get away from this place if you can help me.’

Suddenly all of them shouted: ‘Sure, sure, come with us.’ And they led me to an obscure, ill-smelling and dingy room. Its atmosphere and lethal vibrations were eerie and to me this environment seemed alive with peril. It was a perfect hell. There I saw distorted heads stuck against the grey walls. Red tongues were hanging from their mouths, huge blood-

shot eyes kept staring and some of them had their giant teeth sticking out of their mouths. I shuddered and stood dumb and stricken. My fear increased a hundredfold. But I did not show the slightest glimpse of it to these hostile, nasty, beastly creatures lest they should harass me and scare me to death. The leader asked me to put my head in a hole which was somewhat like a port-hole. He said that I could thus go out. I did as he had asked. And in the flash of a second with a weird weapon he chopped off my head. I could see clearly with my inner eyes the head and body separated. At once a piercing cry from my heart reached the Supreme. I uttered the two Names – Mother, Sri Aurobindo. In a trice my head and body joined together. I opened my eyes gradually and saw the pernicious beings at a distance. Now they could not dare to approach me. They were nervous and alarmed. I got up slowly, looked at them intently and walked out of the chamber of horrors into an open space.

I presume that in that dreadful room there were heads of human beings turned into monstrous faces. It also seemed that they could not return from this gloomy domain. Those ghastly creatures wanted to fix my head also among the rest.

O Mother, I wanted to see the grandeur of the higher worlds and I actually thought before I left my body that I was going there. But I landed in a hellish world, which was not at all my idea...”

The Mother answered the next day:

It is into the subconscious that you went last night; into the subconscious where are accumulated all the past impressions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, fears, disgust, etc., etc. – still hoping to come back to the surface on the first occasion – it is the world of concentrated falsehood where all is distorted, falsified, degraded. It is one of the places where the Divine is not only denied and unknown but violently disobeyed and rejected.

Before going to sleep, pray not to go there again, and to remain under the Divine Protection.

On my side I shall do what can be done to help.

This subconscious world is one of the places where wander those who have put an end violently to their physical life. It is wiser to avoid going there at all.

I wondered why my teeth had fallen out in that subconscious world. I came across Sri Aurobindo's explanation (to Amal) in his *Letters on Yoga*:

Symbolically, if the dream is symbolic, the falling of teeth means the disappearance of old fixed mental habits belonging to the physical mind.

SABCL 23:986:

I remembered to have taken ill for a few days after this wretched experience. I was utterly shaken. But, thank God, I did not go there again. The Mother must have done the needful.

Nevertheless, I do not regret the terrifying experiences in my sleep because they were useful both outwardly and inwardly.

I call to mind the date – 6th April 1965 – when I went to the Mother in the morning. She saw the paintings of *Savitri, Book Seven – The Book of Yoga*, and said with a happy smile:

They are really successful.

Then she pointed out one of the pictures in which I had painted beasts, snakes and grotesque and malicious beings. She asked:

Child, do you see all these beings? Because they are exactly as in reality in that world.

I answered: “Yes, Mother, sometimes I have glimpses of these creatures but mostly I have painted them according to the feeling of the inspiration.”

A sweet smile spread across her charming face. Well, it was only because of her inner and outer guidance that I could bring authenticity into the paintings. Above all, the Mother protected me constantly.

It is a great pity when some human beings get lost in those hideous and hazardous worlds.

I cannot resist quoting a few lines from *Savitri*, Book Two, Canto Seven:

*Only were safe who kept God in their hearts:
Courage their armour, faith their sword, they must walk,
The hand ready to smite, the eye to scout,
Casting a javelin regard in front,
Heroes and soldiers of the army of Light.* (p. 211)

Shortly afterwards I wrote another letter to the Mother, because the horrid experience of the subconscious which I had gone through was still haunting me.

Mother, dear, if the world of the subconscious is not conquered, the substances from there are likely to come over and over again. I feel that there is no use in overlooking or suppressing them. These nether worlds must be overcome. Please, Mother, make me surmount these terrible worlds of falsehood.

The Mother answered:

This is quite true.

In the same letter I continued:

Mother, the other day I had a dream-vision of a red-gold snake – very humble and lucent. It moved smoothly in a golden Light. It was simply fabulous. Its tail was up and the head down trying to touch the dark worlds. I really wish the head could touch all these coarse subconscious depths; then the falsehood will disappear from the earth-consciousness. How wonderful that would be!

She wrote back:

It is indeed the Supramentalised Energy.

The Mother's remark somewhat reminds me of what she has been reported as saying in *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Part Seven, p.131:

... The serpent, now luminous, – pure and free energy – can enter the body again, this time with its head down and tail up. It enters blazing, illumining with its superconscious

light the centres one by one, giving man a richer and richer consciousness, energy and life, transforming the being more and more. The Light comes down easily enough to the heart region; then the difficulty begins, the regions below gradually become darker and denser and it is a hard task for the Light to penetrate as it goes further down. If it succeeds in reaching the bottom of the spine, it has achieved something miraculous. But there is a further progress necessary, if man – and the world with him – is to realize a wholly transformed supraconscious life. In other words, the Light must touch and enter not only the physical stratum of our being but the others too that lie below, the subconscious and inconscient. That has been till now a sealed dungeon, something impossible to approach and tackle.

And yet it is not an impossibility. Not only it is not impossible, we have to make it possible. Not only so, man's destiny demands that it should be inevitable....

I continued writing to the Mother: “I feel sure that you will make my soul attain the Supreme Truth and the Supreme Love...”

The Mother wrote:

Yes.

I expressed my ardent wish: “Mother, I shall have to reach my goal – otherwise my soul will never keep quiet.”

She replied:

Yes, your soul wants the whole being to be free.

Lastly I prayed to her: “O Mother, let it be realised. I am yours in all love.” She promised me:

This is exactly what I am doing.

With a ceaseless love.

Huta

(To be continued)

(The Mother's letters and talks to Huta are © Huta D. Hindocha)

Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni:
1933-2007



Dr. Nadkarni at Savitri Bhavan on April 14, 2007

On September 23rd, 2007, Savitri Bhavan lost a very dear and great friend – Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni – who succumbed to a heart attack in the early morning hours at his home in Pondicherry. We share this loss not only with his immediate family members, but also with the large extended family of all those who looked up to him as a guide and mentor, who benefitted from his illuminating teachings and writings, the many people who organised the calendar of their year around his Study Camps at the Beach Office of the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. All of these will feel the gap left in their lives by his unexpected passing.

The connection between Savitri Bhavan and Dr. Nadkarni dates back to 1995. One of our founder-members, Franz, used to be a regular attender of the *Savitri* Study Camps which Nadkarni-ji had been holding in Pondicherry since 1989. Franz invited him to come and talk with us. On the first visit, Dr. Nadkarni came alone, sat with us under the trees – for at that time no building had yet been manifested – and shared with us in a very spontaneous and moving way his love for Sri Aurobindo’s masterwork. He told us, “I like to talk about *Savitri* because I love to be in the atmosphere of this wonderful poem, and these lectures give me the chance to share that experience with other enthusiasts.” After that, each time that he held a study camp on *Savitri* in Pondicherry, on the last day in the afternoon he used to come out to Savitri Bhavan and give us a summary of what had been studied throughout the camp. As his regular students came to know about this, many of them started arranging their own transport and coming out to Auroville to join this happy occasion. After a few such experiences it was decided that in future the closing session of each of his Camps could be held at Savitri Bhavan. This happened for the first time on August 25th 1999. Dr. Nadkarni concluded the camp with a study of the last Canto of Book Seven : The Discovery of the Cosmic Spirit and the Cosmic Consciousness. With the help of the Sri Aurobindo Society team, a wonderful celebratory atmosphere was created for the 300-odd people who attended. And these celebrations continued regularly over the years. The last one took place on March 5th 2007, the day before Dr. Nadkarni’s 74 birthday.

But this was not the last time that he visited Savitri Bhavan. He had accepted to become a member of our new “Advisory Group”, along with other wise friends and advisors. The first meeting of this group was held on April 14th 2007, and the photo at the head of this article was taken on that day.

Our most recent contact came shortly after the completion of the last Study Camp he held at the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry, in August 2007, on Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita*. The transcript of the talk he had given at Savitri Bhavan on March 5th 2007 needed to be revised for publication in this issue of *Invocation*. This work he completed in the first week of September. Then came his last gift to us, a review of Savitri Bhavan’s first book-length publication, *Savitri*:

The Mother, by Professor M.V. Seetaraman, which Nadkarni-ji had kindly agreed to write for the SABDA Newsletter. I thanked him on the phone for this on September 18th, after receiving the text for publication. This review may have been Dr. Nadkarni's last writing on *Savitri*.

Our gratitude for all that he has done for *Savitri*-lovers and for Savitri Bhavan goes beyond words.

We know from what the Mother has told us, that every soul chooses to leave the body at its destined time, and that there is nothing to regret or grieve over when the being moves on to what Sri Aurobindo calls its '*internatal sleep*'. And yet we cannot help feeling the passing of Dr. Nadkarni as a great loss, for it seemed that he still had so much to give. It reminds us of the basis for the Mother's battle to overcome the inevitability of physical mortality : when a really rich individuality has been built up, carrying a wealth of experience, knowledge, insight, influence, consciousness, capacity to contribute to the Divine Work and the forward march of humanity, what a pity that it should have to be dissolved simply because of the limitations of the as-yet-untransformed flesh! But of course we believe that the essence of all that has been developed remains and moves forward to greater conquests.

Dr. Nadkarni was born on March 6, 1933. For his 60th birthday some of the distinguished scholars who had been his students brought out a book in his honour. The essays in *Applied Linguistics* assembled there are prefaced by a fascinating interview with Nadkarni-ji, conducted by the chief editor, P.N. Paranjape. For the interest of our readers, we reproduce part of it here, with grateful acknowledgements to the editors and publishers¹.

¹ *Explorations in Applied Linguistics*, P.N. Paranjape *et al.* Pune, 1995, pp. 1-2, 9-12.

A Dialogue with Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni

P.N. Paranjape

PNP: To begin with, would you please tell us something about your childhood? Where and how did you spend it? Can you recollect any significant experiences which proved crucial in your later development?

MVN: I spent my childhood in a little village in coastal Karnataka – in a most picturesque part of the west coast where the Sahyadri mountains hug the Arabian sea. I had a very happy childhood. My village was just about waking up from the long slumber of feudalism and I grew up in that milieu of a society in transition. The reawakening of the national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression, or what is sometimes called the Indian renaissance, had just begun to stir the village community in that remote corner of India. Literature, folk art, spiritual lore, music, and sports – these kept me enthralled during my school days. I was fortunate in having as my teachers at the secondary school some very distinguished men of letters and the influence of some of them proved decisive in my later life. Some of them gave a powerful impetus to my imaginative life, some others taught me the sheer excitement of ideas, and one of them put me firmly on the path to an inner quest.

PNP: Did your career shape up as a result of your college education? Who were some of the teachers who influenced you the most?

MVN: The obsessive interest I always took in games and sports very nearly ruined my educational career at college. However, it did not turn out to be a complete disaster partly because of the sound educational foundation which I had acquired in my secondary school, and partly because I was plain lucky. Most of the teachers who influenced me deeply belong to my school days. During my college career I had an outstanding man of letters, an educationist and a great teacher of literature for my

hero – Professor V.K. Gokak. But his influence was indirect: I was his student in the formal sense hardly for a year.

* * *

PNP: Why and when did you turn to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? Would you trace for us your progress on that path?

MVN: This turning was gradual and it began in my mid-twenties. I turned to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy because I found it intellectually the most liberating and satisfying. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is neither for the world-weary nor for those whose minds are so befuddled that they can't see the turban of doubt on the head of every purely rational, mental theory about man, nature and reality.

If by my 'progress on the path', you mean the progress I have made on the path of Yoga, let me say this. I find it interesting that this is a question that gets thrown at me quite a bit; it is a well-mannered way used by some of my cynical friends of being sarcastic about my interest in spiritual philosophy and in spiritual matters in general. The factual answer to this question is very difficult to give; at least I can't give it about myself and then again, it cannot be of much use to other people, so it is not a very profitable question either to ask or to answer. But having said this, I should also point out that there is nothing exceptional or unique in that I am on the path of yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo, there is nobody here who is not a yogi, who is not on the path of Yoga. After all what is Yoga if not Nature in the process of the evolution of consciousness? This progressive evolution of consciousness began with the state of seemingly inconscient Matter, and moved on to semi-conscient Life in trees and plants, and then to conscient life in animals and then to self-conscient mental consciousness in man. Which one of us has his existence outside of evolutionary Nature? Whether we know it or not, we are all participants in this process of the evolution of consciousness. And thus we are all yogis. This evolution in which all of us are participants is an adventure of consciousness. If the animal is the living laboratory in which Nature has worked out man, man himself may be a thinking

and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation Nature intends to work out the perfect manifestation of this evolving consciousness.

PNP: Is spirituality an escape from day-to-day problems? Does it have anything to contribute to nation building?

MVN: Spirituality can be an escape from life, or from what you call 'day-to-day' problems. But in this it is no different from, say, a preoccupation with literature, social service, or with Linguistics or even women's lib. It is the nature of your engagement that determines whether it is a creative engagement with life or a form of escape. In the case of spirituality, it all depends upon why one turns to spirituality, and what one understands by spirituality. If you turn to spirituality because this world has not been kind to you, or if you seek in spirituality a private world into which you can retreat when you find it hard to face the realities of life around you, then it is a form of escape. If, on the other hand, you turn to spirituality because you are not happy with the way of your being and want to discover your real self, the inner being, and live from that consciousness, then it is not an escape from what is called day-to-day problems. For this you need to explore all the dimensions of your consciousness and establish the real 'you' in the place of the present surface 'you' who is confined so much within the shell of the ego. Most of us do not realise that in our present mode of being we cannot see the world or understand it except through this coloured glass of the ego; only some people feel suffocated in the prison-house of the ego. They wish to step out of the fantasy-land of the ego and step into the world of reality. That is genuine spirituality. You can really understand the world and its problems only when you transcend your ego. Once you have really understood the problems of this world, then you can work on them with the resources of your new consciousness.

For me the aim of spirituality is the terrestrial perfection of human life, but such perfection cannot be achieved through the resources of human reason or mental consciousness

operating through the grid of the ego. It requires the resources of a spiritual consciousness. We have today too many people vending answers to problems which they have not really understood. That is why in human history most of the revolutions have failed to realise their promise. This was true of Karl Marx as much as it is of your local politician or moral reformer or religious zealot. Even to know what really afflicts man, one needs the light of the spirit.

As I see it, there are two kinds of spirituality, the world-negating spirituality, and the world-affirming spirituality. Spirituality can be a resource in nation-building only if it is genuinely world-affirming, such as the spirituality of Vyasa in ancient India and of Sri Aurobindo in modern India. Well, for anything like an adequate answer, this question too, like some of your other questions, would need more space than we have here. But for our present purposes this should suffice.

The Kingdom of Subtle Matter, The Glory and the Fall of Life

(Cantos 2 and 3 of Book Two of Savitri)

Talk by Dr. M.V. Nadkarni on March 5, 2007

After a break of three years in our group study of *Savitri*, last year we decided to return to it, and we started this time not with Book One, but with Book Two. This was because among all the Books of *Savitri*, this is one of the Books that has not been studied as widely, not appreciated as much as it deserves to be. In my opinion, some of the finest examples of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual poetry are to be found in this Book, so I felt that we should spend some time on Book Two before taking up anything else. That is why we began with Book Two of *Savitri* last time. But I have this old habit, since all my life I have been a teacher, of starting each study camp with a review of some of the things that are needed as a background to what we propose to study during that camp. That was why, in fact, I began with a quick review of King Aswapati's yoga as described in Cantos 3, 4 and 5 of Book One. This took up most of our time in the camp held last year, and consequently, we ended up studying only one canto of Book Two – the first one, 'The World Stair'.

As a backdrop to the study of Book Two, which consists, as you know, of fifteen cantos in all, covering Aswapati's travel through the Worlds, we need brief answers to questions such as: why did Aswapati undertake this journey, what are these 'other' worlds made of, where are these worlds, and so on. Some of these basic questions we have already discussed at some length earlier, but we may spend a few minutes answering them once again now. By the way, the answers to these questions are mostly to be found in Chapter 21 of Part 2 of *The Life Divine*.

Sri Aurobindo, while explaining how these worlds came about,

gives us his version of the genesis of this creation, how it came into existence. And his perspective on this is one with that of the Vedic Rishis. His account of the creation of this universe corresponds closely with what these Rishis have said, for example, in the *Purusha Sukta*, which occurs in the Rig Veda, the 10th mantra, the 19th verse. In the *Purusha Sukta*, it is said that the Divine first took a plunge and became the Inconscient, and from the Inconscient the world has been evolving. Sri Aurobindo looks upon it as the sacrifice of the Divine as World-Mother. That is basically the central idea. We have talked about it several times, so I won't go into all the details of it, but just quote a few lines from *Savitri* to show the correspondence between it and the *Purusha Sukta* :

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

What Sri Aurobindo holds is that the Divine did not take a precipitous plunge from the Superconscient to the Inconscient, but gradually descended step by step, as it were, from level to level, bringing into existence a “World Stair” consisting of seven steps. This again is basically a Vedic concept. The highest stair is called “Sat” – Truth or Existence; Anna, or Matter is the lowest rung of this stair. Between Matter and Satya (or Sat) there are five other steps. They are, in the descending order : Chit-Tapas (Consciousness-Force); Jana (Bliss); Vignana – what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind; then Mind and then Life. In taking this plunge, we are told, the Divine gradually lost or divested himself of all his characteristic features of Sat, Chit and Ananda. The Divine's very nature is immortality, total knowledge, and delight or bliss. In taking this plunge into Inconscience, all these qualities were lost, and the manifestation took on their exact opposites as its characteristic features. The Divine accepted to be governed by death, incapacity, ignorance and pain and suffering. This is the sacrifice of the Divine, through which act was born this creation.

When we use the English word ‘sacrifice’, there is always the idea in it that one has given up something very dear to him, for the sake of a greater cause. But the Divine does not need anything, and he does not have to give anything up. A singer sings, a painter paints, and they do it all for delight. What does the Divine do? He creates like a supreme artist for its own sake. And this mode of creation can be seen as a process of involution followed by evolution.

This means that once the descent, the process of involution, has been completed, the ascending process of evolution starts. It begins from the Inconscient. If the Inconscient itself is a formation of the Divine, the tendency, the urge it has for ascent, for growing upward, cannot be suppressed for very long. That is why, whenever in the course of human history there has been an attempt to banish the aspiration for the Divine, it has come back with a redoubled force. It is not a matter of you and me aspiring for the Divine. It is rather the earth aspiring for the Divine through you and me. We are all participants in this cosmic yoga. Since we are channels of this cosmic yoga the aspiration for the Divine is built into us, and therefore it can never be suppressed for long. The Divine too doesn’t burst out of the Inconscient precipitously; that process too is a gradual unfolding. And this ascent to consciousness of the Divine is called evolution. And this ascent also follows the steps of another stairway which also has seven rungs, from Anna (Matter) to Life, to Mind, to Supermind, and then Ananda, Chit and finally Sat – this is the ascent. Thus there seems to be a double stairway.

Sri Aurobindo has made wonderful poetry out of all this. Modern physics also talks about these very things in its own language. It talks about the Big Bang, out of which this creation emerged. What happened after the Big Bang? A powerful whirl of energies emerged, and it took billions of years before an atom could be formed; it must have taken billions of years more before our Sun could be formed. These are all subjects for research in the sophisticated laboratories of the leading universities in the world. If someone gives us a book on this subject, most of us are likely to set it aside because we are bound to find it too prosaic and technical. But Sri Aurobindo has made this saga of evolutionary history into an exciting subject-matter for his

poetry. One of the claims I normally make in this context is that in no other literature of the world has great poetry been made out of the evolutionary journey of this creation. So Sri Aurobindo is a great poet, among other things, also of evolution. Evolution is hardly regarded as a subject matter for poetry – there is nothing thrilling about Evolution, is there? It is basically the story of early forms of life, first of the blooming of vegetation on earth, and then of slimy creatures growing up into animals, and of so many years wasted on this ascent, from the earlier states until evolution brings out man. Nature takes its own time, and there is so much effort wasted. But Sri Aurobindo does not find anything wasteful, because he sees behind this so-called wasteful effort of Nature the wizardry of a supreme craftsman, of the Divine. The Divine’s magic has been working through all this. Therefore he is thrilled – and if you are thrilled by any subject, then it is an occasion for poetry. And that is why Sri Aurobindo has made great poetry out of the most unlikely kind of subjects. This seems to apply particularly to Book Two : what a subject for making poetry! And he has done it so beautifully. I will read just a few lines to show this.

*A spirit dreamed in the crude cosmic whirl,
Mind flowed unknowing in the sap of life
And Matter’s breasts suckled the divine Idea.
A miracle of the Absolute was born;
Infinity put on a finite soul,
All ocean lived within a wandering drop,
A time-made body housed the Illimitable.
To live this Mystery out our souls came here.* (p. 101)

We have come here on earth as finite beings, like so many tiny drops of water from the ocean, but the purpose of our coming here is not to be snuffed out – a drop, how long can it survive? – but to remain a drop, a small, finite form. Physically we may not grow larger than what we are today, and yet be able to capture in this drop the glories of the infinite. That is why we are here. Nobody is going to be infinite physically; but remaining finite physically here and yet be able to manifest God’s infinite perfection! That is what we see happening here. And this entire prospect is so exciting for Sri Aurobindo, and therefore he is interested in every detail of this process: where a

particular brick was laid, how much cement was used, by Nature in creating this universe – and out of this comes this wonderful poetry here.

Now, as Aswapati's exploration of the evolutionary stair proceeds, the first world he explores – there are seven planes of worlds that Aswapati explores – is the subtle physical world. That is described in Canto Two of Book Two. Now what about the gross physical world? The gross physical world is the world in which you and I live, a world which is quite familiar to us, palpable to us. Has Sri Aurobindo written anything about it? Well, if you remember, Sri Aurobindo grew up in England as a boy. He was educated there at a time when the gospel of the supremacy of physical nature, also known as Materialism, held its sway in the intellectual world. That gospel proclaimed that the gross physical is the only reality there is. This view came to be known as Materialism. Sri Aurobindo lived in England at the time when Materialism was the dominant philosophy in the western world, and he had studied it. He had seen its inadequacies as well as its strengths, and in *Savitri* there are several passages, particularly in Book Ten, dealing with Materialism. There is a long discussion between the god of Death and Savitri, where there is a lot of criticism and a lot of appreciation of the materialistic view of life, what it has brought to mankind and in what respects it is inadequate. But since this does not appear in Book Two which we are studying we will not go into it now. Here in Book Two Sri Aurobindo leaves aside the gross physical, and so Aswapati enters the world of the subtle physical.

Now, a few words about the subtle physical : this world is not easily perceptible to the human senses except for those who have developed the yogic vision. It is believed that great artists have a capacity to sneak into this world sometimes, without even being aware of what they are doing. It is also believed that through Hathayoga one can acquire faculties which will make it possible for you to operate in the subtle physical world. It is a world of exquisitely beautiful forms. Everything there is very beautiful. What is merely beautiful here in our gross world, Sri Aurobindo says, is divine in that world. And that world also contains the pure archetypes which stand behind all phenomena manifest here in the physical world. Before anything

manifests here, it first takes shape in the subtle physical, and from the subtle physical it precipitates itself onto this gross physical world. But there is no guarantee that everything that manifests in the subtle physical will necessarily manifest in the gross physical. There can be ‘many a slip between the cup and the lip’: something can go wrong. That explains why people see that a certain event is going to take place, they have seen it in the subtle physical. But by the time it takes place here in the gross physical it has changed its character, it has become somewhat different. This has baffled many people. They even asked this question to Sri Aurobindo, “How did this happen?” He said that there is no guarantee that everything that appears in the subtle physical will appear in the gross physical in the same form.

So that is the subtle physical world, a world of great beauty. And Sri Aurobindo says that whenever an artist gets an inspiration, or a painter, or a sculptor, they all get this inspiration because somehow, without their knowing, they have been able to contact beings or forms or forces in the subtle physical. But you cannot command these forces or beings, you are at their mercy: they come to you whenever they choose to do so. Otherwise, each one of us would have been a great poet – but it doesn’t happen that way.

That world is also a protecting roof over this physical world. All the time, forces are pouring down on us from the higher worlds and we do not have the capacity to contain many of them. So the subtle physical functions as a kind of protecting roof, and only certain kinds of forces are allowed to descend, mostly only those which we can bear. That is one of the functions of the subtle physical. There is a beautiful description of this on page 103, lines 7 to 18.

*A fine degree in wonder’s hierarchy,
The kingdom of subtle Matter’s faery craft
Outlined against a sky of vivid hues,
Leaping out of a splendour-trance and haze,
The wizard revelation of its front.
A world of lovelier forms lies near to ours,
Where, undisguised by earth’s deforming sight,
All shapes are beautiful and all things true.*

*In that lucent ambience mystically clear
The eyes were doors to a celestial sense,
Hearing was music and the touch a charm,
And the heart drew a deeper breath of power.* (p. 103)

One of the interesting things about Sri Aurobindo's Aswapati is that no matter where he is – for he often visits worlds which are happier than this earth, and he enjoys being in those worlds, but wherever he is, the thoughts of earth and its difficult plight do not leave him. Even when he is far away from earth in a totally different region, his thoughts often turn to earth : “Poor earth – why can't it acquire some of this glory? What can I do to bring something of this glory down to earth?” The thought of the earth, that the earth has to grow beyond its present state, and what he should do for this – these thoughts are constantly uppermost in Aswapati's mind. When he talks about the subtle physical world, he asks “Can this beauty be taken to earth? Is it worth the effort of making earth share in this glory?” But Sri Aurobindo is never despondent about the earth. He knows every fault of earth-consciousness, every fault of human beings. But he believes that, no matter how imperfect the earth is, the earth has something which no other world has. And what is this? The earth is the only ‘*nurse of souls*’ (p. 107). Souls are nursed here. This is the only evolutionary world. Even if you are a god – and I'm sure that some of you are, although you don't know it – if you want to evolve any higher, you have to come down to our world, wear a human body, and only then can you go beyond your present status. So he says, ‘Earth is a wonderful place! Don't look at its present situation; look at the potential the earth has : this is a nursery of souls. This is where gods will be created, perfect beings will be created.’ And so he is always hopeful about the future, and he says on page 107, lines 163-172:

*This mire must harbour the orchid and the rose,
From her blind unwilling substance must emerge
A beauty that belongs to happier spheres.
This is the destiny bequeathed to her,
As if a slain god left a golden trust
To a blind force and an imprisoned soul.*

*An immortal godhead's perishable parts
She must reconstitute from fragments lost,
Reword from a document complete elsewhere
Her doubtful title to her divine Name.*

(p. 107)

But Aswapati cannot rest contented even with this ravishingly beautiful subtle physical world. It is rather like a beautiful exhibition hall: beautiful things, everything is nice. But he has not come here for amusement, he has not come just to look at beautiful things. He has twin purposes, two purposes, for which he has undertaken this journey. One purpose is that he knows that all these worlds – earth as the lowest rung, and then the higher worlds . . . many vital worlds, many mental worlds, there are many many worlds on different planes – are all interconnected. Not only are they interconnected, but the forces and beings from the higher worlds also constantly act on our world, the earth. Some of these forces are benign, they help us in our growth, they bring great blessings to us; but some of them are malignant forces, and they also sometimes come down on earth. For example, Sri Aurobindo has said that what happened in Germany in the late thirties was a descent of many of these malignant forces which corrupted people there and made them behave the way they did. Otherwise, Germans are very nice people. If there is anywhere in the world where Sanskrit studies were taken seriously and Kalidas was studied seriously and the greatest of compliments were paid to Kalidas, it was in Germany. But what happened to all those nice, liberal people? Sometimes even such societies are invaded by the malignant forces, and the result of this invasion was too, too obvious. So Sri Aurobindo was interested in what exactly happens when such malignant forces come. From where do they come? Can we stop them? He was interested in all these things. So he was interested in finding out all these worlds, so that our earth can be kept safe from these malignant forces. We won't go into it now, but once he knew this tendency of the malignant forces, he spent many years fighting something in the human consciousness which keeps inviting them.

The second purpose of Aswapati's exploration of these worlds was that he had seen that this earth had come from the Divine, and that it was going one day to reach the Divine's perfection. When?

When will this happen? What does earth need to get there? So in these worlds he is exploring, he is looking for a Force, a creative principle, that can be brought down to earth so that earth's life can be transformed. Human beings have been waiting for millennia, avatars have come, great people have come, social reformers have come, saints have come, but basically human life has remained the same. The same limitations bind it today as they did one or two millennia ago. Can this be changed? That is why he is undertaking this journey through the worlds. He doesn't find this force of redemption anywhere in the manifested world, and so in Book Three he enters the Transcendental world where he meets the supreme Divine Mother. This is also where he sees the supramental world, which has not yet manifested, and he persuades the Divine Mother to bring down to earth the supramental force. These are the twin purposes of his journey.

Aswapati does not find in the subtle physical world what he is seeking. He finds that this world is a “*world of faultless beauty that comes by nature's grace*”. “*a fantasy of perfect line and rule*”, but he also finds that it is a world which “*had no grace of error or defeat, it had no room for fault, no power to fail.*” He realises that this is not what he is seeking. Everything is predetermined here, there is no scope for making errors and for further growth and evolution. He realises that this is a sterile world. The poet has described Aswapati's dissatisfaction with this world in these words:

*A perfect picture in a perfect frame,
This faery artistry could not keep his will:
Only a moment's fine release it gave;
A careless hour was spent in a slight bliss.
Our spirit tires of being's surfaces,
Transcended is the splendour of the form;
It turns to hidden powers and deeper states.
So now he looked beyond for greater light.* (p. 115)

When Aswapati finds that the subtle-physical world is like an amusement park and there is nothing very much there, he decides to move on. He leaves that world and goes on to the higher worlds.

The next higher worlds are basically kingdoms of Life, the vital worlds. In the fifteen cantos of Book Two, as many as seven cantos are assigned to the description of the life worlds. There are various levels here. There are also great worlds of falsehood and evil. All are part of this plane, and he goes through all of them. The life world is very complex. We now move on to the next canto, Canto Three, which is entitled “The Glory and the Fall of Life”.

This is a fairly long canto of about 17 pages. We have here a most wonderful description of the chief characteristic of the Vital. What is the chief characteristic of the Vital? It does not like inertness of any kind. It is always active, kinetic. It is always trying out new things. Thus it is characterised by an inexhaustible variety and creativity, a reckless passion for change, an insatiable hunger for the new. It is like the urge to climb Everest : why do we have to climb it? It is motivated by our sense of adventure – always trying to do things no one has done before. Life tries to expand in all directions, and since there seems to be no control or guidance for this outburst, creation is followed by destruction. But Life is so blind that it cannot always distinguish between creation and destruction. It just goes on creating, acting, destroying, creating This is something Sri Aurobindo has described very beautifully. How can you make poetry out of it? This is on page 117, lines 43 to 61; just listen to this :

*A huge inconsequence was her action's law,
As if all possibility must be drained,
And anguish and bliss were pastimes of the heart.
In a gallop of thunder-hooved vicissitudes
She swept through the race-fields of Circumstance,
Or, swaying, she tossed between her heights and deeps,
Uplifted or broken on Time's inconstant wheel.
Amid a tedious crawl of drab desires
She writhed, a worm mid worms in Nature's mud,
Then, Titan-statured, took all earth for food,
Ambitioned the seas for robe, for crown the stars
And shouting strode from peak to giant peak,
Clamouring for worlds to conquer and to rule.* (p. 117)

Only Sri Aurobindo can write like this!

Note that the vital also has a great friendship with depression, with sorrow. And Sri Aurobindo writes:

*Then, wantonly enamoured of Sorrow's face,
She plunged into the anguish of the depths
And, wallowing, clung to her own misery.
In dolorous converse with her squandered self
She wrote the account of all that she had lost,
Or sat with grief as with an ancient friend.* (p. 117)

This is the first section of Canto Three. In sections two and three of this canto there is a wonderful description of the higher levels of the vital – heavens of various kinds, of delight, of beauty, etc. In these heavens, there is an opulence of all the wonderful things which the Vital would ever want to have. I will just read some of these descriptions, because all I can say about these heavens is that they are more beautiful, more wonderful than anything here on earth, anything we can ever imagine. If you listen to the poetry in which these descriptions are couched, you will get at least some idea of what Sri Aurobindo wants to convey. Take, for instance, lines 109 to 126 on page 119.

*Towered spirals, magic rings of vivid hue
And gleaming spheres of strange felicity
Floated through distance like a symbol world.
On the trouble and the toil they could not share,
On the unhappiness they could not aid,
Impervious to life's suffering, struggle, grief,
Untarnished by its anger, gloom and hate,
Unmoved, untouched, looked down great visioned planes
Blissful for ever in their timeless right.
Absorbed in their own beauty and content,
Of their immortal gladness they live sure.
Apart in their self-glory plunged, remote
Burning they swam in a vague lucent haze,
An everlasting refuge of dream-light,*

*A nebula of the splendours of the gods
Made from the musings of eternity.
Almost unbelievable by human faith,
Hardly they seemed the stuff of things that are.* (p. 119)

In these two sections, there are several pages of such description – of the worlds of delight, the worlds of immortality and happiness, and we wish that at least a little of this could be experienced here on our earth. Then the poet tells us:

*Heaven's joys might have been earth's if earth were pure.
There could have reached our divinised sense and heart
Some natural felicity's bright extreme,
Some thrill of Supernature's absolutes:
All strengths could laugh and sport on earth's hard roads
And never feel her cruel edge of pain,
All love could play and nowhere Nature's shame.
But she has stabled her dreams in Matter's courts
And still her doors are barred to things supreme.* (p. 123)

This is the problem.

There are so many beautiful descriptions. I shall read a few more lines and then move on.

*Creation leaped straight from the hands of God;
Marvel and rapture wandered in the ways.
Only to be was a supreme delight,
Life was a happy laughter of the soul
And Joy was king with Love for minister.* (p. 124)

This leads us to the last section of this Canto, which describes the Fall of Life.

In Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics, when a call rises from earth to higher levels of consciousness, a response normally comes. The next higher level above earth is Life. So when the aspiration for Life goes up from earth, and when earth is ready to receive it, a response

comes down from the Life-world. Similarly when man is ready for the mental consciousness, prayers rise from earth and the response comes from the mental worlds. Now, Sri Aurobindo believes, earth is ready for the supramental consciousness and the aspiration has to rise from earth for the supramental, and then there will be a response from the supramental.

So when there is this call, this prayer for the descent of Life, something from the Life-world comes down. Now Life, often called the 'Vital', is essentially a power derived from the Supreme Divine Mother. It is basically the Chit-Shakti of the Lord, it is Consciousness-Force of the Lord. And therefore, if it is the consciousness force of the Divine it must have as its properties Delight, Immortality and Power. So this great world of Delight, Immortality and Power is now getting ready to descend to earth, to come down to earth. But the poet points out that the earth is owned by Matter. Matter owns this earth. And Matter does not like intrusion by any other power, not even by God. But now Life is keen on coming on earth and bringing to it these great glories of Immortality, Delight, etc. But Matter is adamant and stops this by saying, 'Please stop – you are trespassing into my territory.' Life says, 'Look, there has been a great aspiration from below for my descent, and I am ready to come down with all my opulence to bless this earth.' Matter replies, 'You can come in, but on my conditions.' What are these conditions? Matter says to Life that the conditions it has to accept before it can touch earth and settle down here are Death, Incapacity, Ignorance, and Desire. 'Are you willing to be bound by these rules?' Life has no other choice but to accept these conditions. So Life accepts the conditions. And that is what has really happened. The result is that "*The Might that came upon the earth to bless, Has stayed on earth to suffer and aspire.*" (p. 133)

That is beautifully put in these lines on page 130:

*Life heard the call and left her native light.
Overflowing from her bright magnificent plane
On the rigid coil and sprawl of mortal Space,
Here too the gracious great-winged Angel poured
Her splendour and her swiftness and her bliss,
Hoping to fill a fair new world with joy.*

*As comes a goddess to a mortal's breast
 And fills his days with her celestial clasp,
 She stooped to make her home in transient shapes;
 In Matter's womb she cast the Immortal's fire,
 In the unfeeling Vast woke thought and hope,
 Smote with her charm and beauty flesh and nerve
 And forced delight on earth's insensible frame.
 Alive and clad with trees and herbs and flowers
 Earth's great brown body smiled towards the skies,
 Azure replied to azure in the sea's laugh;
 New sentient creatures filled the unseen depths,
 Life's glory and swiftness ran in the beauty of beasts,
 Man dared and thought and met with his soul the world.
 But while the magic breath was on its way,
 Before her gifts could reach our prisoned hearts,
 A dark ambiguous Presence questioned all.* (p. 130)

There is a dark ambiguous presence here in the heart of Matter. It doesn't easily allow any upward ascent of consciousness along the ladder of evolution. It is this presence that is a constant adversary evolution has had to face at each stage and much later Savitri faces it in the form of the God of Death in Books IX and X of *Savitri*.

*The secret Will that robes itself with Night
 And offers to spirit the ordeal of the flesh,
 Imposed a mystic mask of death and pain.* (p. 130)

This is basically the content of Canto Three. We also looked at one more canto in our study camp this time. In the last two days we also looked at Canto Four. It is one of the longer cantos, it covers 18 pages. When I started trying to make a brief summary of it, I did not know what to leave out. I realised that there was too much here to be summarised briefly and presented towards the end of this concluding session. We will have to come back to it next time. So in my study camp next year, we shall begin with a revision of Canto Four.

Now before I conclude, I would like to make two general points which refer to this part of *Savitri*. One of these I have already touched

upon. The first point is that nobody has written about Evolution as Sri Aurobindo has done. Sri Aurobindo is the world's great poet of Evolution. He has explored evolution at all levels – from the Inconscient to the Superconscient.

In Book Two Canto Four Aswapati takes a plunge into the subconscious of man. And there he sees raw instincts, jostling with one another. There is no beauty there, there is ugliness, there is quarrel, discord So one part of Aswapati's mind comes to the conclusion that this is a useless world. Nothing good can come out of this state – just forget about it. But there is another, a stronger perception that Aswapati has : 'How can this be a useless world? Let us take a closer look at it.' And when he does that he realises that this is not a useless world, that this is the inscrutable way in which the Divine works. This perception takes us all by surprise. But this seems to be the normal way in which the Divine works.

This is happening right now in the world. I don't want to spend too much time speaking about it. If we look at the world, read the newspapers, watch the news, etc., we come to know that there are so many clashes, so many conflicts; there is imminent ecological disaster staring us in the face, and there is no harmony anywhere, in any continent in the world. Everywhere there is disharmony. There seems to be some peace in Europe, probably because they have exhausted themselves in two World Wars. But everywhere else you go – look at Africa : tribal wars. America is involved in another kind of war, Latin America – another kind of war. Everywhere all this is happening. The situation in the Indian subcontinent and its neighbouring countries is well known to all of us. It is easy to apportion blame if you nurse favourite prejudices and dislikes. But if you take a detached view of the whole world, it seems to be in a mess. And therefore many people have concluded that this is a useless world, a hopeless world, you can't do anything about the world. Sri Aurobindo is the only one who says that this is not a hopeless world. It is certainly a world in ferment, it is fermenting, but something is coming out of it, a great aspiration for a new truth, the Supramental truth.

This is something that happens again and again in *Savitri*. Because of this, I have always felt that when Sri Aurobindo was writing *Savitri*

in Pondicherry, unknown to the whole world, he was also doing something to this world. He was not merely writing *Savitri*. Through its words he was leaving behind for posterity a great inspiration, a great force and power that will always support man's evolutionary progress. Many people have had this experience: if you have depression – and depression comes very easily in the modern world – if you feel that everything has gone wrong with your life and with the world, the best antidote for this depression is reading *Savitri* to yourself. How does *Savitri* get this power? It gets this power because Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri* not as great poetry alone, but as a way of permeating the occult world with vibrations of love, vibrations of hope, and vibrations of joy. And that is something that you get out of your reading of *Savitri*. And I am sure that *Savitri* is a bridge to the new world because of what Sri Aurobindo has done for all of us. *Savitri* is only an outer body, this form of *Savitri* is only an outer shell. The spirit of it, he has already deposited in the occult world, and as we proceed on the path shown by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it will be available to us as a resource needed for our onward journey. Sri Aurobindo has left for us in *Savitri* enough help to enable us to move towards the new world on the path of hope, love and joy. *Savitri* has therefore been regarded by many as the golden bridge that will carry us into the new world. Thank you.



Dr. Nadkarni speaking in the new amphitheatre on March 5, 2007

Heroines as Liberators: Sita, Draupadi, Savitri

*Talk by Professor Manoj Das,
March 18, 2007*

It is my firm conviction that in the entire range of the world's great literature, there are no stronger and more astounding women characters than three heroines we meet in the epics of India. They are Savitri, Sita and Draupadi. I continue on the presumption that most of you know the outline of the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, so that these characters can be fully appreciated. First one theoretical point has to be presented. Sri Aurobindo once said in one of his aphorisms :

There are four very great events in history: the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan, and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra.

He is not saying that these are the four greatest events, but very great events.

The siege of Troy created Hellas,...

The great Hellenic culture came out of Homer's epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, composed on the Trojan War.

...the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion (for before there was only meditation and worship),...

When Krishna was born, as you know, he would have been killed; hence overnight the infant was transported to Brindavan across the river Yamuna. As time passed he grew up into a lovely friend of the cowherd boys and the object of supreme attention for the damsels of the village. According to mythology these boys and girls were no

ordinary beings but liberated souls – free from the cycle of birth and death – who deliberately took birth in order to enjoy the physical contact with Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu. It is this relationship between these youths of Brindavan and Krishna that resulted in the development of the Devotional way of approaching the Divine, the Bhakti Yoga.

Christ from his cross humanised Europe. The colloquy at Kurukshetra ...

that is, the Gita – Kurukshetra is the battlefield where Krishna gave the message of the Gita to Arjuna. Significantly, Sri Aurobindo says:

... the colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity.

“Will yet liberate humanity” : this means that the Gita has not yet been fully realised. It has not been fully activated in our life till this day. That explains why one of the major works of Sri Aurobindo is his “Essays on the Gita”.

Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.

Sarcastically Sri Aurobindo is implying that they did of course happen.

When we look into the epic past, the grand old mythical era, sometimes we wonder, was there a time when human and supernatural beings intermixed? I would not call it an infrarational age, but a pre-rational age. As the rational faculty developed, as mind developed and the sense of reasoning dominated the race, Nature did perhaps withdraw some of the great opportunities that were available earlier, for the sake of evolutionary progress. Mind had to realise its full potentiality, reasoning had to build up. But a pre-rational age was there. Mystics believe that there was a time when human beings and supernatural ones, divinities, semi-divinities, interacted among themselves. May I refer to an ancient legend:

A work on the science and art of Drama, according to historians probably the world’s first work of dramaturgy, was written by Bharata Muni, after whom the classical Bharat Natyam is named – that follows the grammar of dance enunciated by him. A projection on

stone of the *Mudras* of the dance can be seen at the famous Nataraja temple in Chidambaram. This great master, Bharata Muni, who lived maybe 3000, 3500 years ago, was obviously a dramatist as well as a director. He wrote a play for which he could find actors in the human community; but when it came to the heroine, the role of Lakshmi, he could find no suitable actress. That was an era when females did act in the plays. It was only much later that men started appearing in female roles. After much effort, when Bharata Muni could find no artiste who could fit the part, he requested Urvasie, the celestial nymph, the most enchanting of all the wonderful members of that genre, to condescend to come down and take up the role of the heroine. She agreed, she came down to his town and played the role, charming the audience, and then departed to her own sphere.

I refer to this possibility of the divinities and semi-divinities palpably mixing with humans because otherwise we cannot explain, we cannot understand the implications, the beauty, and the splendid wisdom that remains embedded in many of the great myths – not only Indian, but Graeco-Roman myths too.

As students of mysticism, all of you know that there are two great powers at work in the world – Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is the Divine proper, undiluted, always awake and conscious divinity – the Supreme Lord, Yogeshwara. Prakriti is the projection of that Divinity constituting the phenomenal creation, but generally forgetting its origin. Thus we have Nature consisting of jungles, rivers, mountains, earth, we have human Nature consisting of the three modes, *sattwa*, *rajas*, *tamas*, we have mind – and the countless manifestations of life – all completely oblivious of their origin.

But deep within Prakriti, this manifestation of Godhead that has completely forgotten itself, there remains the Shakti. That principle of Divinity, apparently asleep, goes on working, and in the course of time we who are subjects of Prakriti, subject to Prakriti's rule, wake up to our real truth, wake up to our inner self, and then the Shakti begins to act as the Divine Mother. Purusha is aloof, he has given freedom to Prakriti to do whatever she likes. But the Shakti, the spirit of Prakriti, the hidden Godhead in Prakriti, has a very very difficult task. On one hand, freedom has been given to Prakriti to do as she likes; on the other hand, the ultimate

goal must not be forgotten. The entire Prakriti has to be one day transformed into its original nature that is Divine. Hence Shakti, the kinetic principle hidden in Prakriti, has to manifest again and again as powerful characters, to liberate the entire Prakriti from the clutches of darkness and ignorance into which the creation had plunged. She has her free will, yet is intricately involved in nature.

The first instance we come across of this action of Shakti, probably the most primeval of the myths of India, known as Daksha Yagna, goes back to the dawn of humanity. According to the Indian tradition, the first demigodly monarch whose daughters brought forth humanity, was known as Daksha. Konkhal, adjacent to Haridwar, was the capital of his domain. He had a hundred daughters, some married to gods, and some married to Rishis – the early Rishis seem to have been emanations – but human beings were yet come into being. Daksha's youngest daughter was named Sati. Daksha had decided to marry her off to one of the godheads. But she would not agree. She had resolved to marry Lord Shiva. Her father would not consent to this – the earliest instance known to us of conflict between the powerful paternal instinct and the free-will of the child. How could Daksha reconcile to his most prized daughter marrying a candidate who had no citadel of his own, who lived almost like a vagrant without even proper clothes, putting on a piece of tiger-skin? All he had as ornaments was a serpent and he lived in the open on the top of Mount Kailas. How can he let his daughter share such a life-style? Nevertheless, Sati married him. And Daksha decided that he would never again even look at the face of his daughter!

Some time passed. One day Daksha organised a great Yajna: a sacred fire sacrifice. As you know, Yajna was a double-edged institution. The real Yajna is human aspiration, the spirit of sacrifice, flames of devotion moving upward, flames of prayer. But everything psychological has a physical corollary. On the surface of our life, on the earth, Yajna is the fire rite, the great purifier. Fire purifies everything. Daksha, with the help of expert priests, convened such an event. His 99 daughters and sons-in-law have been invited, but not Sati and Siva.

The holy mischief-maker, Devarshi Narada – Deva and Rishi at the same time – happens to visit the abode of Siva and, rather surprised,

asks Sati, “How is it that you are still here – instead of being at your parents’ place? Don’t you know that your father is performing a great Yajna and all your sisters and brothers-in-law have gathered there? What about you?”

“Of course I will be there before long!” exclaimed Sati. Narada departed and Sati informed her husband of her intention to proceed to Daksha’s palace. But Shiva warned Sati against taking such a step. “Don’t, please don’t do it! Uninvited, you should not go anywhere.” There was a dialogue between the two, but to cut short the story, Sati said with the force of finality – an utterance that became an unwritten law in Indian tradition – “At no point of time, during the day or at night, a daughter’s entry into her parents’ house can be forbidden!”

For a long, long time, at least up to the beginning of the 20th century, this pronouncement of Sasti held good as a sacred law. Never could a daughter be forbidden to return to her parents – the one place where she has absolutely unquestionable right to shelter when in distress or danger.

So Sati went to attend the ceremony. Who could be a greater feminist? She stood by her will against her father’s and married Shiva. Now she stood by her will against Shiva’s. But then – she is the Divinity involved in ignorant Nature. The moment Daksha sees her he bursts into a tirade, a volley of accusations against Shiva. Sati cannot tolerate that. “Father, please stop ...” But he would not. Sati cannot bear it. She jumps into the sacred fire and sacrifices herself.

The news reaches Shiva. Agitated, Shiva throws his trident to the ground and a myriad supernatural beings spring up. They rush to Daksha’s place and create havoc. The whole Yajna is destroyed. But that is a different story – I won’t go into that. Distraught, Shiva takes up the dead body of Sati and carrying it on his shoulder starts moving all over the then India. Vishnu with his *Sudarshana Chakra*, the celestial whirling wheel, symbolic of the entire creation, revolving time, Kala, the great revolving disc, cut into pieces the dead body of Sati. Wherever a piece of it fell, there sprang up a Shakti temple. Throughout the whole subcontinent, from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari, they were the places sanctified in those remote times by absorbing the physical relics of Sati.

The great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, as Sri Aurobindo explains in his *Foundations of Indian Culture*, are projections of the Vedic truth. The eternal strife between the Devas and the Asuras – the Titanic consciousness and the Divine Consciousness – this is the conflict. And this conflict finds expression through the great events as depicted in the epics. Today we focus on three women characters and their roles in this formidable conflict that continues to this day. They are Savitri, Sita and Draupadi. Are you all aware of the stories of the Mahabharata and Ramayana? It is important to know these epics at least in their bare outlines. They are interesting and very revealing.

Of the three, Savitri is seniormost. In the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata a renowned Rishi, Markandeya, is talking to Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava, in the course of which Yudhishthira, observes, “Have you ever known any woman comparable for her strength of character and determination, to Draupadi?” Says Markandeya, “Yes, I know of one – Savitri, the daughter of Aswapati, the King of Madra.”

Where is Madra? Madra is modern Afghanistan. And Salwa, the kingdom of Prince Satyavan’s father Dyumatsena, the deserts of Rajasthan. What a geographical change!

Since you know about Savitri quite well, I will not go into that episode just now. I come to the Mahabharata, and to the remarkable Draupadi. But first I have to tell you about Sita, because the Ramayana precedes the Mahabharata.

We all know that there were four major epics in the ancient world: Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey Valmiki’s Ramayana and Vyasa’s Mahabharata. The Ramayana is older than the Mahabharata. Sita is the heroine of the Ramayana. Should I go into the story of the Ramayana? It may not be necessary. Sita is the daughter of King Janaka; she is married to Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, and because the father of Rama, Dasaratha, once in a critical moment had unwittingly promised to grant a few boons to his youngest queen Kaikeyi, she suddenly demanded, on the eve of Rama’s coronation as the Crown Prince, that her son Bharata, not Rama, should ascend the throne. What is more, Rama should go into exile for fourteen years.

To uphold his father’s prestige as a man of truth, Rama voluntarily goes into exile. Sita, his wife, follows him, and his younger brother

Lakshmana too. While they are in the forest, the demon king of Lanka manages to kidnap Sita. Rama has to wage a battle to rescue her. That is the very bare outline of the story. In many people an impression prevails that Sita is a very delicate character. In fact some years ago I read a thesis, I received the work for review from a university in the West, in which the writer very clearly stated that Indian womanhood, under the shadow of the influence of Sita, had remained passive, weak and timid. Undoubtedly Indian womanhood has suffered a lot and the observation cannot be summarily dismissed. But what is untrue is what is said about the influence of Sita. Sita is an unusually strong character. All these three characters, Sita, Draupadi and Savitri, are not mere human beings. The human Savitri was born as the daughter of King Aswapati by the Grace of the Goddess Savitri, the presiding deity of Dawn, in response to the prayer of Aswapati and his queen. Sita emerged out of the earth. Draupadi emerged, a fully formed young lady, from a Yajna, a sacrificial fire.

Let us first focus on Sita. King Janaka was ploughing the land as a ritual on an auspicious day when he suddenly found an infant female child, glorious and wondrous! He picked up the infant and nurtured her as his daughter: that is Sita.

When Sita prepares to follow Rama into the forest, she is entreated by everybody not to do so. “Life in the forest is not going to be easy. Your place is in the safe palace, not in the wilderness. A princess, you are also the daughter-in-law of an illustrious royal family.” But Sita would not listen to anybody. She follows Rama – the first assertion of her own free will. She was never vulnerable to the influence of others. She deliberately undertakes a difficult, arduous life in the forest.

While they are living like hermits in the forest, one day Ravana the demoniac and titan king, representing the forces of arrogance, barbaric lust, falsehood and all the characteristics of the ominous Ignorance, comes, disguised as a hermit-cum-mendicant, and asks Sita for alms. But before that he has arranged things dramatically. He has sent his uncle, Maricha, who was capable of assuming any shape – these titans and demons were endowed with certain magical and occult powers, and the art of changing forms was one of them – to enact the first act of the drama. Maricha assumed the form of a deer, a golden one to boot, and pranced and frolicked about in front of the

hut of Rama and Sita. It is an irony that Sita – who had forsaken her palace, forsaken all her jewellery, all the luxury of life – once, for a moment, is lured, attracted by this deer. She wonders if she could have this deer for her pet, a golden deer! She asks Rama, “Can’t you capture it for me?”

Rama goes out in pursuit of the deer. Ultimately, when the deer keeps on eluding his grasp, he shoots an arrow at it. But while dying, the wily demon reverted to his own form and shouted out, feigning Rama’s voice, “Oh Lakshmana, come to my rescue!”.

Rama’s brother Lakshmana hears this, but he will not move. He knows that there is no power strong enough to endanger Rama. It must be a trick by some elements hostile to them; it cannot be true. But Sita lost her patience absolutely. She orders Lakshmana in harsh words to proceed immediately to Rama’s rescue. No sooner has Lakshmana gone than Ravana appears as a begging mendicant. When Sita comes out to give alms to him, he takes hold of her and carries her off in his flying chariot to Lanka.

Now, this is Sita. Sita left the palace at Ayodhya of her own free will. It is Sita who asks Rama to go after the golden deer. It is Sita who compels Lakshmana to leave her and go to the rescue of Rama. At every turn of the events in the epic, it is her will that is being executed. In Lanka, Ravana cannot do anything to her forcibly, because of a curse. The story with numerous implications is very involved, immensely significant and absorbing, but this is not the occasion to narrate it in full. So, what is happening in Lanka? Sita is detained in a beautiful orchard, guarded by the wives of the demon nobles. One day there arrives the mighty and noble Hanuman, the leader of the Vanaras, the emissary of Rama. Alone with Sita for a moment, Hanuman proves his identity to her and then says, “Mother, sit on my back. I will carry you to your husband.” But Sita says, “The wicked demon has stolen me. If you also steal me, what is the difference between Ravana and Rama? What is the difference between my husband and this brute who kidnapped me? The evil must be finished. I may escape, but he will continue to be a menace to many many more helpless people of the world. My suffering must bear some fruit. It must culminate in the total annihilation of this scourge that is Ravana.” Thus once again Sita asserts her will.

Can we call this a weak character? In fact she is one of the strongest characters one can meet in history or mythology. You have all heard about the *agnipariksha* of Sita. After the war is over and Ravana and his entire clan have been destroyed, Sita is restored to Rama. But Rama now has very unfortunate misgivings. “How do I explain all that happened? My wife was a captive of the demon king. Are the people of Ayodhya going to accept her as their queen?” Sita understands his predicament. Instantly she orders, “Prepare a fire for me!” Such is the power of her words that all present are almost paralysed, nobody can overrule her command. A fire is prepared. Sita enters the fire, only to emerge, with the god of Fire bringing her back – because, as the mystics say, flames could not destroy her, for she herself was as pure, as luminous as the flames. She was herself a flame of the most pristine pure consciousness. How can material fire destroy that other fire – the fire of consciousness?

Thus Sita emerges triumphant. Here comes another epic, *Devibhagavatam*. This is a supplement to the Ramayana, where the mystery of Sita’s re-emergence from the fire is explained. Before Sita was stolen, Agni, the Vedic god, came to Rama and told him, “This is what is going to happen: Ravana is going to kidnap Sita. I will create an illusory Sita. The real Sita will remain in my custody. The illusory Sita will be a duplicate and no one will be able to tell the difference. Let this replica go through the ordeals. Let not the real Sita, who is an incarnation of goddess Lakshmi, be touched.” When this illusory Sita entered the fire, the one who came out was the real Sita – that is, the essence of Lakshmi, who had incarnated as Sita.

But then what is important here is the fact that it was Sita, with her decisions, that brought about the destruction of the demoniac forces.

In the Ramayana we meet the real demons and titans. As time passes, the race of demons disappears, but not the demoniac consciousness. The vision of transformation had not yet come, the time had not come for that. It must take another few thousand years for the truth that once created, nothing can really be destroyed, all must be transformed, to prevail. So the demons have been destroyed, but what about the demoniac consciousness?

I am just remembering one small incident : Udar was working in

the Mother's room. One of the Mother's attendants, a lady, sometimes used to go rather crazy and she would speak malicious words to the Mother. Udar, out of his concern for the Mother, had a lightning thought: "Oh, this lady ought to be killed! How dare she speak like this to the Mother!" Mother was passing by. She just looked at Udar, and said, "So? Thinking of killing her? What gain would that bring? What about that consciousness? It will jump into someone else and find its new abode there. Don't worry about it, I will tackle it."

So the demons were destroyed but the demoniac consciousness made human beings its instruments. We meet them in the Kauravas of the Mahabharata: Dhuryodhana, Duhshasana and their hundred brothers. Of course, among those hundred brothers there was one who was not at all of demoniac consciousness – the only exception. Again, symbolically: nothing is absolutely bad or absolutely good. Somewhere a promise of redemption is there. Hence amongst the hundred there was one who was wise. But to come back to our topic – the *Devibhagatam* says, this Maya-Sita, the illusory Sita created temporarily, had nevertheless become a formation, a powerful formation – and this formation is reborn as Draupadi. The king of Panchala, Drupada, had a mortal enemy in Drona; he knew that Drona was so powerful, protected by occult *siddhis*, that no human king, however strong, can destroy him. So he performed a Yajna. The purpose was to get the boon of a son who would be strong enough to destroy his formidable foe. Out of the Yajna, as prayed for, emerged a young man, Drishtadyumna. But, what a significant thing to happen! The revelation is: You wanted a son; a son is given; but your purpose is to destroy a *siddha* occultist who is at the same time a great warrior. Only Shakti can do that. So as a supplementary gift, Draupadi comes out of the sacrificial fire. Drishtadyumna is there, but he alone cannot destroy the powerful Drona.

These are quite intriguing and revealing truths of that unknowable and invisible world. Now, this Draupadi has been presented in various fashions in the recent past. A famous French dramatist has also presented the story of the Mahabharata. Draupadi was married to five Pandava brothers: she had five husbands, a situation unthought-of by people accustomed to moral and ethical codes of conduct. But we have to remember – well, daring indeed is the concept – that Draupadi cannot be measured, cannot be judged, according to human

codes of conduct: she is a divinity. She has emerged directly from the Yajna *samadhya* – a ready-made maiden. And when the Pandavas are defeated in the play of dice, when they have pledged everything to Dhuryodhana the leader of the Kauravas, including Draupadi, she is dragged into the court, and Duhsashana, the wicked and nasty brother of Dhuryodhana, is trying to disrobe her, and all the great leaders of the dynasty are dumb spectators to this humiliating situation. It is an episode in the Mahabharata unparalleled in its poignancy. It is only the great Vyasa who could present it in his powerful Sanskrit. But what is the lesson from that heart-rending scene? However wise, however great and noble human beings may be, you can never depend on them when you are in a crisis. All human beings have their limitations. All human beings, as again and again in several letters Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have pointed out. “You will fall flat on your nose!” if you ultimately depend on human beings, once said the Mother. Sri Aurobindo has not warned so bluntly, nevertheless he too has said that everything fails us in life but the Divine! It is not because human beings are bad – it is just because of the human limitations. Now coming back to Draupadi’s crisis, modern minds often miss its message. There is an English version of the Mahabharata. A learned professor had produced it. In his introduction he is showing three reasons as to why Krishna came to her rescue when everybody else failed. First she was his relative, second one of her names was similar to his – Krishna, and third, once when Krishna bled in one of his fingers, Draupadi had torn a piece of her costly sari and bandaged the wound! These are the prudent reasons. The question of the Divine’s help coming to a devotee when everything else had failed her was not even referred to, whereas that is the message generations of devout readers of the epic have received.

Do you remember the scene? When Draupadi is being disrobed, and no one is saying anything, she is looking to all the directions, but all the guardians are turning their faces away, or someone is hanging his head. Ultimately Draupadi throws up her arms and says, “O Krishna, you alone can come to my rescue!” And suddenly it so happens – Duryodhana goes on pulling her sari – yards and yards, and hundreds of yards, but the sari never comes to an end. Exhausted, Duhsashana falls down. And by then the blind king Dhritarashtra

had panicked : who is this strange lady? What is this miracle? But see the character of Draupadi: at that moment when things have stopped, she is looking at the guardians and saying, “My elders, I am sorry. When I was dragged into the court I forgot to greet you all.” What a courtesy, and what a satire! Now she greets everybody. Again they look down, hanging their heads. Then Dhritarashtra the King says, “Mother, I am sorry for what happened. Now ask me for boons.”

“All right, set Yudhishthira free from his bondage.” He is set free. Then the King says, “Ask another boon”. “Set all the other brothers free.” They are set free. “Ask for a third boon” says the King. “No, I must not be greedy after boons. These two are sufficient.” She could have asked for anything, but she does not. That is the character! Then we must not forget that these five Pandava brothers are all emanations of Indra; they are all one. In order to fight that terrible demoniac power represented by the Kauravas, it would not have been possible for any one of the five to tackle it. Five different aspects of Indra had to come as five human incarnations. They are united in Draupadi. She alone can keep them together. It is only because of their reverence for Draupadi that they are capable of fighting to the end, for time and again they were on the verge of changing their minds, they had prepared themselves for a compromise. Draupadi alone does not favour any kind of compromise. Time and again, as if destiny had seen to it that she should not forget the promise she had made that until these people are crushed she will keep her hair loose, she will not tie it up. So while in the forest, another nasty fellow, Jayadratha, had tried to humiliate her. While they were taking shelter in the palace of another king, again there had been Kichaka – the king’s brother-in-law, commander of the king’s army, tried to humiliate her. So she knows what humiliation is. Through all these humiliations she had only become more and more determined to achieve her purpose; and it is only at her instance that Krishna, the great emissary of the Pandavas to the Kauravas, remained firm in negotiation without any concession to the evil. Everybody is ready to compromise, but when he comes to Draupadi she says, “How does Bhima forget? How does Arjuna forget what has been done to me in the court of the Kauravas?” So, I was speaking of the learned professor, representing the so-called modern mind, who explains

why Krishna came to Draupadi's rescue: because she was a relative of his – as if Krishna had a great godown of clothes and could spare enough from it since a relative was in distress! So on and so forth. That at the moment of crisis, when everything failed a human being only the Divine came to his or her rescue – this supreme truth that has sustained human faith and sustained human courage through the ages, at least so far as this sub-continent is concerned, is sometimes ignored.

These are the characters who have played a leading role in liberating mankind from the dominance by the forces of darkness that play havoc with human life through their egomaniac conduct.

And you see the link between the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The illusory Sita being born as Draupadi; the demons of Lanka destroyed, but the demoniac consciousness has not been eliminated yet: they come and possess human beings. The war goes on. The Vedic tradition of war between Devas and Asuras continues.

Is there no vision of transformation at all? Just as we would not know about Supermind unless Sri Aurobindo had told us, Sri Aurobindo has also told us that in the Vedas the indication of Supermind was there – but we would not have known that, if Sri Aurobindo had not said so. This vision which Sri Aurobindo discloses, the truth of transformation, also was there though was yet to be unfolded. But through the ancient legend of Savitri – because it was elevated to a Symbol, became a Legend and a Symbol – we come to know what it really meant.

You all know Savitri, *kanya tejaswini*, the luminous girl, daughter of King Aswapati. This luminous quality represents her personality, not necessarily that she was shining like a powerful light! Such was her powerful personality that no young man could even look at her. So where to find a bridegroom for her? Draupadi was 'Krishna' – dark-complexioned – but she too was luminous, *kanya tejaswini*. Dhritarashtra says to her, "You who are *tejas*, nothing but luminosity ...". So this luminosity is nothing to do with the physical skin. It refers to the power of the personality. Such was the personality of Savitri that nobody would even dare to look at her for some time. That is why her father tells her, "You go and find out your own consort." Look at the ancient Indian tradition: escorted by some of

the old ministers of the king she goes out. From modern Afghanistan she travels all the way to our modern Rajasthan region. She has seen so many princes, they are nice, but none is the comrade of her spirit – until in a forest, she meets Satyavan. Once she and Satyavan have become engaged and she comes back to report to her father “I have found my match”, just then Narada comes again – the same Narada, who was involved in the story of Sati. He says, “It is not a well-chosen match.” Why? Because Satyavan is to die only a year from now. So the father and mother of Savitri try their best to dissuade her from marrying Satyavan. But she will not change: “Once I have decided, that is final.” And you know how she goes to live in the forest. Her father accompanies her. The moment her father has left, according to the Mahabharata, she takes off all her jewels, the diamonds, sapphires, rubies, everything, and puts them in a casket and leaves them in a corner of the hermitage-like hut. She lives like a hermitess herself. She alone knows that the fateful day is coming, she is counting them. Five days before the date when Satyavan is destined to die, she enters on a very very high state of tapasya. Nobody can understand what she is doing. They know that she is not taking food, not sleeping, is always in a meditative mood, but what she was doing in her innermost being, that is not revealed.

The doomsday dawns at last, she accompanies Satyavan to the forest. The final moment of destiny arrives. And it is an occult truth, mystics say, that even today whenever one dies, there are certain emanations present around to escort the spirit to the other world. In the case of Satyavan, the presiding deity of the institution of death, Yama himself, has come. In the Mahabharata – Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* you know, so I am going to the Mahabharata – when Satyavan is dead, his head on Savitri’s lap, when with her third eye, the occult eye, Savitri can see the presence of Yama, invisible to anybody else, she asks, “How is it that you yourself have come, instead of sending your emissaries?” He replies, “Satyavan is no ordinary mortal. He is such a great *tapaswi* that automatically his spirit pulled me, and I had to come.”

But paradoxically, the god of Death is also the god of Dharma: all-compassion. Then the famous dialogue takes place: as Yama moves with the soul of Satyavan, Savitri, releasing herself from her

husband's body, begins to walk behind. Yama is looking back, but Yama does not know how to get angry. There is no anger, no ego in him. Although he is the god of Death, he is a wonderful god, all-compassionate, all love is he. He looks back and says, "My mother, why do you come? Beyond a certain point your physical body cannot follow me. Evening is approaching – don't be late, go back." "How can I go back?" "Then ask me for some boon, and go back with something – not empty-handed." Cleverly, how psychologically she is preparing him! She says, "Give my father-in-law back his eyesight." For Dyumatsena is blind. Granted. But again she pursues. "What do you want again my child?" "Give him back his kingdom." "Very well – he will get back his kingdom. Go back." "Won't you bless me that I remain a virtuous woman, faithful to my husband?" "Of course you will remain faithful to your husband." "Won't you grant me that I shall have a hundred sons?" "Of course you shall have a hundred sons!"

Yama has been outwitted. How can Savitri have a hundred sons and remain faithful to her husband, if her husband is dead? Does Yama express any kind of disgust, any kind of disappointment at being outwitted? Not at all. The Mahabharata says that he is moved with compassion. He looks back and tells Savitri, "You are unique, you are unparalleled, you are wonderful. Go back, your husband has come back to life. I have returned the soul to the body." Savitri goes back. Satyavan wakes up as if from a bad dream.

The women of India observe Savitri-*amavasya*, the moonless night when Savitri was born. Prior to Savitri's birth any girl who was born on a moonless night would not get married, because she is bound to become a widow. Savitri changed the destiny of Satyavan. After that this whole taboo ended. Nobody asks whether a girl who is born on an *amavasya* should get married or not – the question does not arise at all. It is the individual Savitri's love for Satyavan which erased death from the destiny of one individual, Satyavan. In Sri Aurobindo's vision, the advent of Divine Love will erase death from the destiny of mankind. But it has to be a different mankind, a deserving mankind, a purified mankind. But this legend of Savitri implies that love is the transforming power. There is no question of transformation without Divine Love. Now this element was so deeply hidden in the legend that we would not have known about

it, had Sri Aurobindo not resurrected that legend, which the folks kept alive as just a formal ritual, into a vibrant new life through his epic *Savitri*.

So the real liberators from ignorance and all the terrible manifestations of ignorance over the centuries, tyranny, arrogance, lust, hatred, have been confronted by these heroines of the Indian epics. What I have said is only a brief outline and introduction, a tribute to Savitri and her compatriots. You have been studying Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* so much, I thought it would be good to mention the other characters also, for there is a beautiful link among them.

The Work of Savitri Bhavan

Savitri Bhavan has been created and is being developed as a place to house every kind of material and activity that can help us to a better understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* – the mantric epic that the Mother has called “the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision”. We want it to be a place that breathes the atmosphere of *Savitri* and is conducive to spiritual growth and the further evolution of consciousness, a place that welcomes *Savitri*-lovers from all over the world, and is an inspiring centre of *Savitri* studies. As our brochure states :

The activities of Savitri Bhavan aim to make Sri Aurobindo's vision more accessible to people of very varied psychological types and cultural backgrounds. The object is not mere intellectual scrutiny of Sri Aurobindo's language and thought, but to approach his writings for help and light, for the psychological insights and spiritual support which can make us better human beings and show the way to a new and nobler human life and society.

It is now 12 years since Nirodbaran laid the foundation stone for the Savitri Bhavan project, and 8 years since he inaugurated the first permanent building of the complex. In the coming months we expect to see the completion of the main Core Building – something that seemed like an impossible dream, so few years ago.

In this growth, we have enjoyed the help and support of SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research), the body which coordinates and sponsors all the educational centres in Auroville. This year, the SAIER administrators have requested all SAIER units to record and report their varied activities under particular headings, namely Research, Outreach, Training and Learning Materials. We have found this a very helpful exercise.

Outreach

For example, under “Outreach”, we can list the various classes, programmes and events through which we aim to make the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother accessible to a wider circle of interested people. These include our regular weekly classes :

The Savitri Study Circle

The Synthesis of Yoga, led by Sraddhalu Ranade

Foundations of Indian Culture, led by Professor Kittu Reddy

The Upanishads in the Light of Sri Aurobindo, led by Vladimir

Cultivating Concentration, led by Dr. Jai Singh

The English of *Savitri*, led by Shraddhavan

The OM Choir, led by Narad.

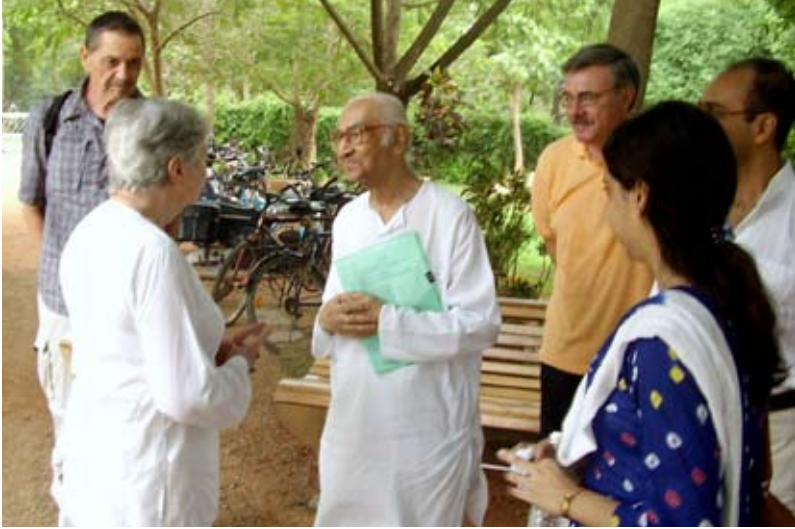
One new class which has been initiated recently is *Savitri* study in Tamil, led by Mrs. Bhuvanandari and Mr. Sudarshan. Another is a course in basic Sanskrit, led by Nishtha. Along with the playing of the Mother’s recorded talks in French, these activities now cover all the four languages mentioned by the Mother to be used in Auroville.

Then there are the guest lectures. Since last February we have hosted talks by Dr. M.V. Nadkarni (March 5) on “*The Kingdom of Subtle Matter*”; by Professor Manoj Das (March 18) on “*Heroines as Liberators : Sita, Draupadi, Savitri*”; Dr. Premanandakumar



Dr. Premanandakumar speaking on September 13, 2007

(September 13) on “*Satyavan’s Mother*”; and Professor Arabinda Basu (October 4th) on “*The Future God*”.



Professor Arabinda Basu greeting Mme. Janine Panier, the Mother’s granddaughter, outside Savitri Bhavan before his talk on October 4, 2007. Mme. Panier, who lives in Paris, has translated several of Sri Aurobindo’s books into French, and is currently working on a translation of Savitri.

‘Outreach’ also includes special events, such as exhibitions, cultural events and film shows. On February 19th we were able to show for the first time the sixth film prepared by Manohar of Huta’s “Meditations on Savitri” paintings, completing Book One with Canto Five “The Yoga of the King : The Yoga of the Soul’s Freedom and Greatness”. On September 2nd, the seventh film of the series was shown, covering the first four cantos of Book Two, “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”. On July 18th we remembered our dear Nirod-da, with a beautiful film on his life prepared by the Gnostic Centre of Delhi, “Nirod-da, an Inspiration”, as well as a short film prepared by Tatiana about his connection with Savitri Bhavan.

In August Savitri Bhavan hosted two beautiful musical programmes. On August 12, our long-standing friend from Pondicherry, Deepshikha Reddy, shared with us her rendering of the Isha Upanishad. She was supported by Sunayana Palande, who read Sri Aurobindo’s English

translation of the slokas and by Carnatic violinist K.B. Sukumaran. Then on the 18th, Srimati Indira Debnath gave a moving sitar recital, accompanied by vocalist Pradipta Debnath and Debasish Das on tabla. Both these events took advantage of the acoustics of our Hall, which are much appreciated by musicians.



Isha Upanishad recital by Deepshikha Reddy, supported by Sunayana Palande and K.B. Sukumaran, August 12, 2007



Srimati Indira Debnath performing on the sitar, August 18, 2007

Through June and July reproductions of Huta's "Meditations on Savitri" paintings for Book Seven, "The Book of Yoga" were exhibited in the Hall. In August Loretta presented another of her exhibitions of little-known photographs of the Mother, with accompanying texts, entitled "The Mother's Work in Us". Throughout September and October there were "Meditations on Savitri" paintings, those for Books Eight, "The Book of Death", and Book Nine, "The Book of Eternal Night". Starting from November 1st the paintings for Book Ten, "The Book of the Double Twilight" will be shown.

Another form of 'Outreach' is the contact that we have with the pupils of Auroville schools, young people from the surrounding villages, and visiting groups. Through our "Student Volunteer" programme nine young men who are attending local high schools and colleges offer voluntary service on alternate evenings of the week. In return, we assist them with their educational expenses, and organise occasional educational events to familiarise them with the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. One of the Auroville secondary schools also has a "Community Service" programme, and through this programme Andrei, a teenage newcomer from Russia, chose to serve at Savitri Bhavan on four Wednesday mornings in August. He gained experience in processing books in our Reading Room, and reception duties at the Reception Desk. On August 14th two teachers from Transition School brought a group of 20 students to visit Loretta's exhibition, and to hear a talk from Shraddhavan about Sri Aurobindo and India's Independence. Then on September 17th three teachers from Deepanam school brought a group of 10 children for a question and answer session on the aims and ideals of Auroville.

The organisers of guest introductions to Auroville, and of visiting student groups, also regularly bring their groups to Savitri Bhavan for orientation sessions on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the dream of Auroville. On October 15th a group of 35 students aged 14 to 17, accompanied by five teachers, from the Salwan Schools in Delhi, visited Savitri Bhavan for an orientation to launch their four-day educational visit to Auroville. The young people were very receptive and we had a fascinating interactive session.

Learning Materials

As a support for all these classes and events, Learning Materials are prepared by our team in various forms, from cyclostyled texts to CDs, to pamphlets, as well as publications such as our two journals *Invocation* and *Prarthana*, and recently a first book, *Savitri, The Mother : essays on The Book of Yoga* by Professor M.V. Seetaraman. (for details see p.71)

To give just one example, for some years we have had a regular Wednesday afternoon programme of recorded talks of the Mother. We started with her '*Entretiens*' or '*Questions and Answers*', her Playground Talks from 1955 onwards. These recordings are of course in French. To help those who attended these sessions, bilingual booklets were prepared, giving the text of the Mother's talk in French along with an English translation. Coming to the end of these talks in 1958, we moved on first to the Mother's comments on some of Sri Aurobindo's '*Thoughts and Aphorisms*' (published in Volume 10 of the Mother's Collected Works), and then to her '*Notes on the Way*'. For this later series, it was necessary not only to prepare the accompanying booklets, but also the recordings, which form part of the *Agenda*. Now Margrit, who is taking care of this project, is preparing a programme of the '*Commentaries on the Dhammapada*' talks. She aims to go on to create a series of recordings plus booklets based on the compilation from the *Agenda* called '*Notebook on Evolution*'. This is an example of how the preparation of learning materials for outreach activities often becomes a major research project.

Research

'Research' of course has been a basic activity ever since the first *Savitri* Study Circle meetings began in November 1994. This weekly gathering remains the core of everything else that is done at Savitri Bhavan. To support this group exploration of Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic, and to help other students and *Savitri* lovers in their attempts to understand and appreciate his revelatory poem, we have aimed to provide some helpful reference tools. Preparing these are on-going research projects. For example, we are in the process of compiling a comprehensive list of all writings on *Savitri*, and all *Savitri*-related materials. A first simple listing of published books, entitled '*Towards a Bibliography of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*', was brought

out in 2006. In April 2007 this was updated in a second Interim Publication comprising four sections: Editions of *Savitri*; Published Books (Reference Texts, Translations, Studies and Art Works); Unpublished Works (Translations, Studies – mainly doctoral theses); and Recordings. A much greater task lies ahead : not only to keep these lists up to date, but to add a comprehensive list of Journal Articles, and chapters or sections on *Savitri* appearing in other publications.

Another project related to this one has been the gathering of all references to *Savitri* in the many published writings of Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna). Although he has been a prolific author, and is regarded as a leading authority on *Savitri*, Amal has never written a book as such on the poem. But references to Sri Aurobindo's masterwork abound in his writings, talks and letters. It has been a labour of love to collect all these passages, which are now being arranged for publication in book form.

Sri Aurobindo's writings abound in allusions, and *Savitri* is no exception. Indeed Sri Aurobindo has made lavish use of this poetic tool to enrich the suggestiveness of his word-music and images. We find echoes of the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and Puranas – but also of Greek and Roman mythology, of the Bible, and of lines or phrases from English literature, and from Virgil, Dante, Homer and other great poets. As we read the poem in the course of our other activities, we constantly come across allusions which, if understood, immeasurably enhance our appreciation and comprehension. Recognising and elucidating these allusions is an on-going process. A few instances have been shared in the pages of this journal. Vladimir has created a database where such references can be recorded and adequate explanations collected.

Vladimir himself has contributed a lot of material to this project, based on the Vedic research being done by himself and by our German friend Nishtha. Vladimir is often invited to contribute to seminars and conferences with his knowledge of the Vedas, and some of his articles have appeared here in *Invocation*. There are more to come. In April we brought out a first taste of Nishtha's work in the form of a pamphlet entitled '*Anumati : Hymn to the Divine Grace*', which comprises the original text of Arthava Veda VII.20 in Devanagari, with a transliteration, translations into English and German, and Nishtha's notes.

New Publications from Savitri Bhavan

***Savitri, The Mother: Essays on Sri Aurobindo's SAVITRI: The Book of Yoga* by Professor M. V. Seetaraman, published by Savitri Bhavan, Auroville, 2007. These essays, originally published in the Ashram Journal *Advent* in the early 1960s, have now been brought out in book form for the first time, with an Introduction by Professor Kandasamy. 178 pages Rs. 125.**

The following pamphlets are now available free on request.

Auroville, Integral Yoga, and the Future of Mankind, by Sraddhalu Ranade (based on a talk at Savitri Bhavan on 27.08.2006)

Hymn to Anumati, the Divine Grace, by Nishtha (Original text of Arthava Veda VII.20 with transliteration, English and German translations, and Notes)

Towards a Bibliography of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri (Interim publication no. 2, April 2007)

Departments

These and other research projects, as well as all our other activities, are supported and made possible by the existence of several departments or services, which act as a support-base for all the diverse projects and activities of Savitri Bhavan.

The most fundamental of these is the **Maintenance Section**, which takes care of the buildings and grounds, providing an appropriate physical base for everything else that happens here. Murugan is in charge of this section, looking after five employed staff as well as a team of 9 student volunteers, in addition to taking care of purchasing all needed supplies.

The Reading Room is looked after by Mirajyoti, with the help of two young assistants, Ram Kumar and Prema. Their responsibility is to take care of all the books and other study materials that are acquired for our Reference Collection. Recently they have taken up digital cataloguing of all these materials, using the same software as other libraries in Auroville, so that the complete list of our holdings can be made available on-line.

Mirajyoti is training Prema to maintain the accession records and catalogue, to keep the books well-ordered on the shelves, and to deal with queries. Ram Kumar, who has already learned how to do cataloguing, took training at the Auroville Library in August and September in the software that is being used there for on-line cataloguing. This software has now been installed in our Reading Room computer, and Ram Kumar is in the process of entering the data from our existing catalogue, under the guidance of Juergen, the Librarian of the Auroville Library.

In August 2006, the team of three Aurovilians who have been looking after **The House of Mother's Agenda** in Aspiration for many years have shifted their base and their collection to Savitri Bhavan, and are now sharing the Reading Room space in our First Phase building, until a room is ready for them in the Main Building in a few months time. We are happy about this development, as their work complements our own. For example, compiling and indexing all the references to *Savitri* in the Mother's *Agenda* was completed on the basis of the English text some time ago. But it is important that this collection

should also be available in the original French, and a young French newcomer is now taking up this project, with the support of the Mother's Agenda team.

Another important department is the **Audio-Visual Section**, run by Vladimir and Hye Jeong, which ensures that recordings are made of all guest-lectures and many classes, and maintains an archive of master-copies of audio and video recordings, as well as photographs of Savitri Bhavan events.

In addition to these regular activities, Vladimir and Hye Jeong have been taking care of two special projects over the past months. Hye Jeong prepares the sound-tracks for the "Meditations on Savitri" films which are being prepared by our friend Manohar at Huta's request, using the recordings which Huta made of the Mother's readings of the *Savitri* lines that correspond to each painting. Vladimir has been converting to digital form many hours of talks on *Savitri* in Gujarati by renowned poet and sadhak Sundaram. This work has been taken up at the request of Sundaram's daughter, Ms. Sudha Sundaram of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The **Huta D. Hindocha Collection** comprises all the treasures entrusted to us by Huta. The *Savitri* paintings and connected materials are taken care of by Shraddhavan, assisted by Tatiana, a young Aurovilian originally from Bulgaria. Photographer Giorgio and filmmaker Manohar are also working to make these treasures available to the whole of humanity – Giorgio by making archival quality prints in actual size of the photographs he has taken of Huta's paintings, and Manohar by preparing films of the "Meditations on Savitri", from these photos.

For dealing with the public, with queries, mail and visitors, the **Reception Service** is looked after by Jai Singh. The **Administrative** and **Accounts Sections** are also essential services which help to keep everything running smoothly.

Construction

Meanwhile, in the background, the construction of the second section of the Core Building is now in its finishing phase, financed by a

Government of India grant under the SAIIER Development Scheme. Everything possible is being done to complete this building by the end of February 2008. Moving into the new premises will represent another important milestone in the growth of Savitri Bhavan next year.

The Team

As our facilities grow, the team expands. There are now 13 Aurovilians working full time for Savitri Bhavan, plus the three members of the House of Mother's Agenda team. In addition we have the help of six employees and nine student volunteers. Then there are those who come regularly to give classes or to help in other ways – six people at present. This gives us a total of 37 team-members as of October 2007.

To prepare ourselves to face the new challenges and opportunities presented by the rapid expansion of our work, two organisational changes have recently been made. In future, administration is to be handled by a Management Team, consisting of four senior staff members, rather than by a single project coordinator as it has been up to now. In addition we requested six trusted and highly experienced friends to form an Advisory Group, to help us with advice and guidance as our project grows in complexity. The first introductory meeting was held on April 14, 2007. The group consisted of Professor Kittu Reddy and Sraddhalu Ranade, both of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Mr. Srinivasamurthy of the Auroville Foundation, General Ashoke Chatterji and Mr. Sanjeev Agarwal of SAIIER, and Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni of the Sri Aurobindo Society. As mentioned earlier, this was Dr. Nadkarni's last visit to Savitri Bhavan.

Finances

It can readily be imagined that our expenditures are increasing proportionately. Between April and September 2007 the expenses for activities averaged around Rs. 90,000.- per month. By the Mother's Grace, and thanks to the generosity of our donors and well-wishers, the average monthly income has remained a little above this figure. Our thanks go to all of you who are supporting us with your financial help and your goodwill. We shall continue to make our best efforts to be worthy of the Mother's Blessings and the support of all of you.

Over the years, as the facilities have grown, and the team and activities have expanded, we have always kept focussed on this formulation of ‘The Dream of Savitri Bhavan’ :

The Dream of 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 can help the Dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality

Please note that from October 1, 2006 onwards all cheques or drafts should be made payable to

Auroville Unity Fund (SAIER)

They may be sent to Savitri Bhavan at the address below.

If you live abroad and would like to send your offering by SWIFT Transfer, please note the following new code :

SWIFT Code : SBININBB474

State Bank of India, Branch Code 03160

Auroville International Township Branch

Kuilapalayam, Auroville - 605101 INDIA

Auroville Unity Fund Foreign Account No. 10237876508

Purpose "SAVITRI BHAVAN"

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www.auroville.org/education/edu_centres/savitribhavan_main.htm

Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother