

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 37

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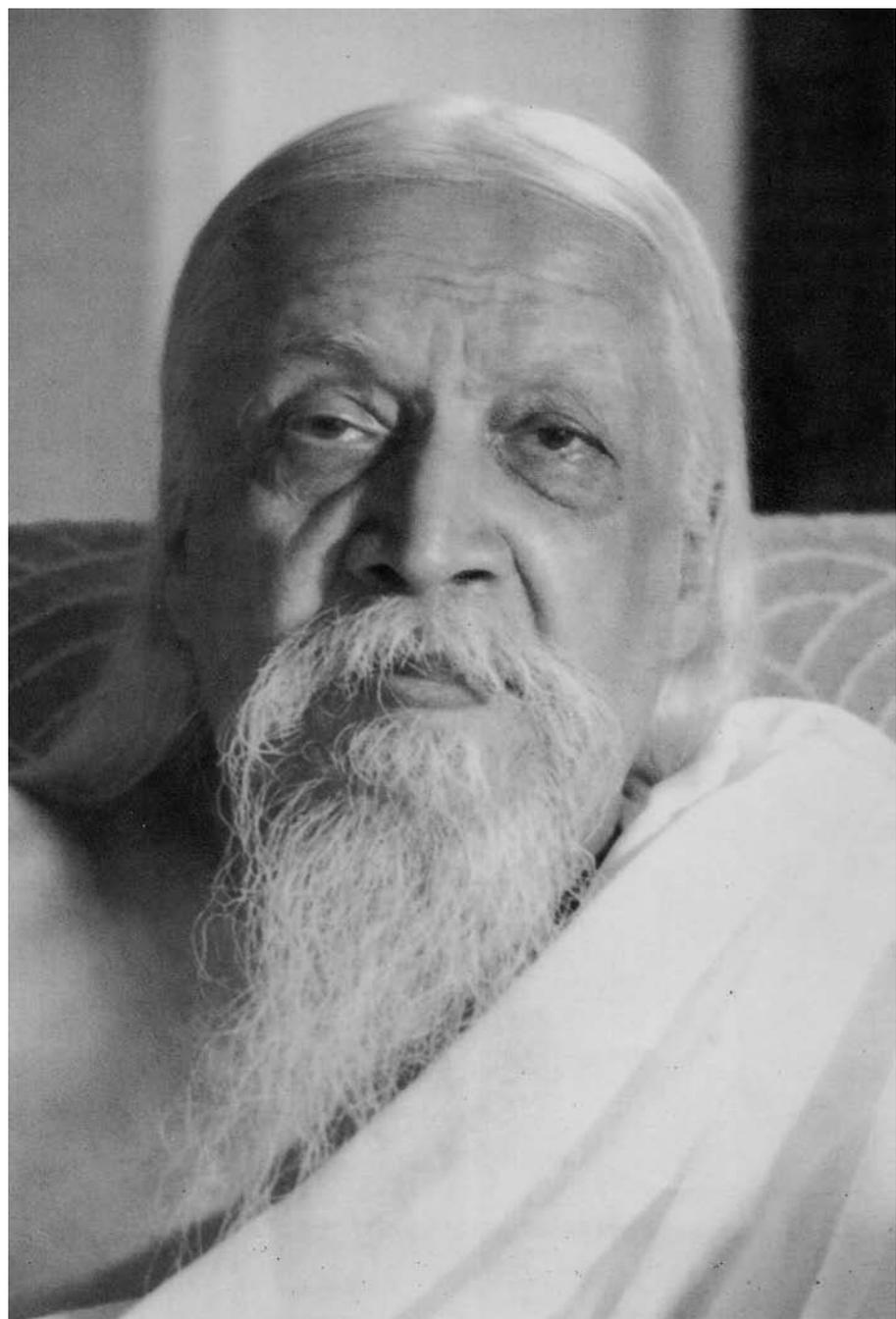
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***Savitri* – the legend and the symbol (2)**

by *Shraddhavan*

(continued from issue no. 36)

In the first part of this essay, we have seen how Sri Aurobindo has taken the Mahabharata legend of Satyavan and Savitri as a starting-point and framework for his epic *Savitri*, bringing out its original Vedic symbolism and making it the vehicle for this supreme poetic expression of his vision and his mission.

No longer as a traditional tale, but a profoundly symbolic myth, we can understand this story on different levels – both individually and universally. If we take it individually, we can apply the characters and their significances to different parts of our own complex being.

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, Satyavan is revealed to be '*the soul, carrying the truth of being within it but descended into the grip of Ignorance and Death.*' In fact, he is an individual form of the supreme Lord himself. In Book One, Canto Four – 'The Secret Knowledge' Sri Aurobindo reveals with amazing conciseness the whole process of manifestation, relating how 'the One', 'The Perfect, the Absolute, the Alone' has awakened his own sleeping creative power and concludes :

Thus have they made their play with us for roles:
Author and actor with himself as scene,
He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.

And now, as the individual soul, our soul, as the soul of humanity,
of the world,

In a body obscuring the immortal Spirit ...
He sits, unfelt by the form in which he lives
And veils his knowledge by the groping mind. ...
As one forgetting he searches for himself;
As if he had lost an inner light he seeks:
As a sojourner lingering amid alien scenes
He journeys to a home he knows no more.

p.68-69

This is what Satyavan represents. He is within each of us.

Savitri is an embodiment of the supreme Divine Mother, who descends into the human world to free her other self, Satyavan, the divine Soul. All of us need her intervention, her Grace, her Love, in order to re-find our true selves.

She takes birth in response to earth's dire need and longing, expressed through the aspiration of a great representative being, her human father, King Aswapati, who embodies '*the concentrated effort of spiritual endeavour*', the intense aspiration and tapasya that can carry us '*from the mortal to the immortal planes*' He too shows an aspect of ourselves, our own possibilities, which we can foster and harness in order to progress in the Light.

Satyavan's father, King Dyumatsena, can also be seen as an aspect of ourselves – our mind, which in its origin and on its heights is a divine power of Knowledge and Will, commanding all its shining armies of thought and intention, but which here, in the world of Ignorance, has become blind and by losing its power of faultless vision, has also lost its power of true will and action: it can no longer rule itself or the world around it. In the process of saving Satyavan, the soul, Savitri also saves the mind and restores it to its true role and glory. The Mother can do this for us too, if we sincerely ask her to do so, and collaborate with her in her working on us and in us.

One crucial character from the legend is shown more differently in the epic than all the rest, and that is the character of Death. This figure will be taken up and explored now.

In Vyasa's tale, the god who comes to take away Satyavan's life and soul is Yama. His name means 'The Limiter' or 'The Ordainer' and in the traditional literature he is far from being a negative figure. He is the power who keeps order in the universe by holding things and beings within their proper limits and positions. He is also seen as 'Dharma' – the cosmic guardian of right conduct and Law. In the legend he is not shown as terrifying. When Savitri asks him why he has come in person to take away her husband instead of sending his servants or messengers as would be the usual practice, he explains that it is fitting for him to honour Satyavan's outstanding qualities by

coming himself. He responds to the dharmic correctness and virtue of Savitri's words by granting her appropriate boons – boons which show her sense of correctness and discernment; and when finally she is able to convince him of the propriety of her request to be reunited with her husband, he yields and grants Satyavan's return to life.

In his poem Sri Aurobindo never refers to the power of Death and Denial whom Savitri has to confront in the later stages of her Yoga (described in Books Nine and Ten) as Yama – the cosmic power with a positive and necessary function in the regulation of the universe. Rather he is shown as:

A limitless denial of all being
That wore the terror and wonder of a shape. p.574

Sri Aurobindo has perceived and made use of the deeper symbolic significances hinted at by the features of the traditional tale, and his purpose is very different from that of Vyasa. The theme of his poem, as he revealed to Amal Kiran in a note of October 1936, is :

... the issue between Savitri and Fate or rather between the incarnate Light, the Sun Goddess, and Death the Creator and Devourer of this world with his Law of darkness, limitation and ignorance.¹

It is in order to win the deliverance of the human soul from the grip of this Death and his Law that Savitri – '*daughter of the Sun, goddess of the Supreme Truth*' has taken a mortal birth. In fact she has come to change the cosmic law represented by her opponent. The courteous conversation between the virtuous princess and the god of justice and righteous conduct described by Vyasa in the Mahabharata version has become in Sri Aurobindo's epic a battle between Darkness and Light, between God's Yes and his No, between representatives of the way things are and of what they are intended to become.

The Book of Death, Book Eight, which concludes Part Two of the epic, consists of a single canto of 177 lines – the shortest and least-revised canto of all the 49 which make up the poem. Surprisingly, it is headed 'Canto Three – Death in the Forest'. A footnote explains:

¹ *Mother India*, November 1982, p.718

The Book of Death was taken from Canto Three of an early version of *Savitri* which had only six cantos and an epilogue. It was slightly revised at a late stage and a number of new lines were added, but it was never fully worked into the final version of the poem. Its original designation, 'Canto Three', has been retained as a reminder of this. (p. 561 fn.)

This character of Book Eight can easily be appreciated by a comparison of its first eleven lines with the first 24 lines of Book One, Canto Two. Both passages describe Savitri waking up at dawn on the day when – as she alone knows – Satyavan must die, and reviewing in her mind her whole past, especially the last year since her momentous first sight of her soul-mate in the destined meeting place. The difference between the earlier version in Book Eight and the much revised later one in Canto Two of Book One is striking, although there are common features. Almost the whole of Book Eight is much closer in style to Sri Aurobindo's earlier narrative poems such as 'Love and Death' and 'Urvasie' than to the rest of *Savitri*. Apart from the deepened profundity and complex suggestiveness of Sri Aurobindo's later writing, we may also notice in Book Eight as in Book Twelve (also less revised than the rest of the poem) the much more frequent use of enjambment and of sentences ending in the middle of a line, which are not a typical feature of *Savitri* as a whole. It is clear too that in Book Eight, as in Book Twelve and in the first Canto of Book Seven – also taken over from Sri Aurobindo's earlier drafts of the poem – the emphasis is much more on the legend aspect than on the symbolic one which is so dominant in Part One and Part Three.

But towards the end of Book Eight, with the appearance of Death, we find two sentences which stand out from the rest :

A terror and an anguish filled the world,
As if annihilation's mystery
Had taken a sensible form. A cosmic mind
Looked out on all from formidable eyes
Contemning all with its unbearable gaze
And with immortal lids and a vast brow
It saw in its immense destroying thought
All things and beings as a pitiful dream,

Rejecting with calm disdain Nature's delight,
The wordless meaning of its deep regard
Voicing the unreality of things
And life that would be for ever but never was
And its brief and vain recurrence without cease,
As if from a Silence without form or name
The Shadow of a remote uncaring god
Doomed to his Nought the illusory universe,
Cancelling its show of idea and act in Time
And its imitation of eternity.

p.565-66

These two sentences alone are enough to establish continuity between the early narrative version and the following Books of Part Three, which were given their present form in the late 1940s. In one of his essays in the 'Composition of *Savitri*' series¹ Richard Hartz has revealed that these 18 lines were added to Book Eight in 1949. These are the '*few lines*' which were added when the Book was '*slightly revised at a late stage*'. They show Sri Aurobindo's characterisation of Death in a way that is in full harmony with the intention of the rest of the poem. This is the antagonist from whom Savitri has to rescue '*the soul of the world named Satyavan*'² by the light of her consciousness and the dynamic power of her creative speech. Book Eight then closes with the words :

She knew that visible Death was standing there
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.

Books Nine and Ten show the course of the debate between Savitri and this 'visible Death'.

At the beginning of the poem, in Book One Canto Two, as part of the magnificent 'overture' with which Sri Aurobindo introduces his epic, we read about 'The Issue' – the theme of the poem, and the central point of Savitri's mission. There we find this pregnant sentence :

A colloquy of the original Gods
Meeting upon the borders of the unknown,

1 'The Composition of *Savitri*' in *Mother India* December 2001 p.928

2 p. 666

Her soul's debate with embodied Nothingness
Must be wrestled out on a dangerous dim background:
Her being must confront its formless Cause,
Against the universe weigh its single self. p.12

'*A colloquy*' of course means a conversation, an exchange between two or more people. We may ask "Who are these '*original Gods*'?" The rest of the sentence seems to indicate that this colloquy or debate takes place between Savitri's soul and '*embodied Nothingness*'. In fact this sentence contains a concise suggestion of all that is to be revealed in detail in Book Nine, 'The Book of Eternal Night' and Book Ten, 'The Book of the Double Twilight' as Savitri claims from Death the return of Satyavan to life on earth. Over the course of 97 pages (from page 571 to page 668), this debate goes on, and it is as if, point by point, Death challenges and tests all the realisations that Savitri has gained in the course of her Yoga, described step by step in Book Seven 'The Book of Yoga'. Referring to his own four major realisations, Sri Aurobindo has written :

These realisations and others which followed upon them presented ... no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to work out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconscious and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-Consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

4.11.1946

SABCL 26:85-86

In the poem, on this journey through symbolic inner states, it is as if Death is challenging Savitri to apply the spiritual knowledge she has won by her Yoga utterly to the world and all its levels – for only then can she be victorious over the denial which he represents and his rule over our universe, and only then will she be able to reclaim living Satyavan '*for earth and men*'.

The god of Death who confronts Savitri in Books Eight, Nine and Ten of the poem seems to be the face – or the mask – of a figure already mentioned by Sri Aurobindo in Book One, Canto Two :

One dealt with her who meets the burdened great.
Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit's goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.
August and pitiless in his calm outlook,
Heightening the Eternal's dreadful strategy,
He measured the difficulty with the might
And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross.
Assailing her divinest elements,
He made her heart kin to the striving human heart
And forced her strength to its appointed road. p.17

When asked by Amal Kiran who this 'One' is, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

“You can call him the Master of Evolution, if you like.” p. 770

His task is to force Savitri's strength '*to its appointed road*' – to show her the way to fulfil the mission for which she has '*accepted mortal breath*'.

For Savitri, in Sri Aurobindo's poem, the premature death of her beloved husband is the '*private sign*' of a problem lying at the very roots of human life, one that she has been missioned to solve. She has come to '*hew the ways of Immortality*' for human beings. To do this, she must '*live with grief*' and '*confront death on her road*', just like any other human being – except that she is armed with the love and the strength of the universal Mother of whom she is an embodiment.

In Book Seven Canto Six we are shown Savitri's first devastating confrontation with this problem which she has come to solve for mankind. In the previous canto she has discovered and united with her soul and undergone a blissful transformation of her whole being which has given her a sense of victory and a certitude that Satyavan

will enjoy '*the cyclic rondure of a sovereign life*'. But now she is suddenly enveloped by '*a rolling surge of silent death*' :

It willed to expunge the choked and anguished air
And end the fable of the joy of life.
It seemed her very being to forbid,
Abolishing all by which her nature lived,
And laboured to blot out her body and soul,
A clutch of some half-seen Invisible,
An ocean of terror and of sovereign might,
A person and a black infinity.

p. 534

Its message is :

“I have created all, all I devour;
I am Death and the dark terrible Mother of life,
I am Kali black and naked in the world,
I am Maya and the universe is my cheat.
I lay waste human happiness with my breath
And slay the will to live, the joy to be
That all may pass back into nothingness
And only abide the eternal and absolute.
For only the blank Eternal can be true. ...
O soul, inventor of man's thoughts and hopes,
Thyself the invention of the moments' stream,
Illusion's centre or subtle apex point,
At last know thyself, from vain existence cease.”

p. 535 lines

This powerful inner experience has a devastating effect upon Savitri:

It left behind her inner world laid waste;

p. 535

But in response, a new revelation is given to her. She is shown the reason for her birth :

Thou hast come down into a struggling world
To aid a blind and suffering mortal race,
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,
To bring down bliss into the heart of grief,
To make thy life a bridge twixt earth and heaven;

p. 536

She is told :

He who would save the world must be one with the world,
All suffering things contain in his heart's space
And bear the grief and joy of all that lives. p.536

She is advised :

Draw back from the world that the Idea has made,
Thy mind's selection from the Infinite,
Thy senses' gloss on the Infinitesimal's dance,
Then shalt thou know how the great bondage came.
Banish all thought from thee and be God's void. p.536

The process and the results of this next stage of Savitri's sadhana are shown in the rest of Book Seven Canto Six, and culminate in the great realisation of Canto Seven, '*The Discovery of the Cosmic Spirit and the Cosmic Consciousness*':

Her spirit saw the world as living God;
It saw the One and knew that all was He.
She knew him as the Absolute's self-space,
One with her self and ground of all things here ... p.556

The superconscient was her native air,
Infinity was her movement's natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time. p.557

Thus closes Book Seven, the Book of Yoga. Armed and prepared by this climax of her individual realisation, Savitri now has to face the 'Eternal No' in order to rescue Satyavan – the Soul of the Universe – from the grip of Ignorance and Death. This is the confrontation, the '*colloquy*' referred to in the first canto of the poem. Both the 'Eternal No' and the 'Eternal Yes' are cosmic powers. Which of them will prevail? This is the debate that will be progressively worked out in Books Nine, Ten and Eleven.

How does this figure of Death, this '*embodied Nothingness*' meet and test Savitri, in the course of this colloquy, this debate?

We have seen his first appearance, as described at the end of Book Eight. Let us look at this passage a little more closely.

A terror and an anguish filled the world,
 As if annihilation's mystery
 Had taken a sensible form. A cosmic mind
 Looked out on all from formidable eyes
 Contemning all with its unbearable gaze
 And with immortal lids and a vast brow
 It saw in its immense destroying thought
 All things and beings as a pitiful dream,
 Rejecting with calm disdain Nature's delight,
 The wordless meaning of its deep regard
 Voicing the unreality of things
 And life that would be for ever but never was
 And its brief and vain recurrence without cease,
 As if from a Silence without form or name
 The Shadow of a remote uncaring god
 Doomed to his Nought the illusory universe,
 Cancelling its show of idea and act in Time
 And its imitation of eternity.

p.565-66

It is as if '*annihilation's mystery /Had taken a sensible form.*' In a form that can be seen and felt, appears an embodiment of all the mystery of 'annihilation': how can something that exists, cease to exist? The word implies that something is turned into nothing – not simply being dissolved into its constituent elements as our bodies are once the life and soul have left them, but becoming nothing, non-existent. That is a mystery. The rest of the passage seems to say that in this '*cosmic mind*', seen through these '*formidable eyes*', by this '*immense destroying Thought*', none of the universe that is so real to us actually exists: it is '*illusory*', unreal. Life is unreal, all things and beings are a '*pitiful dream*', all idea and action in time are just a show, which he can cancel out completely by his power of Nothingness, of Nought. All this is expressed in the appearance of this Shadow who seems to be the representative of '*a remote uncaring god*'. This Shadow has emerged from a formless nameless Silence to destroy this whole '*illusory universe*'. This is his function, his mission.

This Shadow is described again in Book Nine, Canto One:

Something stood there, unearthly, sombre, grand,
 A limitless denial of all being
 That wore the terror and wonder of a shape.
 In its appalling eyes the tenebrous Form
 Bore the deep pity of destroying gods;
 A sorrowful irony curved the dreadful lips
 That speak the word of doom. Eternal Night
 In the dire beauty of an immortal face
 Pitying arose, receiving all that lives
 For ever into its fathomless heart, refuge
 Of creatures from their anguish and world-pain.
 His shape was nothingness made real, his limbs
 Were monuments of transience and beneath
 Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids
 Silent beheld the writhing serpent, life.
 Unmoved their timeless wide unchanging gaze
 Had seen the unprofitable cycles pass,
 Survived the passing of unnumbered stars
 And sheltered still the same immutable orbs.

p.574

In a '*sad and formidable voice*' which seems to express and represent '*the whole adverse world*', Savitri is instructed to loose her hold on Satyavan and to return:

“Pass lonely back to thy vain life on earth.”

Although she has already laid down his body, she is still clinging on to Satyavan's spirit. When she resists, she is told :

“Relax thy grasp; this body is earth's and thine,
 His spirit now belongs to a greater power.
 Woman, thy husband suffers.”

p. 575

She withdraws her force, and waits. Death stoops and releases Satyavan's soul from the body :

Forsaking the poor mould of that dead clay,
 Another luminous Satyavan arose,

p. 576

This luminous Satyavan moves away, Death moves behind him, and Savitri follows both of them. Soon they seem to cross a subtle

boundary, to move beyond her reach. To follow them, her spirit surges out of her body, leaving it behind. They move on and reach a dark borderline.

Then, to that chill sere heavy line arrived
Where his feet touched the shadowy marches' brink,
Turning arrested luminous Satyavan
Looked back with his wonderful eyes at Savitri.

But Death pealed forth his vast abysmal cry:
"O mortal, turn back to thy transient kind;
Aspire not to accompany Death to his home,
As if thy breath could live where Time must die. ...
Only in human limits man lives safe.
Trust not in the unreal Lords of Time,
Immortal deeming this image of thyself
Which they have built on a Dream's floating ground.
Let not the dreadful goddess move thy soul
To enlarge thy vehement trespass into worlds
Where it shall perish like a helpless thought.
Know the cold term-stones of thy hopes in life. ...
O sleeper, dreaming of divinity,
Wake trembling mid the indifferent silences
In which thy few weak chords of being die.
Impermanent creatures, sorrowful foam of Time,
Your transient loves bind not the eternal gods." p. 580-81

He addresses her as a mortal, a human woman. What he says has validity for mere mortals. But Savitri is not a mere mortal. She does not answer him.

Her high nude soul,
Stripped of the girdle of mortality,
Against fixed destiny and the grooves of law
Stood up in its sheer will a primal force.
Still like a statue on its pedestal,
Lone in the silence and to vastness bared,
Against midnight's dumb abysses piled in front
A columned shaft of fire and light she rose. p. 581

She has triumphed over the first tests, and we have reached the end of Book Nine Canto One. The three figures stand paused on the verge of ‘Eternal Night’, which seems hungry to devour her soul. Nevertheless, it is Savitri who makes the first move onwards into the darkness, and the others follow her. She passes through a terrifying ordeal:

On all that claims here to be Truth and God
And conscious self and the revealing Word
And the creative rapture of the Mind
And Love and Knowledge and heart’s delight, there fell
The immense refusal of the eternal No. p. 583

Savitri loses sight of the god, of Satyavan, she even loses her inner contact with him :

And to abysmal loneliness she fell,
Even from herself cast out, from love remote. p. 584

This painful ordeal seems to continue for a very long time, but nevertheless ‘*She lived in spite of death, she conquered still.*’

Eventually a faint light ‘*Pale but immortal*’ appears in that deep darkness and slowly grows, conquering that power of Night. Savitri wakes up again to a sense of herself.

Her limbs refused the cold embrace of death,
Her heart-beats triumphed in the grasp of pain;
Her soul persisted claiming for its joy
The soul of the beloved now seen no more. p. 585

Again she can perceive the god, and the luminous form of Satyavan appears from the darkness. She has prevailed over another tremendous test. But Death tells her :

“This sorrowful victory only hast thou won
To live for a little without Satyavan.” p. 586

Nevertheless, in recognition of her strength, he offers gifts to soothe her ‘*wounded life*’:

“Choose a life’s hopes for thy deceiving prize.” p. 588

Proudly and defiantly, Savitri demands :

“ ... whatever Satyavan,
My husband, waking in the forest’s charm
Out of his long pure childhood’s lonely dreams,
Desired and had not for his beautiful life.
Give, if thou must, or, if thou canst, refuse.” p. 589

In response, Death grants the return of sight and kingdom, ‘*royal trappings for his peaceful age ...*’ to Satyavan’s father, King Dyumatsena. But again he urges her :

“Go, mortal, to thy small permitted sphere!

and threatens her with dire punishment from the great laws of the cosmos which he says she has violated. Savitri responds :

“World-spirit, I was thy equal spirit born.
My will too is a law, my strength a god.
I am immortal in my mortality.
I tremble not before the immobile gaze
Of the unchanging marble hierarchies
That look with the stone eyes of Law and Fate.
My soul can meet them with its living fire.” p. 589

Again she asks for the return of Satyavan – or, she says, she will continue to follow:

“Wherever thou leadst his soul I shall pursue.”

Death is unconvinced and threatens her again and again, but she answers him with her own view of the world, law and God – the Lover’s eternal ‘Yes’, opposing the eternal ‘No’ of Night and Death and dissolution. Although Death remains unconvinced, at the end of Book Nine Sri Aurobindo shows a subtle change taking place in the appearance of the god:

Half-seen in clouds appeared a sombre face;
Night’s dusk tiara was his matted hair,
The ashes of the pyre his forehead’s sign. p. 595

Through the darkness that has become a ‘dimness’, the three move on into the ‘Dream Twilight of the Ideal’, described in the first canto of Book Ten, ‘The Book of the Double Twilight’. It is a beautiful realm

of dawn twilight and bright hopeful suggestions. But in the next canto Death pours scorn on all its beauty, on all human hopes and ideals, as unsubstantial and unrealisable imaginations, unreal figments of man's mind. He warns Savitri :

... when thou givest thy spirit to a dream
Soon hard necessity will smite thee awake. p. 612

He invites her instead to

Renounce, forgetting joy and hope and tears,
Thy passionate nature in the bosom profound
Of a happy Nothingness and worldless Calm,
Delivered into my mysterious rest.
One with my fathomless Nihil all forget. p. 612

This is the lure and attraction of Death. But Savitri is not taken in by it. To all his arguments she answers:

“O dark-browed sophist of the universe ...
Thou hast used words to shutter out the Light
O Death, thou speakest truth but truth that slays,
I answer to thee with the Truth that saves.” p. 621

She calls him a ‘sophist’. The word derives from the ancient Greek name for the goddess of divine Wisdom ‘Sophia’. But it means a person who cleverly and intentionally misuses words and arguments to justify a falsehood. That is what we see this god of Death doing throughout Book Ten. When we were studying this Book in the weekly *Savitri* Study Circle, we found that his arguments are depressingly convincing to us. In fact he expresses many things that most human beings accept and believe without even thinking about them. He uses all the arguments of both materialist realism and illusionist spirituality, not to mention ‘commonsense’. He faces Savitri – and us – with all the obstructions and contradictions that discourage us and hold us back on our human journey. Despite the perennial persistence of the human aspiration for more freedom and power, more light and delight, a more perfect and purer life, how many of us really believe with our normal daily consciousness that:

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.

The Life Divine pp.42-43

The voice of Death is continually with us, reminding us that we are poor weak beings, unable to change the imperfections of our human nature and our present state, unable to realise our dreams and our ideals, reminding us that we and everything we see around us in our world is impermanent and bound for dissolution.

But in Savitri's answers to these arguments Sri Aurobindo shares with us a higher Truth, the Truth that saves, the Truth that says 'Yes' to us, even in our weakness and imperfection. When Death mocks Savitri's high aspirations, saying :

“O human face, put off mind-painted masks:
The animal be, the worm that Nature meant;
Accept thy futile birth, thy narrow life.”

add ref.!

urging her to be realistic and down-to-earth, she responds:

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

p.634

She reminds us that in our humanity a divine entity is awaiting its hour of fulfilment. She tells us that we are not insignificant insects crawling on an insignificant globe: we are heroic souls that have consented to undertake the adventure of involution and evolution. Now we are dominated by matter and misled by ignorant mind, but still

“On our life’s prow that breaks the waves of Time
No signal light of hope has gleamed in vain.” p.638

Remembering the well-known legend, we are all sure that in the end Savitri will triumph over this god of Death. But at the end of Book Ten, when Death is defeated and has fled and Savitri and Satyavan are left alone, the story is not over.

Even when Savitri finds herself in the divine worlds of Eternal Day she still has a challenge to face. She meets the same godhead in a different guise:

As one drowned in a sea of splendour and bliss,
Mute in the maze of these surprising worlds,
Turning she saw their living knot and source,
Key to their charm and fount of their delight,
And knew him for the same who snares our lives
Captured in his terrifying pitiless net,
And makes the universe his prison camp
And makes in his immense and vacant vasts
The labour of the stars a circuit vain
And death the end of every human road
And grief and pain the wages of man’s toil.
One whom her soul had faced as Death and Night
A sum of all sweetness gathered into his limbs
And blinded her heart to the beauty of the suns. p.678

Death’s sombre cowl was cast from Nature’s brow;
There lightened on her the godhead’s lurking laugh.
All grace and glory and all divinity
Were here collected in a single form;
All worshipped eyes looked through his from one face;
He bore all godheads in his grandiose limbs. p.680

Death, it seems, was just a mask of this radiant godhead. And even in this glorious form, he still tries to deflect Savitri from her purpose. He invites her :

“Renounce the tie that joins thee to earth-kind,
Cast off thy sympathy with mortal hearts.
Arise, vindicate thy spirit’s conquered right:
Relinquishing thy charge of transient breath,
Under the cold gaze of the indifferent stars
Leaving thy borrowed body on the sod,
Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home. ...
Cast off the ambiguous myth of earth’s desire,
O immortal, to felicity arise.” p.685

He is ready to offer her a divine life in heaven, but is not willing to allow her to claim Satyavan back to live with her on earth. But she refuses his offer, and insists :

“To me who turn not from thy terrestrial Way,
Give back the other self my nature asks.
Thy spaces need him not to help their joy;
Earth needs his beautiful spirit made by thee
To fling delight down like a net of gold.
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield,
The forge where the Archmason shapes his works.
Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven. “ pp.685-686

To her, it is clear that this is really the will of the Supreme. She pleads:

“I know that I can lift man’s soul to God,
I know that he can bring the Immortal down.
Our will labours permitted by thy will
And without thee an empty roar of storm,
A senseless whirlwind is the Titan’s force
And without thee a snare the strength of gods.
Let not the unconscious gulf swallow man’s race
That through earth’s ignorance struggles towards thy Light.

O Thunderer with the lightnings of the soul,
Give not to darkness and to death thy sun,
Achieve thy wisdom's hidden firm decree
And the mandate of thy secret world-wide love." p.687

But just as the Divine Mother told King Aswapati that it is too soon to grant the divine transformation that he has been seeking for, so this luminous godhead tells Savitri that she should allow Time to do its work. He tells her:

"O too compassionate and eager Dawn,
Leave to the circling aeons' tardy pace
And to the working of the inconscient Will,
Leave to its imperfect light the earthly race:
All shall be done by the long act of Time." p.690

But Savitri has been sent to earth precisely in response to Aswapati's plea for a divine incarnation to hasten this long evolutionary process. He pleaded :

"Mission to earth some living form of thee. ...
Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate." p.345

In response, the Supreme Divine Mother promised him:

"One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone spirit's power. ...
A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will." p. 346

How is this great thing to be fulfilled? Finally the radiant godhead gives Savitri the opportunity. He tells her:

"But if thou wilt not wait for Time and God,
Do then they work and force thy will on Fate. ...
If thou must indeed deliver man and earth
On the spiritual heights look down on life,
Discover the truth of God and man and world;
Then do thy task knowing and seeing all.

Ascend, O soul, into thy timeless self;
Choose destiny's curve and stamp thy will on Time."

He removes from her sight even those heavenly worlds of Eternal Day: she stands in '*the infinity where no world can be*'. In that formlessness, she is given the opportunity to make the supreme choice of her soul. Four times she is offered the opportunity to merge with the Transcendent, to melt into its Peace, its Oneness, its Power of stillness, its Ecstasy. Each time, she asks for the boon to be given '*for earth and men*'. And finally the great sanction is given:

"O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose:
All thou hast asked I give to earth and men.
All shall be written out in destiny's book
By my trustee of thought and plan and act,
The executor of my will, eternal Time...." p.698

This sanction is followed by a long prophecy, first of what this fulfilment will mean for Savitri herself, then of what it will mean for earth and humanity. The assurance is given that:

"When all thy work in human time is done
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,
The body of earth a tabernacle of God. p.699

Even there shall come as a high crown of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance. p.708

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

When this great message has been given, Savitri is missioned back to earth, carrying the soul of Satyavan along with her.

This brings us to Book Twelve – the Epilogue, which has a single canto entitled 'The Return to Earth'. Like Book Eight, this Book too did not receive final revision from Sri Aurobindo. It received

some attention in the late 1940s, but when in mid-November 1950 he completed his revision of Book Six and asked Nirodbaran “What is next?” and Nirod replied “The Book of Death and the Epilogue” Sri Aurobindo answered: “Oh that? We shall see about that later on”. So the Epilogue remains largely what it was in a quite early version. Here too, as in Part Two as a whole, the legend or frame story is more prominent than in Part One and most of Part Three. Nevertheless, we find that in rounding off his story Sri Aurobindo dramatically shortens the legendary version and, as in the rest of the poem, turns it to his own purpose, making it convey the underlying symbolic meaning he discerned in it, and his own distinctive message.

First we are shown Savitri waking in the afternoon, once more in her body, in the forest, drinking in her surroundings and feeling her oneness with the whole life of earth, and then gently awakening Satyavan who is lying close to her. He has a vague remembrance of what has happened and asks her:

“Whence hast thou brought me captive back, love-chained,
To thee and sunlight’s walls, O golden beam
And casket of all sweetness, Savitri,
Godhead and woman, moonlight of my soul?
For surely I have travelled in strange worlds
By thee companioned, a pursuing spirit,
Where now has passed that formidable Shape
Which rose against us, the Spirit of the Void,
Claiming the world for Death and Nothingness,
Denying God and soul? Or was all a dream ...?”

p.717

Savitri reassures him:

“Our parting was the dream;
We are together, we live, O Satyavan. ...
Only our souls have left Death’s night behind,
Changed by a mighty dream’s reality,
Illumined by the light of symbol worlds
And the stupendous summit self of things,
And stood at Godhead’s gates limitless, free.”

p.718

But Satyavan notices a great change in Savitri:

“What high change is in thee, O Savitri? Bright
Ever thou wast, a goddess still and pure,
Yet dearer to me by thy sweet human parts
Earth gave thee making thee yet more divine.

...

But now thou seemst almost too high and great
For mortal worship; Time lies below thy feet
And the whole world seems only a part of thee,

...

Awakened from the silence and the sleep,
I have consented for thy sake to be.
By thee I have greatened my mortal arc of life,
But now far heavens, unmapped infinitudes
Thou hast brought me, thy illimitable gift!
If to fill these thou lift thy sacred flight,
My human earth will still demand thy bliss.
Make still my life through thee a song of joy
And all my silence wide and deep with thee.”

Savitri answers him reassuringly :

“All now is changed, yet all is still the same.
Lo, we have looked upon the face of God,
Our life has opened with divinity.
We have borne identity with the Supreme
And known his meaning in our mortal lives.
Our love has grown greater by that mighty touch
And learned its heavenly significance,
Yet nothing is lost of mortal love’s delight.
Heaven’s touch fulfils but cancels not our earth:

...

Our wedded walk through life begins anew,
No gladness lost, no depth of mortal joy.”

And she continues :

Let us go through this new world that is the same,
For it is given back, but it is known,
A playing-ground and dwelling-house of God
Who hides himself in bird and beast and man

Sweetly to find himself again by love,

....

We have each other found, O Satyavan,
In the great light of the discovered soul.
Let us go back, for eve is in the skies.

...

Lo, all these beings in this wonderful world!
Let us give joy to all, for joy is ours.
For not for ourselves alone our spirits came
Out of the veil of the Unmanifest,

...

Two fires that burn towards that parent Sun,
Two rays that travel to the original Light.
To lead man's soul towards truth and God we are born,
To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life
Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,
To shape it closer to an image of God,
A little nearer to the Idea divine.”

pp. 718-20

So they set off to return to the hermitage from which they had set out in the morning.

In Sri Aurobindo's version, unlike Vyasa's, they are met on their way back by a great company of people, representing '*The brilliant strenuous crowded days of man.*' King Dyumatsena leads the company, no longer blind but with '*far-questing eyes*'. His queen is beside him, '*Her eyes were first to find her children's forms*' – a poignant touch added by Sri Aurobindo. The fond father shares his great news with his son :

“The fortunate gods have looked on me today,
A kingdom seeking came and heaven's rays.
But where wast thou? Thou hast tormented gladness
With fear's dull shadow, O my child, my life. ...”

p. 722

In a scene full of tenderness, Sri Aurobindo also introduces a touch of humour, as Satyavan replies :

“Lay all on her; she is the cause of all.
With her enchantments she has twined me round.”

– implying that Savitri is to be blamed for the delay. But then he explains the real reason :

“Behold, at noon leaving this house of clay
I wandered in far-off eternities,
Yet still, a captive in her golden hands,
I tread your little hillock called green earth
And in the moments of your transient sun
Live glad among the busy works of men.” p. 723

The wonder, admiration and curiosity of all the attendant crowd is voiced by one ‘*who seemed a priest and sage*.’

“O woman soul, what light, what power revealed,
Working the rapid marvels of this day,
Opens for us by thee a happier age?” p. 723

Savitri’s response summarises the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s theme in four mantric and mysterious lines:

“Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage.” p. 724

Like her hearers, we too may wonder at her ‘*too luminous words*’, which contrast so markedly with the epic comprehensiveness of expression found in all the rest of the poem.

The brief concluding section shows us Satyavan and Savitri travelling through the darkening evening with all that royal company:

Drawn by white manes upon a high-roofed car
In flare of the unsteady torches went
With linked hands Satyavan and Savitri,
Hearing a marriage march and nuptial hymn,
Where waited them the many-voiced human world. p. 724

And Sri Aurobindo rounds off his poem by showing us a figure of Night very different from that of resistance and foreboding with which he began his poem, in the hour before dawn on that same momentous day. Night itself has been transfigured by the fulfilment

of Savitri's mission:

Lost in the halo of her musing brows
Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven
In silver peace, possessed her luminous reign.
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn. p. 724

While the first of these two sentences may be read as a beautiful description of Nature, the second reminds us of the depths of Vedic symbolism with which this supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision is imbued.

We see that while this Epilogue is one of the parts where the legend is in the forefront, and the early narrative version has been least changed, nevertheless it is in full harmony with the rest of the poem. Throughout, Sri Aurobindo has retained the essence of the legend, but has adapted or deviated from the Mahabharata version wherever he found it appropriate in order to bring out in detail all the suggestions of its underlying psychological and cosmic symbolism.

It is as if the whole of this immense epic was contained within a seed which first sprouted in the form of a narrative poem in a style similar to earlier ones the poet had written, but which then unfolded and grew, nourished by the higher and higher levels of insight and inspiration won by Sri Aurobindo's yogic progress, to reveal the overwhelmingly majestic form in which we now know it.

Recalling that when Amal Kiran mentioned to the Mother that *Savitri* consisted of 23,813 lines she at once exclaimed, "It should have been 24,000!"¹, we are reminded of some words from Book One, Canto Five:

... though a glowing form
Abides astonishing earth, imagined supreme,
Too little of what was meant has left a trace. p. 104

¹ 'Sri Aurobindo's Views vis-à-vis the Mother's', *Mother India*, December 1979, p. 752

Nevertheless, addressing his heroine with the voice of the Supreme Lord in a long prophetic passage near the end of the poem, Sri Aurobindo seems at the same time to remind us what his great masterpiece means for us and future generations:

O Savitri, thou art my spirit's Power,
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God.

p. 703

All gratitude to Sri Aurobindo!

Saraswati

This painting, exhibited in Savitri Bhavan throughout August, is the first of a series of engravings on stone by Italian Aurovilian artist Emanuele, entitled *The 7 Heavenly Sisters, or the Rishis' wives*. It is an attempt to give form to the secret existence of the wives of the Rishis, the seers of Vedic times. The Rishi's wife is a very important presence and her role and action have been too often kept in the shadow.

“I feel irresistibly attracted to give form to this still hidden secret, to this Energy, this Power, this Shakti, which acts in symbiosis with the fiery presence of these eternal seers, the Rishis. This work is inspired by words of Sri Aurobindo from *The Secret of the Veda* and *Savitri*. The piece shows the moment just before Saraswati, one of the 7 Heavenly Sisters, starts to play her sublime music. Already, with her light and golden touch, she is melting away old frozen emotions, transporting the heart of man to a far away moment of bliss and rapture.”

Emanuele



Amal Kiran

November 25 2012 is the 108th birth anniversary of Amal Kiran, who passed away on June 29 2011. To mark the occasion we are publishing a poem of his, as well as his account of how Sri Aurobindo started sending him passages of Savitri and the correspondence between them on the developing epic began. The momentous day was October 25, 1936 – just one month before Amal's 32nd birthday. With this in mind, the Trustees of Clear Ray Trust (which holds the copyright to Amal's writings) decided to hold a function at Savitri Bhavan close to that date, to release the second volume of Amal Kiran's writings on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, entitled 'Part Two : Collected Comments'. The first volume 'Part One : Essays' was presented to Amal on his birthday in 2010. Both volumes are now available from Sabda.

Savitri

*A rose of dawn, her smile lights every gaze –
Her love is like a nakedness of noon:
No flame but breathes in her the Spirit's calm
And pours the omnipresence of a sun.
Her tongues of fire break from a voiceless deep
Dreaming the taste of some ineffable height –
A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all,
A universal hunger's white embrace
That from the Unknown leaps burning to the Unknown.*

SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENT

“Exceedingly fine; both the language and rhythm are very powerful and highly inspired. When the inspiration is there, you reach more and more a peculiar fusion of the three influences, higher mental, illumined mental and intuitive, with a touch of the Overmind Intuition coming in. This touch is strongest here in the second and the two closing lines, but it is present in all except two – the third which yet a very fine line indeed and the seventh where it is not present in the typed version ('A cry to clasp in all the one God-hush') but seems to touch perhaps in the written one ('A cry to clasp the one God-hush in all'). In the typed version the higher mental is strongest, but in the written one which is less emphatic but more harmonious, the rhythm gets in a higher influence. In the other lines the illumined mental influence lifting up the higher mental is strongest, but is itself lifted up to the intuitive – in all but the third just high enough to get the touch of the overmental intuition.

Overhead Poetry

by Amal Kiran¹

Sri Aurobindo had tried to make me conscious of a certain element in poetry that hailed from what he called the Overhead planes, the hidden ranges of consciousness above the intellect, with their inherent light of knowledge and their natural experience of the infinite. He distinguished four planes: Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind. The last-named has been, according to him, the top reach of the dynamic side of man's spirituality so far: a transcendental poise of immutable Brahman or featureless Nirvana is the Beyond to it usually realised when in isolated cases there is a leap to the ultimate status of that infinite silence of self-liberation which can be attained on any plane of the cosmos by an inner withdrawal. The master dynamism of the Divine, the integral earth-transformative power which Sri Aurobindo designated as Supermind or Gnosis or Truth-Consciousness and which was his own outstanding personal realisation, rendering his Yoga a unique hope for the world, has lain unmanifest and mostly unseized and, until certain radical conditions are completely fulfilled, cannot find direct expression in life or literature. Even the expression of the Overmind with its massive and comprehensive yet intensely immediate vision – especially in the entire authenticity of its undertones and overtones of rhythm – is rare, as is also to a less degree that of the Higher Mind's broad connective clarity, the Illumined Mind's many-sided opulence of colourful insight, the Intuition's swift and close and all-seizing focus. What the ancients termed the *mantra* – the stuff of Divinity itself appearing to become revelatory scriptural word as in some parts of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita – is the clearest voice of the Overmind in its few past visitations on earth. Less openly, the Overmind is the chief presence in the world's greatest poetic phrases of various types. More and more Sri Aurobindo sought – by patiently

1 Extract from the Editor's Note to the 1951 edition of *Sri Aurobindo – Letters on Savitri*, taken from Amal Kiran's *On Sri Aurobindo's Savitri – Part One:Essays* pp.52-55

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

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

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

Those thoughts that wander through eternity
or Wordsworth's

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

He wrote back in his characteristic vein:

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

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

I think the favour I asked was expressed in perfectly clear language. If no English poet has produced the passage I want, then who has done so in English? God alone knows. But who is capable of doing it? All of us know. Well, then why not be kind enough to grant this favour? If difficult

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

The answer came the very next morning:

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

And then with an “e.g.” there followed in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand sixteen lines of the very first Canto of *Savitri* as it stood then:¹

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

¹ At present this prelude – slightly altered in phrase and with its opening and its close considerably separated – stands in a passage of 93 lines: *Savitri*, Vol. I, pp. 3-5 [*pp. 1-3 in the 1993 edition*].

The impassive skies were neutral, waste and still.
Then a faint hesitating glimmer broke.
A slow miraculous gesture dimly came,
The insistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
That glowed along the moment's fading brink
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.

Below the quotation were the words: "There! Promise fulfilled for a wonder."

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

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

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

On
Sri Aurobindo's SAVITRI

Writings by AMAL KIRAN (K.D. Sethna)

Part Two : Collected Comments

Amal Kiran, (K.D. Sethna, 25.11.1904 – 29.06.2011) is acknowledged to be one of the greatest authorities on Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic poem *Savitri: a legend and a symbol*. Yet although he was a prolific author, with 52 published books on a wide range of topics, he never dedicated an entire book to the poem with which he had such a special relationship. His writings on it have appeared over more than 50 years in various books and journals. The intention behind this compilation is to make easily available to the general interested reader everything written by Amal Kiran on Sri Aurobindo's epic and published by him during his long active career. To this end a careful search has been made through all his published works, as well as through other collections to which he has contributed, and the journal founded and edited by him for 50 years – *Mother India*. The collection is presented in two parts. Part One, consisting of complete essays, which have appeared in full as chapters or sections of books or as independent articles in journals, was published in 2010. Now it is complemented by Part Two which brings together passages relating to *Savitri* that have been extracted from articles or letters authored by Amal.

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The Opening Lines of *Savitri*: A study of its earlier drafts by Anurag Banerjee

Savitri, as we know, was started by Sri Aurobindo when he was working in Baroda. From whatever information we have, it appears that this poem consisted of two parts: the first part, which had four Books, was titled Earth and the second part, which had three Books and an epilogue was titled Beyond.¹ A number of recasts of this poem were made by Sri Aurobindo out of which the first form was done in Baroda and the rest in Pondicherry. Since Nirodbaran has portrayed how *Savitri* received its final form in his masterpiece *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, we would only be concerned with the opening lines of the epic which is the subject-matter of this article.

Let us come to the earliest draft of *Savitri* which is said to have been started in August 1916. Nirodbaran writes in his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* about this draft:

‘The draft exists in two sections. Book I is complete, Book II unfinished. The spelling of the three chief characters is: Savithri, Uswapathy, Suthyavan. In the first Book, after a short description of Night and Dawn, there is a very brief account of the Yoga done by Uswapathy, then Savithri is born, grows up and goes out, at Uswapathy’s prompting, to find her mate. She finds Suthyavan. In the meantime Narad comes down to earth and visits Uswapathy’s palace. There is a talk between the two; Savithri returns from her quest and discovery, and a talk takes place among the three.’

(pp. 173-174)

¹ There is a booklet in Bengali entitled *Aurobindo Prosonge* by Dinendra Kumar Roy who tutored Sri Aurobindo at Baroda. The said reference has been taken from this booklet. Nirod-da too has written about the structure of these earlier drafts in his ‘*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*’ (p. 170, 1995 edition).

This draft commences with the following lines:

In a huge forest where the listening Night
Heard lonely voices and in the large hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things
That have no sound for the rich heart of day,—
For now her phantom tribes were not abroad,
The panther's eyes glared not, the tiger slept
Prone in his lair of jungle or deep grass,—
Startling the wide-browed dreamer Dawn arose.
Lain in her darker thoughtful sister's robe
She pushed away the loving cloak that sealed
To rest her brilliant and imperious eyes
And waved the dim kind guardian from her side.
Raised were the wonderful lids that open heaven.
Vague for a while with sleep lightened her gaze.
Smiling the ever-youthful goddess rose,
Voluptuous in a purity divine,
Cast free her drifting robe of magic light,
And pressed her rosy fingers delicately
Upon the flushed cheek of the pallid world.
Flocking upon the ruddy verge her locks
Made splendid clots of morning gold, wind-lifted
To enrich the hues of space; and lucid limbs
Of secret spiritual beauty formed
Glimmered divinity through every veil.
Once she half-looked behind for her great sun,
Then thoughtful turned to her immortal work.
And Sāvithrî woke also in a world
That opened joyful eyes to life again
And rapturous heard the voices and the stir
Of morning. Not to joy she rose; for fear
Awoke with her and trembled at the dawn.
Sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom,
Nor knew why the close lingering ache was there,
So quiet, so old, so natural to its place,
Till memory came opening like a bud
Her strong sleep-shrouded soul. She gazed within

And saw the dumb white statue of pain erect
Within its temple waiting like a god
Daily oblation of her unwept tears.
Then all the cruelty of thought returned,
And lifting up wide beautiful heavy eyes
She gazed upon the bright and careless Dawn.
This was the day when Suthyavân must die.

Here is a letter written in 1931 by Sri Aurobindo about a draft of *Savitri*; probably he is referring to this draft when he mentions:

There is a previous draft the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a “*magnum opus*” at all. Besides, it would have been a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame.

It is a little-known fact that in Sri Aurobindo’s *Collected Works* in Bengali, there is a poem titled *Savitri*. This poem seems to be a rough draft of the first canto of the original *Savitri*. It was probably composed either in 1916 or 1917. If the reader compares the earliest draft of *Savitri* with the draft in Bengali he would certainly note some strong similarities. A translation of this poem (made by the author) runs as follows:

Silent were the forests, the lonely Night
In its vast tranquil spirit deeply engrossed
Listens to the unknown solitary voice, obscure breath
Unearthly footsteps, which never ring
In the avaricious heart of delight-greedy Day.
No nocturnal animal wanders in the dreadful forest,
No cruel eye glitters in the darkness. On the sleeping grass
In the dense forest rests the tiger,
Its ferocious spirit satisfied with the devoured blood and flesh.
The profoundly tranced heart of the Night
Lost in palpitationless, thoughtless, infinite obscurity.
Suddenly the startled deep-eyed damsel sees
An indistinct hint of wakefulness in dream

The unconscious inert mane of dormant consciousness
In the dark room of hidden treasures' splendour
Arising on the border of the garb the ever-veiled
Smiling sister Dawn. She lay with her eyes
Covered with the robe of her dark-complexioned sister
Like a wench afraid of darkness who hides herself
And sleeps under her mother's robe fearlessly.
Now her body shook slightly in the wave.
The lustre of the ray of paleness
Pile of flowers the hint of the shining shoulder.
The restless damsel threw away her dark veil
The lazy fingers rose gently and slowly.
The beautiful, ever-youthful goddess of Delight
The splendour of the laughter of her welkin-unbolting eye
Bloomed out in the joyful World.
Her enchanting golden-laughter flooded the sky
Her billow of bliss as if in a golden wave
Caressing a touch of light in the heart and eyes
Creates white-bosom lustre in pure leisure.
Her unrobed fair and graceful figure
Splits and floods with her subtle cloak of light
Reveals Divinity in the nude beauty of her limbs.
Sweet-smiling Dawn caressed its crimson fingers
On the pale cheeks of the world.
Her restless feet rose to fall
The goddess beholds the earth and turns back
Hoping for the Sun, her thoughtful movements
Emerged from the eternal work of the Immortal.
The eyes behold the mirth of life
Listens in thousand ears the melody of the morn,
Rejoice of the world-spirit. Savitri rose to
Joyful wakefulness. She shivered with the touch of the day
Fear rose in her. Upon her bosom her hand she laid
Knew not why her constant companion
Existed there—the indistinct grief and agony
Of her wound. The door-keeper of her memory
Arrived then to open the slumber-enveloped Soul
Like a sleeping lotus in the gloomy dawn.

She looked within, the white-stoned statue of sorrow
In its void abode like a reticent heartless god
Awaits in the silent heart
Daily offerings of her tears. With her
Reposed, beautiful, vast eyes
At the smiling eyes of the Dawn she looked.
This illuminated World seemed a burden
On her bosom, her sorrow like a foe
Surrounds her bliss, the morn came to know,
In this golden-wave lies the death-day of the Lord of her life.

Now let us come to the opening lines of the 1936-37 version of *Savitri*.

But before that let us note how the first line of Book I received its final form. It has already been mentioned that the earliest draft of *Savitri* began with the line: '*In a huge forest where the listening Night...*' The second known version which was given the title of *Savithri, A Tale and a Vision* began with: '*The boundless spirit of Night dreamless, alone*'. The third version began with '*It was an hour of the transfiguring Gods.*' It remained unchanged in the fourth version but was altered a bit in the fifth one where it ran: '*An hour was near of the transfiguring Gods.*' It was again modified in the sixth version and it became: '*It was the hush of a transfiguring hour.*' In the seventh version, for the first time we come across the line with which *Savitri* now commences: '*It was the hour before the Gods awake.*'

While the earliest draft mentions that '*This was the day when Suthyavân must die*' in its forty-third line, the same message is given in the hundred and fifty-fifth line of the 1936-37 version; the only difference is the spelling of the name of Suthyavân which was changed to Satyavan. And the following version was the one whose first sixteen lines were sent to K.D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran by Sri Aurobindo following the former's request for an instance in English of the inspiration from the pure Overmind.

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge unslumbering spirit of Night, alone
In the unlit temple of immensity,

Lay stretched immobile upon silence' marge,
Mute with the unplumbed prevision of her change.
The impassive skies were neutral, waste and still.
Then a faint hesitating glimmer broke.
A slow miraculous gesture dimly came,
The insistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
That glowed along the moment's fading brink,
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.
A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,
A sense was born within the darkness' depths
Vague like a promise from still powerless suns,
A memory quivered in the heart of Time
As if a soul long dead were moved to live.
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall
Obscured the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And slow creation laboured out once more.
Yet the undying Ray took shape on high.
Out of the superconscient altitudes
A glamour from unreached transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
The brief perpetual sign recurred above.
Ablaze awhile upon creation's edge
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues,
Burying its seed of grandeur in the hours—
Bright like a soul that nears the sill of birth
And is absorbed into life's common day,
A spark of heaven enshrined in Matter's crypt,
Its lustre vanishing in the inconscient planes.
Almost that morn the epiphany was disclosed
Of which she is the coloured signal-flare:
A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
Almost was flung upon the opaque Inane.
Only a little the God-light endures,

But through that little the ancient Marvel shines.
Once more a tread perturbed the vacant vasts.
A face upon Infinity's borders, One
Parted the ageless lids that open Heaven;
A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.
Ambassadors twixt eternity and change,
Outlined but still protected by her mask,
The omniscient Goddess leaned above the breadths
That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars
And saw the spaces ready for her feet.
Once she half looked behind for her veiled Sun,
Then, thoughtful, turned to her immortal work.
Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close,
The waking ear of Nature heard her steps
And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,
And, scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile
Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.
All grew a consecration and a rite.
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills,
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.
Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,
Here where one knows not even the step in front
And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
An anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Our prostrate soul bore the awakening Light.
Here too the glamour and prophetic flame
Touched for an instant trivial daylong shapes,
Then the divine afflatus, lost, withdrew,
Dimmed, fading slowly from the mortal's range.
A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
The worship of a Presence and a Power
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
Affranchised from its respite of fatigue,

Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
Renewed the cycles of the blinded quest.
All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,
And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
Alone who seeks the future's covered face,
Man lifted up the burden of his fate.

And Savitri too woke among these tribes
That hastened to join the brilliant summoner's chant
And, lured by the beauty of the apparent ways,
Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy.
Akin to the eternity whence she came,
No part she took in their small happiness.
Its chequered eager motion of pursuit
And fluttering-hued illusion of desire,
Its message of brief light shone not for her.
A mighty stranger in the human field,
The embodied Guest within made no response.
In her there was the anguish of the Gods
Imprisoned in the transience of our mould,
The deathless conquered by the death of things.
A vaster joy had dwelt with her, but long
Could stand not on this brittle earthly base.
A narrow movement on Time's deep abysm,
Life's fragile littleness denied the power
And proud and conscious wideness and the bliss
That she had brought into the mortal form:
Offered to the daughter of Infinity
Its passion-flower of love and doom it gave.
As with one who watches over men left blind
And bears the load of the unwitting race,
A dread foreknowledge separated her
From all of whom she was the star and stay:
To the lone immortal's unshared work she rose.
At first life ached not in her burdened breast.
Awhile she lay in silence twixt two realms,

Nothing recalling of the sorrow here,
Then sighing put her hand upon her bosom,
Nor knew why the dull lingering grief was there,
Deep, quiet, old, made natural to its place.
Heavy, unwilling were life's servitors
Like workers with no wages of delight:
Sullen, the torch of sense refused to burn;
The unassisted brain found not its past.
Only some vague earth-nature held the frame.
But soon her strong far-winging spirit returned
Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep.
Her house of Nature felt the unseen sway:
Illumined swiftly were the darkened rooms,
And memory's casements opened on the hours,
And the tired feet of thought approached her doors.
All came back to her. Earth and love and doom,
Dim giant figures wrestling in the night,
The ancient disputants encircled her,
And in the shadow of her flaming heart
At the sombre centre of the dire debate
An image white of high and godlike Pain,
A guardian of the unconsolated abyss
Inheriting the long agony of the globe,
Appeared and gazed with fixed regardless eyes
That saw grief's timeless depths but not life's goal.
Afflicted by his harsh divinity,
Bound to his throne, he waited unappeased
The daily oblation of her unwept tears.
All the fierce question of man's hours relived:
The sacrifice of suffering and desire
Earth offers to the immortal ecstasy
Began again beneath the eternal Hand.
Awake she endured the moments' serried march,
And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,
And heard the ignorant cry of living things.
Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate:
Immobile in herself, she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die.

Now let's come to the final draft of *Savitri*. What was earlier entitled *The Book of Birth* was renamed *The Book of Beginnings*. The first two lines of the first canto remained intact; in the third and fourth lines some alterations were made: the phrase '*unslumbering spirit*' was replaced by '*foreboding mind*' and in the fourth line '*immensity*' was replaced by the word '*eternity*'. From the sixth line onwards an entirely new passage was included which begins with '*Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable*' and continues till '*The brief perpetual sign recurred above*'. The next two lines '*A glamour from unreached transcendences /Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,*' remain the same as in the draft of 1936-37. Then the line '*The brief perpetual sign recurred above*' of the older draft is replaced by '*A message from the unknown immortal Light*'. Next, the following three lines of the earlier draft, i.e. '*Ablaze awhile upon creation's edge/ Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues,/ Burying its seed of grandeur in the hours—*' is rewritten as '*Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,/ Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues/ And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.*' And then a new passage commencing with the line '*An instant's visitor the godhead shone*' and ending with '*A brilliant code penned with the sky for page*' was included. The passage starting from '*Almost that morn the epiphany was disclosed*' till '*Parted the ageless lids that open Heaven;*' in the older draft was rewritten as:

Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
 Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;
 A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
 Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.
 Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;
 Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
 Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;

The next few lines ('*A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near... The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.*') were kept almost intact but with a few minor changes (including punctuations); for instance, in the older draft after '*Ambadress twixt eternity and change*' there existed '*Outlined but still protected by her mask,*'—this line was omitted in the 1936-37 version. In the very next line, i.e. '*The omniscient Goddess leaned above the breadths*', the word '*above*' was replaced with '*across*'; a small '*S*' was used in the spelling of

‘Sun’ in the line ‘*Once she half looked behind her veiled Sun*’; ‘*On this anguished and precarious field of toil*’ was written instead of ‘*An anguished and precarious field of toil*’; ‘*Our prostrate soul*’ was replaced with ‘*Our prostrate soil*’ which was preceded by a new line ‘*Impartial witness of our joy and bale*’; ‘*Here too the glamour and prophetic flame*’ became ‘*Here too the vision and prophetic gleam*’; ‘*Touched for an instant trivial daylong shapes,*’ was changed to ‘*Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes*’; the word ‘lost’ was replaced with ‘spent’ in the line ‘*Then the divine afflatus...*’ The very next line ‘*Dimmed, fading slowly from the mortal’s range*’ was changed to ‘*Unwanted, fading from the mortal’s range.*’ The lines ‘*Only a little the god-light can stay... There was the common light of earthly day*’ were included after ‘*The prescience of a marvellous birth to come*’. And in ‘*Alone who seeks the future’s covered place,*’ the word ‘seeks’ was replaced by ‘stares at’. Regarding the alteration in the line ‘*Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray*’, Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter (when he was informed that ‘soil’ was an error for ‘soul’):

But ‘soil’ is correct; for I am describing the revealing light falling upon the lower levels of the earth, not on the soul. No doubt, the whole thing is symbolic, but the symbol has to be kept in the front and the thing symbolised has to be concealed or only peep out from behind, it cannot come openly into the front and push aside the symbol.

(*Letters on Savitri*, p. 760)

In the second half of Book I Canto I, Sri Aurobindo has interchanged some lines and added several more lines to the existing stanza, thus making the newer draft much larger than that of 1936-37. For instance, the 1936-37 draft ran:

No part she took in their small happiness.
 Its chequered eager motion of pursuit
 And fluttering-hued illusion of desire,
 Its message of brief light shone not for her.
 A mighty stranger in the human field,
 The embodied Guest within made no response.

In the newer version, the two lines ‘*A mighty stranger in the human field*’ and ‘*The embodied Guest within made no response*’ were

inserted just after *'No part she took in their small happiness'*. A new line *'The call that wakes the leap of human mind'* was introduced and was followed by *'Its chequered eager motion of pursuit/ Its* [*'And'* was replaced by *'Its'*] *fluttering-hued illusion of desire, / Visited her heart like a sweet alien note.'* A new line *'Time's message of brief light was not for her'* was followed by *'In her there was the anguish of the gods / The deathless conquered by the death of things.'* The lines *'A vaster joy had dwelt with her, but long/ Could stand not on this brittle earthly base'* were changed to *'A vaster Nature's joy had once been hers, / But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue/ Or stand upon this brittle earthly base.'* *'That she had brought into the mortal form'* was altered to *'She had brought with her into the human form'*. The four lines commencing from *'The calm delight that weds one soul to all'* till *'Rejected the undying rapture's boon'* were introduced after it. *'Its passion-flower of love and doom it gave'* was modified to *'Her passion-flower of love and doom she gave'* and this line was followed by several new lines which started from *'In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice'* and continued till *'A solitary mind, a world-wide heart'*. The word *'ached'* in *'At first life ached not in her burdened breast'* was changed to *'grieved'* and this line was followed by four new lines starting from *'On the lap of earth's original somnolence'* till *'Obtuse and tranquil like the stone and star.'* *'Awhile she lay in silence twixt two realms'* was changed to *'In a deep cleft of silence twixt two realms'* and after *'Nothing recalling of the sorrow here'* a new line *'Then a slow faint remembrance shadowlike moved'* was included, followed by *'And sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom'* - a modified version of *'Then sighing put her hand upon her bosom.'* *'Nor knew why the dull lingering grief was there'* of the older version was changed to *'And recognised the close and lingering ache.'* The 121st line of the older version *'Deep, quiet, old, made natural to its place'* remained intact in the newer version but two more lines *'But knew not why it was there nor whence it came./ The Power that kindles mind was still withdrawn:'* were added after it. The following four lines *'Heavy, unwilling were life's servitors... The unassisted brain found not its past'* remained the same.

The 126th line of the older draft *'Only some vague earth-nature held the frame'* remained almost intact in the newer version, only the

word ‘some’ was replaced with ‘a’. The very next line ‘*But soon her strong far-winging spirit returned*’ was changed to ‘*Her strong far-winging spirit travelled back,*’ but before it two new lines (‘*But now she stirred, her life shared the cosmic load. / At the summons of her body’s voiceless call*’) were added and it was followed by three new lines ‘*Back to the yoke of ignorance and fate...Lighting a pathway through strange symbol dreams*’. The passage commencing from the 128th line of the older draft (‘*Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep*’) till ‘*All came back to her. Earth and love and doom*’ remained almost unchanged: only a few alterations were made: ‘*Illumined swiftly were the darkened rooms*’ became ‘*Illumined swiftly were life’s darkened rooms,*’ and ‘*Earth and love and doom*’ became ‘*Earth and Love and Doom*’. Lines 134 and 135 of the older draft ‘*Dim giant figures wrestling in the night, / The ancient disputants encircled her*’ were altered to ‘*The ancient disputants, encircled her/ Like giant figures wrestling in the night.*’ and in the newer version they were followed by the new lines ‘*The godheads from the dim Inconscient born/ Awoke to struggle and the pang divine*’. The passage from the 136th line till the 141st line of the older draft was, in the newer draft, rewritten as:

And in the shadow of her flaming heart,
 At the sombre centre of the dire debate,
 A guardian of the unconsolated abyss
 Inheriting the long agony of the globe,
 A stone-still figure of high and godlike Pain
 Stared into Space with fixed regardless eyes.

From the 142nd line of the older draft till the very end, where we come across the line ‘*This was the day when Satyavan must die*’, there has been not much alteration except the inclusion of a Capital E in the spelling of ‘ecstasy’ in line 148 of the older draft and a new line ‘*Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene*’ after ‘*And heard the ignorant cry of living things*’.

One might ponder why Sri Aurobindo rewrote *Savitri* so many times. In fact, this question was put to Sri Aurobindo and the reply he gave was:

That is very simple. I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could

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

In another letter Sri Aurobindo writes on *Savitri*:

The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Most of the stuff of the first book is new or else the old so altered as to be no more what it was; the best of the old has sometimes been kept almost intact because it had already the higher inspiration. Moreover, there have been made several successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry.

(*Letters on Savitri*, pp. 728-730)

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The English of *Savitri* (6)

Book One, Canto Two, lines 1-116

by *Shraddhavan*

Today we are starting Canto Two, on page 11. Savitri is just waking up on the morning when — as she alone knows — Satyavan is going to die. We remember the last line of the previous canto: ‘*This was the day when Satyavan must die.*’ As she is waking up, we saw that she ‘*gathers force*’: she needs strength to face this day. And now we shall see that she is remembering everything that has led up to this moment.

Awhile, withdrawn in secret fields of thought,
Her mind moved in a many-imagined past
That lived again and saw its end approach:
Dying, it lived imperishably in her;
Transient and vanishing from transient eyes,
Invisible, a fateful ghost of self,
It bore the future on its phantom breast.

Savitri’s mind, for a time, ‘*awhile*’, is ‘*withdrawn*’, drawn inwards, concentrated within herself, ‘*withdrawn in secret fields of thought*’. Within herself her mind is moving ‘*in a many-imagined past*’. She is remembering many pictures, many images from her whole life. That happens to us sometimes: we wander in those fields of memory and it is as if the past is happening to us again; but there is also the consciousness that something is coming to an end now. Whatever has happened in the past is going to come to an end now with the death of Satyavan. So the past is dying, but it lives on imperishably in her, in her memory. It can’t die completely because she is holding it in her consciousness.

That past is ‘*transient*’ — passing — ‘*vanishing from transient eyes*’. Things happen, and our physical eyes don’t see them again, so the past, once it is gone, is transient, we no longer see it with our physical eyes, it is invisible. But it is full of fate and significance, determining the future. It is a kind of ‘*ghost of self*’, he says; a

ghost is a subtle form of something or someone that has died. The remembered past is like a ghost of herself. But it is fateful; the past determines the future. It is carrying the future ‘*on its phantom breast*’. ‘Phantom’ is another word like ‘ghost’, signifying an almost invisible form. Usually it is used as a noun; here Sri Aurobindo uses it as an adjective — ghostly. Savitri is remembering the past that has gone by, and seeing how it is carrying the future on its breast, as if on the surface of a river.

Along the fleeting event’s far-backward trail
Regressed the stream of the insistent hours,
And on the bank of the mysterious flood
Peopled with well-loved forms now seen no more
And the subtle images of things that were,
Her witness spirit stood reviewing Time.

That time of the past is like a stream, a river. Each event has a trail stretching back into the past, and each hour of past time follows the other like a stream of hours, one after another, one moment after another. The events are ‘*fleeting*’ — they happen, they pass, they are gone, but they leave a trail, and along that trail runs the stream of hours. We can’t stop that stream of time. It is insistent. Whatever we try to do, time just flows and flows on, like a stream stretching away backwards into the past — regressing, going backwards. She is standing on the bank of that stream and observing it: ‘*Her witness spirit stood reviewing Time.*’ And that mysterious flood, that river of Time, is ‘*Peopled with well-loved forms, now seen no more.*’ She can remember back to her childhood: the palace she grew up in, her family, all the people she doesn’t see any more — all the well-loved forms. And this many-imaged past is peopled too with ‘the subtle images of things that were’ — things that happened or used to exist; they are subtle: images in the inner mind, not in the objective world. (We don’t pronounce the ‘b’ in subtle, it is silent; the word sounds like ‘suttle’.) She sees it all flowing past her like a stream.

All that she once had hoped and dreamed and been,
Flew past her eagle-winged through memory’s skies.

This is a different image, isn't it? First of all the stream, she is standing on the bank of a stream of time; but now it is all the things that she once had hoped, all the things she had dreamed of and all the things that she has been; these things fly past her like birds with wings like eagles have, very powerful wings, flying through those skies of memory. Then another image comes:

As in a many-hued flaming inner dawn,
Her life's broad highways and its sweet bypaths
Lay mapped to her sun-clear recording view,
From the bright country of her childhood's days
And the blue mountains of her soaring youth
And the paradise groves and peacock wings of Love
To joy clutched under the silent shadow of doom
In a last turn where heaven raced with hell.
Twelve passionate months led in a day of fate.

The poet says that it is as if everything is lighting up inside her in an inner dawn and she sees laid out in front of her as if on a map the broad highways of her life and its sweet bypaths, the little lanes, the small, apparently unimportant but very sweet things that have happened. She can see it all with her '*sun-clear recording view*'. She can see and remember it in full detail, starting from '*the bright country of her childhood's days*'. When she becomes a little older life becomes more adventurous, '*the blue mountains of her soaring youth*'. 'Soaring' is what a bird does, it flies up very high, as if effortlessly. In her youth she had this soaring adventurous spirit. And then she meets Satyavan, and experiences with him '*the paradise groves and peacock wings of Love*'. Groves are clearings in the forest. Later in this canto, Sri Aurobindo will describe the beautiful scenery where she lives with Satyavan in the forest. It is full of beautiful colours like those in the shimmering tail of the peacock. The peacock also has big wings, it is something powerful and magically beautiful. And then comes this time when she has to 'clutch' her joy — hold it tight, knowing that Satyavan is doomed to die. She is holding onto that joy of being with him under the silent shadow of doom '*in a last turn*' on the road of her life, where the heaven of being with him and the hell of knowing that he must die are racing along together. Which of them will win — heaven or hell?

These twelve passionate months that she has spent with Satyavan have all been leading up to this day of fate, this day when he must die, this moment when she is waking up and remembering everything that has happened.

Then Sri Aurobindo tells us something general:

An absolute supernatural darkness falls
On man sometimes when he draws near to God:
An hour arrives when fail all Nature's means;
Forced out from the protecting Ignorance
And flung back on his naked primal need,
He at length must cast from him his surface soul
And be the ungarbed entity within:
That hour had fallen now on Savitri.

This is an experience which people who have come close to God have spoken about. Before really finding themselves, they had to pass through some kind of darkness. '*An absolute supernatural darkness*' — not just the darkness of our physical night, something much more than that: an hour when all Nature's means fail, when nothing in the world can help you any more — not even your own courage and strength: that is all gone. Whatever help you might expect from other people is simply not there. There is nothing any more. All Nature's means fail. That moment happens to the chosen soul when it is forced out of our ignorance, our ordinary consciousness, which is a kind of protection for us, and is flung back onto its '*naked primal need*'. 'Primal' means 'original' — the absolute essential thing, what was there at the beginning. What we really need is the contact with the Divine. When everything else is taken away, that is the only thing that can help and heal. Then we have to cast off our surface soul. Sri Aurobindo says that we have two souls: we have our vital soul, our vital, mental surface soul which serves us very well in ordinary life; deep behind it there is the true, essential entity. He says we have to become that '*ungarbed entity within*': 'ungarbed' means without any covering at all. The primal need is naked, and when at last we feel it, we have to find our true self, our true soul, also without any covering or veil. *That hour had fallen now on Savitri*. The day has come. There is nobody to help her. Even the heavens seem to be indifferent and closed. She has to fall back on her own divine inner strength.

A point she had reached where life must be in vain
Or, in her unborn element awake,
Her will must cancel her body's destiny.

She had come to a moment where it seems as if her whole life must be without significance, meaningless, useless — unless her will can wake up in '*her unborn element*', in her true immortal self. If she can unite with that unborn and undying will, it alone can cancel the destiny of the body. It is something that the Mother has talked about. She says that we have many different destinies: our body has a destiny, due to our heredity and the circumstances in which we are born, but we also have many other parts of our being. The destiny of our life being, our vital being, can interfere with the body's destiny, either to help it or to harm it. If we follow our vital being, even if we have a good destiny for our body, for a strong, vigorous, long life, if we indulge in all kinds of bad vital habits we will interfere with that destiny of the body. And similarly we have a mental destiny, built up perhaps during our previous lives or formations that we picked up as we came into the body or in the course of our life. That too can have its effect. As a human being, Savitri has this destiny: she is born to be married to Satyavan and to face his death. This is her body's destiny. Is it possible for her to connect with her immortal self so that some will from there can come and cancel that destiny of her body? That is what she must try to do, because only that timeless power, that power which is beyond time, the power of the unborn spirit, can '*lift the yoke imposed by birth in Time.*' We are born into this world of time and space, certain conditions are laid on us and it is really only our '*unborn spirit*' that is strong enough to remove those conditions or change them — or perhaps take advantage of them for our growth.

For only the unborn spirit's timeless power
Can lift the yoke imposed by birth in Time.
Only the Self that builds this figure of self
Can raise the fixed interminable line
That joins these changing names, these numberless lives,
These new oblivious personalities
And keeps still lurking in our conscious acts
The trail of old forgotten thoughts and deeds,
Disown the legacy of our buried selves,

The burdensome heirship to our vanished forms
Accepted blindly by the body and soul.

The Self, the one Self, is the only power that can change destiny. It builds all these little figures of itself — our individualities; and only that one power can ‘rase’ the line. There is another word that sounds the same: ‘raise’ meaning to lift up. But the word ‘rase’ means to rub out — as if with an eraser. Literally, it means ‘to cut’. If you grow a beard, you have a razor to cut it off or trim it. There is this fixed, interminable, endless line which joins all our many, many, numberless lives. In each life we have a different name; in each life we have a different personality. Those poor personalities have completely forgotten what happened in the previous lives, but there is a line connecting all of them, which affects the destiny of the body and of the being. Only the one Self which is beyond all those changes can rub out that line so that it no longer has its effect. It is that line, joining all these lives, that keeps still lurking, hiding like an animal in the bush or like a thief outside the house; it keeps hiding there behind our conscious acts, hiding something carried over from our other lives, this trail of old forgotten things that we have thought and done: all that is like a legacy from our buried selves, from our past selves. A legacy is something that you inherit from someone in your family when they pass away — you may get a necklace from your mother, for example. So we have also inherited things from our own actions in other lives in the past. He says that it is ‘*a burdensome heirship*’. An heir is a person who inherits, so sometimes what we inherit is a burden, a load. We wish we didn’t have it, that we didn’t inherit anything from those vanished forms. The body and soul accept this legacy, this burden, blindly, without realizing it. Only the Self, our one true Self who is beyond space and time, can free us from all that. That is what Savitri has to do now: to get in touch with that higher Self.

An episode in an unremembered tale,
Its beginning lost, its motive and plot concealed,
A once living story has prepared and made
Our present fate, child of past energies.

There is all the old story that we don’t remember. We are only conscious of this little episode that is happening to us now. Television

dramas have many episodes. The Mahabharata also has so many little stories, somehow all connected. But if we are experiencing only one episode, we have forgotten all the rest of the tale. Its beginning is lost. We have forgotten all that went before, all that explains and determines what is happening to us now, the motive or moving force that has prepared our present fate. Our present fate is the child born from all those past energies. That ‘*once-living story*’ has prepared this episode, all these things that are happening to us now.

The fixity of the cosmic sequences
Fastened with hidden inevitable links
She must disrupt, dislodge by her soul’s force
Her past, a block on the Immortal’s road,
Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate.

What she must do is to disrupt, to break this chain of events, these cosmic sequences, these links in the chain, one after the other in a sequence, an order that is fixed and fastened with inevitable, unavoidable, links. She has to disrupt that, break it up. By the force, the strength of her soul she has to dislodge, to shift, to move out of her way the consequences of all those things that happened in the past. It is as if a big stone, a big obstacle, is blocking her path; she has to find a way to move it. She has to make ‘*a rased ground*’ — a space that is nicely flattened and smooth — so that she can make a fresh start, begin to shape her fate, her destiny in a new form. There is a Latin phrase which has come into English: *tabula rasa*. In the old Roman days the school children had small blocks of wax in a wooden frame. They would learn to write on that. People would even write small letters to each other. When they didn’t need the writing anymore, they would just smooth the wax so they could write something else. A *tabula rasa* is a tablet where all the old writing has been smoothed out, ‘erased’, so that you can make a fresh start, turn over a new page, a new leaf.

A colloquy of the original Gods
Meeting upon the borders of the unknown,
Her soul’s debate with embodied Nothingness
Must be wrestled out on a dangerous dim background:
Her being must confront its formless Cause,
Against the universe weigh its single self.

A colloquy is a conversation, a dialogue. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the debate or discussion or argument between Savitri's soul and embodied nothingness, this figure of Death, this figure of Negation which she has to confront, is '*a colloquy of the original gods*'. It is as if Death is representing the Eternal No and Savitri is representing the Eternal Yes. They are meeting there on '*the borders of the unknown*'. The debate or argument between these opposing powers has to be '*wrestled out on a dangerous dim background*'. '*Her being must confront its formless cause*': Savitri has to look and see the source beyond form, beyond the manifestation, which has caused her to exist. She must weigh her single, small, individual human self against the whole universe, as if in a pair of scales: Savitri — one human woman — on one side, on the other side the laws of the universe. This is a very profound sentence that carries in it a key to the whole message of the poem, but we won't go into the deeper meaning of it now.

On the bare peak where Self is alone with Nought
And life has no sense and love no place to stand,
She must plead her case upon extinction's verge,
In the world's death-cave uphold life's helpless claim
And vindicate her right to be and love.

We imagine a bare mountain top where the Self is alone with Nought, with Nothingness. There life has no sense, neither sense perception nor meaning. And there is no place on that peak for love to stand. Savitri has to plead her case as if in a court of law — tell her side of the story, how she sees it, what she wants to happen — standing right on the very edge, the verge of extinction. 'Extinction' means going out of existence.

'*In the world's death-cave*' she has to '*uphold life's helpless claim*'. What right has Life to exist in this universe of dead matter? She has to '*vindicate her right to be and love.*' To vindicate means to show that you have a right or that you are right. Savitri has to justify, to prove, her right to exist and to love, and to continue to love. When everyone thinks you are guilty or wrong, but then you are proven right or innocent, you are vindicated: it is proved that you have right on your side.

Altered must be Nature's harsh economy;
Acquittance she must win from her past's bond,

An old account of suffering exhaust,
Strike out from Time the soul's long compound debt
And the heavy servitudes of the Karmic Gods,
The slow revenge of unforgiving Law
And the deep need of universal pain
And hard sacrifice and tragic consequence.

Economy : we always think of money when we use this word, but here it refers to the balance of things in Nature. In Nature, if you are born you must die. If you have some happiness, then you will have some suffering too. What Savitri is trying, wanting and wishing to do is to alter this harsh economy of Nature. In order to do so, she must become free from some kind of a bond or a debt from her past. 'Acquittance' means becoming free, particularly getting free from a debt or a contract. It is as if there is an old account of suffering which must be paid off. It must be exhausted, finished. Sri Aurobindo says it is as if the soul has a long debt and it's getting bigger and bigger. If you borrow some money, you have to pay interest for every month that money is with you. If you can't manage to pay the money back, the debt gets bigger and bigger and bigger: you have to pay interest on the interest — compound interest; and if you cannot pay, you may have to become a bonded labourer to try to work off your debt. So Sri Aurobindo refers to '*the heavy servitudes of the Karmic Gods*': we human beings are as if bound in service to those cosmic powers who look after the laws of the consequences of the past. There is an unforgiving karmic law in nature, and those karmic gods are always taking their slow revenge, giving punishment for what we have done in the past. He says too that there is a deep need of pain in this universe. There is a need for sacrifice and tragic consequence. In order to save Satyavan, Savitri will have to win acquittance from all that. It is a tremendous task.

Out of a timeless barrier she must break,
Penetrate with her thinking depths the Void's monstrous hush,
Look into the lonely eyes of immortal Death
And with her nude spirit measure the Infinite's night.

That task cannot be done here in our physical world. She has to break out of the barrier of the manifestation, go beyond time, take her

individual consciousness, her thinking depths, right into that terrible silence of the Emptiness, to look into the eyes of Death, Death who is a god and immortal. All alone with her own naked spirit she must measure how vast, how wide, how deep is that limitless night of the Infinite. This is Savitri's mission.

The great and dolorous moment now was close.
A mailed battalion marching to its doom,
The last long days went by with heavy tramp,
Long but too soon to pass, too near the end.

'*The great and dolorous moment*', the moment full of sorrow — 'dolorous' means full of sorrow — that moment is close now when Satyavan must leave his body. Savitri is counting the days and the hours, '*The last long days*'. Those days go by '*with heavy tramp*', like a troop of soldiers. A battalion is a unit in the army. This battalion is 'mailed' — wearing armour — and it is heavy. The battalion is tramping on its way like soldiers fully ready for battle — doomed to die. These '*last long days*', tramping on their way are long; it is always long when we are waiting for something to happen, waiting seems to stretch out the moments. But Sri Aurobindo says that even though it is like that, even though she is waiting for something which stretches the moments out, makes the days long, still they pass too quickly because what she is waiting for is not something pleasant: it is the end of her life with Satyavan. That is still approaching too quickly, even though the last days are long, tramping past slowly.

Alone amid the many faces loved,
Aware among unknowing happy hearts,
Her armoured spirit kept watch upon the hours
Listening for a foreseen tremendous step
In the closed beauty of the inhuman wilds.

There are people around her. There is Satyavan and his family and there are the hermits in the woods; but she is alone because she has this knowledge in her heart that she doesn't share with anybody. So there she is, alone among the many faces of those she loves. She is aware, she is the only one who is aware among all the others; they are happy because they don't know, they are unknowing. Narad

spoke to her parents, but this has not been told to Satyavan's family at all. Her spirit is therefore 'armoured', on guard, watching on the hours, all the time alert, listening for that '*foreseen tremendous step*' of Death, the step that she knows will come '*in the closed beauty of the inhuman wilds*'. They are in a forest; it is not a human place — it is a beautiful secluded wilderness. Where will that step come from? How will it come?

A combatant in silent dreadful lists,
The world unknowing, for the world she stood:
No helper had she save the Strength within;
There was no witness of terrestrial eyes;
The Gods above and Nature sole below
Were the spectators of that mighty strife.

She is going to have to fight — she is a combatant, someone who fights. She is going to have to fight in silent dreadful 'lists'. This word comes in a couple of places in *Savitri*. It is a space that is marked out for a contest or a fight between two people. It has nothing to do with shopping lists! It is a word from Latin. You might have seen pictures of knights in armour coming at each other on horseback; that marked-out space where they fight is the lists. In ancient times, when there were two equally matched armies, it sometimes used to happen that they would decide that each army should choose a champion and those two champions would fight each other in single combat; the one who wins, wins for his army and the battle is decided. The armies would stand around and watch. There would be a 'lists' marked out where the two would fight. So it is something like that for Savitri. She is going to have to fight her battle alone and she is fighting it for the world. The world doesn't know that she is fighting this battle. '*The world unknowing, for the world she stood*'. She is the champion of the world against this force of Death and there is no one to help her except her inner strength. Her only helper is the Divine Strength. There is no earthly witness to watch this combat; this time it is the gods and the nature forces in the forest who are watching, who are '*the spectators of this mighty strife*,' this contest against all the forces of negativity and dissolution that Savitri is facing.

Around her were the austere sky-pointing hills,
And the green murmurous broad deep-thoughted woods
Muttered incessantly their muffled spell.

Savitri is living in the foothills of the Himalayas. All around her are the high, ‘*sky-pointing*’ hills. They are austere because on the peaks there are no trees, just bare rock. All around are the green murmurous forests. Forests always make a sound. It is as if the forests are in some deep state of thought, as if they are deeply indrawn — ‘*deep-thoughted woods*’. The forests are making a muttering sound. When someone mutters, you can tell that they are saying something, but you can’t hear exactly what they are saying. And this muttering goes on incessantly, on and on and on. ‘*Their muffled spell*’ — they are muttering some kind of mantra, some kind of magic formula, but it is muffled, we don’t hear it properly. If you put your hand over your mouth, your words are muffled. It means we can’t hear it distinctly. When pirates went on a raid, they would muffle their oars so they could not be heard. Nevertheless the spell has its effect, even if no words are heard distinctly — the forest wraps her in its special atmosphere.

A dense magnificent coloured self-wrapped life
Draped in the leaves’ vivid emerald monotone
And set with chequered sunbeams and blithe flowers
Immured her destiny’s secluded scene.

In just a few words, Sri Aurobindo evokes the beauty of the Himalayan forests. ‘Dense’ means thickly-packed, and ‘*self-wrapped life*’ means that the life there is not looking outwards; it is absorbed, concentrated within itself, not aware of the rest of the world, the human world. Think of the life of all the beautiful flowers and birds and lovely colours, and the trees and animals: a forest is full of life, and all the living things are packed closely together and interwoven — but that life is wrapped up in itself, self-absorbed, not looking outwards. That life is wearing a vivid green robe, all one colour, a monotone, the emerald colour of the leaves; and as if embroidered on the robe here and there are seen the light of sunbeams ‘chequered’ — contrasting brightly with the darker background, and blithe flowers. ‘Blithe’ means happy, joyful. All of this is walled-in — ‘immured’ means surrounded with a wall, enclosed. It is a secluded, private scene.

There is nobody looking on. Savitri's momentous destiny takes place in this isolated setting.

There had she grown to the stature of her spirit:
The genius of titanic silences
Steeping her soul in its wide loneliness
Had shown to her self's bare reality
And mated her with her environment.

In this place, this enclosed scene in the forest, Savitri has grown to the full stature of her spirit. Your stature is how tall you are. We have read the poem before and we know that in this place, before this day, Savitri has done a tremendous yoga, alone in the middle of the forest. Here, in this secluded place, she has grown into the stature of her spirit. Sri Aurobindo is telling us that the secluded forest environment has helped her in that growth. In these huge silences — Sri Aurobindo uses the word 'titanic' which means much more than human, more on the scale of the earth or bigger than the earth — there is a spirit, a genius, which has steeped her soul in that wide loneliness. If you want to dye cloth, you will steep it, put it into a vessel and cover it with the coloured water. Before cooking dried beans, we steep them in water for some hours. Here, it is her soul which is soaking up, absorbing all that silence and vastness. The spirit or genius of all that silence and loneliness and vastness has shown to her the bare reality of herself. Beyond all the surface appearances — first as princess of Madra, living with her parents, then later alone in the forest — something much deeper and truer has come to her in that silent atmosphere and it has matched, mated, her with her environment. She has grown as vast, as silent, as long-lasting, as patient as that wonderful environment up in the Himalayas somewhere.

Its solitude greatened her human hours
With a background of the eternal and unique.

This continues the same thought of loneliness, of solitude; this isolation has focused her human hours not on small things as ours are, but rather has greatened them, made them greater against this background of what is eternal — the oneness.

A force of spare direct necessity
Reduced the heavy framework of man's days
And his overburdening mass of outward needs
To a first thin strip of simple animal wants,
And the mighty wildness of the primitive earth
And the brooding multitude of patient trees
And the musing sapphire leisure of the sky
And the solemn weight of the slowly-passing months
Had left in her deep room for thought and God.

In daily life, so much of our energy and attention are taken up with the '*heavy framework of man's days*', the '*overburdening mass of outward needs*'. In that simple environment, '*A force of spare direct necessity*' ensures only the most basic needs. There is nothing extra. It is spare, there is nothing superfluous, only what is directly necessary. Think of the heavy framework of our days — all the things we have to do just to keep things running and all the things we seem to think that we need. All this has been taken away, reduced to this '*first thin strip of simple animal wants*': water, simple food, shelter — then the work of the day is done. That leaves a lot of time and space and atmosphere, '*the mighty wildness of the primitive earth*' and '*the brooding multitude of patient trees*' — so many of them, patiently living their slow vegetable life, '*And the musing sapphire leisure of the sky*' — the sky that doesn't have to struggle and strive; it is just there, at ease, that beautiful peaceful blue as if in a muse, a meditation, '*And the solemn weight of the slowly-passing months*' — twelve months, one after the other, slowly passing. All this has provided Savitri with deep room for thought, for inner exploration and for feeling the divine presence all around her.

(To be continued)

Passings

Over the past few months, Savitri Bhavan has lost some precious friends. Here we mention three of them who must be known to the wider Aurobindonian family:

Dolly-di

On Friday 22 June 2012 Dolly Mutsuddi, the youngest niece of Dr. Nirodbaran, left her physical body in the Ashram Nursing Home at the age of seventy-five. She had lived in the Ashram since 1949 when she arrived at the age of 12. She learned to read *Savitri* beautifully from her uncle, and recited one of his own poems at the Memorial Gathering for him at Savitri Bhavan in July 2006. She loved to come to Auroville with her uncle, and we have many



happy memories of her visits to Savitri Bhavan. When her much-loved sister and companion Bani passed away in March 2010 after a prolonged illness, Dolly felt bereft. Before she could recover from her sorrow she was diagnosed with throat cancer towards the end of 2010 and was staying in the Ashram Nursing Home since 2011. The end came at around 9pm on 22 June 2012, exactly two months before her 76th birthday.

(With acknowledgements to The Overman Foundation)

Professor Arabinda Basu

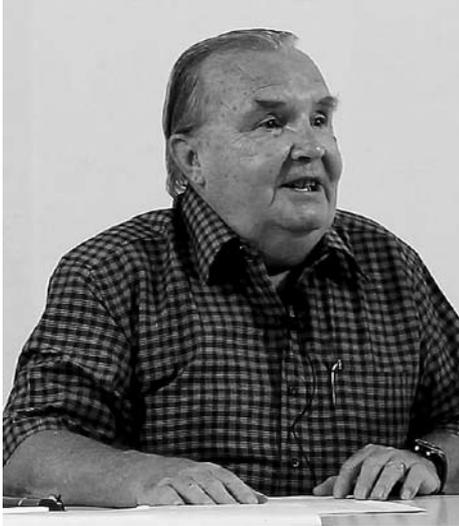
Professor Arabinda Basu left his body during the 11th day meditation for Dolly-di, on Tuesday July 3 at around 7.15 pm, from the Ashram Nursing Home where he had been under treatment for a couple of weeks. Arindam-da – as he was known to many – was named after Sri Aurobindo at his uncle’s request, and came under the influence of the Master as a college student in the early 1930s. During the 1940s he was regularly visiting the Ashram for Darshan, and he received the encouragement of Sri Aurobindo for his



academic career. In the 1950s he was invited to become Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Durham in the U.K. After returning from England in 1968 he settled in the Ashram for good. His sweet refined nature and scrupulous scholarship made him one of the best loved sharers of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and teachings, and he was often invited to give lectures around India and abroad. He was a close friend of Nirodbaran, and the two of them used to come to Savitri Bhavan together. Arindam-da has given some wonderful talks at Savitri Bhavan, the latest in April 2009 when he shared his memories of Sri Aurobindo. Over the past three years he was becoming increasingly frail. Those who knew him will remember him with gratitude and affection, and his presence as a link with the earlier days of the Ashram will be sadly missed.

(For more details of his life see <http://overmanfoundation.wordpress.com/2012/07/05/the-passing-of-prof-arabinda-basu>)

Georges van Vrekhem



Well-known author and speaker Georges van Vrekhem left his body at his home in Auroville on August 31, following cardiac arrest. He was 77 and had been fighting coronary arterial disease for over 20 years. Georges joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1970, leaving a successful career as a playwright and artistic director to the Dutch Theater Company of Ghent in his homeland of Belgium. In 1978 he moved to Auroville, where

he continued his new career as a speaker and writer of books about the lives and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which won him an appreciative world-wide audience. His last book, *Preparing for the Miraculous*, published in 2011, consists of articles based on eleven lectures given in 2010-2011 in the Auroville Town Hall and at Savitri Bhavan. Another series of lectures he intended to give in Savitri Bhavan in early 2012 had to be cancelled because of his increasing health difficulties. Nevertheless he continued his writing to the end. He has lived and died as a warrior in the cause of his beloved gurus, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and will be remembered and missed by many.

(All of Georges' books and their translations are available online at www.beyondman.org)

News of Savitri Bhavan

The Birth of the Sun – paintings by Shri Shivkumar-ji Paliya

Shri Shivkumar-ji Paliya (1935–2000) visited the Pondicherry Ashram for the first time in 1967, when he had darshan at the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and received the blessings of the Mother. The Mother blessed him and told him to start reading the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She also told him “What you read you will be able to express in the form of paintings ... you will be able to express *Savitri* in paintings.”

After that Darshan and Blessing he returned to his home in Ahmedabad. He started regularly reading and studying the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He even started reading all the Vedas. He went through the entire works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He developed a very deep love and affection for *Savitri*, and read the whole poem thoroughly. In his daily meditations, he received the inspiration to create these paintings on various aspects of *Savitri*.

He has kept a diary, recording the lines which inspired each painting, with references to other texts from the Vedas, Upanishads,

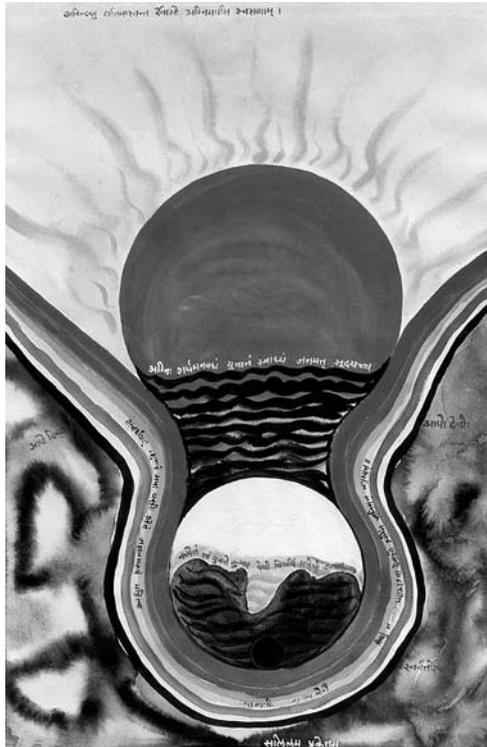


Tantra and Gita which seemed to him to correspond to the *Savitri* lines.

This series of paintings was completed by 1973 and was first exhibited in Ahmedabad in 1974, then again twice in 1976 and 1997, receiving an enthusiastic appreciation from the public.

These remarkable works, along with a copy of the diary, have been entrusted to Savitri Bhavan and were displayed here for the first time in July 2012, accompanied by the corresponding *Savitri* lines.

Our gratitude goes to the painter's widow Mrs. Sunita-ji Paliya and daughter Ms. Shivani Paliya for granting us the opportunity to care for these remarkable works and to share them with *Savitri* lovers. With their permission, one of the paintings has been used on the cover of the new Gujarati publication *Savitri Sabdamrut*.



'The Birth of the Sun' – the painting which was used for the exhibition poster, and which is featured on the cover of the new Gujarati publication Savitri Sabdamrut.

SAVITRI SHABDAMRUT

This newly published book contains 11 articles by Shraddhavan on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, translated from the original English into Gujarati by Shri Kirit Thakkar of Vadodara.

The first two articles are based on two general talks on *Savitri*. The other nine articles give sentence by sentence explanations of the lines of Cantos 1 and 2 of Book One of Sri Aurobindo's epic. Six of these articles on "The English of *Savitri*" have appeared serially in *Savitri Bhavan's* periodical *Invocation* since 2010. The other three will appear in future issues.

Published by "Yoga Yukta Prakashan" E- 102 Chandranagar colony, Near Suvarna Laxmi Apts. Waghodia Road, Vadodara 390 019, contact no. 09427540195.

Obtainable from SABDA, Savitri Bhavan, Sri Aurobindo Sadhna Kendra Santram Society, Nadiad 387001, Sri Auroma Trust, 63 Yashkamal Society, opp to Jivraj Mehta Hospital, Ahmedabad 380 007, and from the Publishers.

260 pages. Price : Rs. 70/- plus postage in Gujarat Rs. 10/-, outside Gujarat Rs. 30/-.

Savitri

The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire

An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's epic

by **Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni**

Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni (1933-2007) was a Professor of Linguistics in Hyderabad and Singapore. After his retirement he devoted himself to sharing his enjoyment and understanding of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with appreciative audiences all over the world. From 1995 onwards he used to hold regular Study Camps on Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic poem at the Beach Offices of the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. The essays gathered in this collection first appeared in the e-journal of the Sri Aurobindo Society *Next Future* and are now offered in book form for the benefit of a wider audience. They cover the whole of *Savitri* and will be of interest and assistance to all who aspire for a deeper understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's unique poetic masterwork.

**Published by Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
612 pages, hard cover, Rs. 350, available from SABDA**

Remembering Dr. M.V. Nadkarni

August 8, 2012 was the 13th anniversary of the day when Dr. Nirodbaran inaugurated the first permanent building of the Savitri Bhavan complex. The occasion was celebrated by a Book Release in memory of our great friend the late Dr. M.V. Nadkarni. At the request of Mrs. Nadkarni and her daughters, a collection has been made of a series of essays on *Savitri* written by Dr. Nadkarni for *Next Future* – the e-journal of the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry – under the title *Savitri – The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire*. The book was published by Savitri Bhavan and released at a function presided over by Mrs. Nadkarni.



It was also presented at the Sri Aurobindo Society Beach Office Hall at the first session of the post-Darshan *Savitri* Study Camp conducted by Dr. Alok Pandey.

Dr. Pandey held the concluding session of the Study Camp at Savitri Bhavan on August 23rd as the 3rd annual Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Lecture, with the title *The Journey of Love*.

These were two very happy occasions, gathering many old friends who had been following Dr. Nadkarni's wonderful talks on Savitri in Pondicherry and Auroville since 1995.



Dr. Alok Pandey delivering the 3rd Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture on August 23, 2012. In the background, panels from an exhibition of historical photos and texts about Golconde, a great architectural achievement commissioned by the Mother in the 1930s to house sadhaks of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The exhibition was prepared by Gauro Pinto, whose parents were intimately connected with Golconde: her father Udar as an engineer; her mother Mona as the guardian appointed to manage the running of the building. It was first shown in the Ashram exhibition hall in November 2011, to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of Mona Pinto.

Current weekly schedule of Regular activities

Sundays	10.30-12 noon: <i>Savitri</i> Study Circle
Mondays	3-4 pm: <i>Cultivating Concentration</i> led by Dr. Jai Singh 5-6 pm: <i>On The Mother</i> , led by Dr. Ananda Reddy
Tuesdays	9-10.30 am: <i>Sounds of Savitri</i> : practice for pronunciation and rhythm led by Patricia 3-4 pm: <i>Cultivating Concentration</i> , led by Dr. Jai Singh 4-5 pm: <i>L'Agenda de Mère</i> , listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi 5-6 pm: <i>Savitri</i> Study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan 5.45-7.15 pm: OM Choir
Wednesdays	5.30-6.30 pm: Reading <i>The Life Divine</i> , led by Shraddhavan 5-6 pm: <i>Mudra-chi</i> led by Anandi
Thursdays	4-5 pm: The English of <i>Savitri</i> , led by Shraddhavan 5-6.30 pm: <i>Exploring the Basics</i> , led by Patricia, a class to build English vocabulary and pronunciation and assist students to become comfortable with reading <i>Savitri</i>
Fridays	3-4 pm: <i>Cultivating Concentration</i> led by Dr. Jai Singh

Monthly Event

Full Moon day *Full Moon Gathering* in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue, 7.15-8.15 pm

Calendar of Special Events April to October 2012

April:

- 1 – 30 : Exhibition – ‘*Meditations on Savitri*, Book One’, paintings by Huta, in the Picture Gallery.
- 2 : Film – ‘*Sri Aurobindo: Glimpses of His Life*’, script and commentary by Manoj Das, a film from the Sri Aurobindo Society.
- 6 – 28 : Exhibition – ‘*Parables of Dawn*’: digital paintings by Jürgen P.
- 9 : Film – ‘*Meditations on Savitri* Book 6, The Book of Fate’, a film by Manohar of Huta's paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 14 : Demonstration of Vedic chanting by Nishtha.

- 16 : Film – ‘*Adam Kadmon & the Evolution*’, video of a talk by Georges van Vrekhem.
- 23 : 2 Films – ‘*The Mother : Glimpses of Her Life*’ and ‘*Four Aspects of the Mother*’.
- 30 : Film – ‘*Experiences with the Mother, Part I*’, video of a talk by Narad (Richard Eggenberger).



Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, visiting the exhibition of digital paintings by Aurovilian artist Juergen P., Parables of Dawn, in April.

May:

- 7 : Film – ‘*Meditations on Savitri Book 7, The Book of Yoga*’, a film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by The Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

June:

- 6 – 10 : ‘*Well Being*’ (Pranayama) workshop of 5 sessions by J.V. Avadhanulu.

July:

- July 1 onwards : Exhibition – ‘*Meditations on Savitri Books 2 and 3*’, paintings by Huta in the Picture Gallery.
 Exhibition – ‘*Saraswati*’, a new painting on stone by Emanuele.
 (see p.29)

- 2: Film – ‘*Meditations on Savitri* Book 7, The Book of Yoga’, a film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 6–31 : Exhibition – ‘*The Birth of the Sun and other paintings inspired by Savitri*’ by Shri Shivkumar-ji Paliya of Ahmedabad.
- 9: 2 films – ‘*Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity*’ prepared by the Gnostic Centre, New Delhi and ‘*Evolution Fast Forward*’ directed by Manoj Pavitran, Auroville.
- 16: Film – ‘*OM The Divine Name*’: Narad shares general guidelines for OM Choirs around world and what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother say on OM.
- 18–22: ‘*Well Being*’ (Pranayama) Workshop of 5 sessions by J.V. Avadhanulu.
- 23: Film – ‘*Experiences with the Mother, Part 2*’, video of a talk by Narad about early experiences in Auroville.
- 30: Film – ‘*Four Chapters of Sri Aurobindo Ashram*’; this film was made in 1952 on 16mm, shown now because of the pictures of the Mother and for its historical, archival and spiritual value.

August:

- 1 – 31 : Exhibition – ‘*Meditations on Savitri, Books 2 and 3*’, continued.
Exhibition – ‘*Saraswati*’, painting on stone by Emanuele, continued.
- 6 – 31 : Exhibition – ‘*Golconde*’, a collection of fascinating historic texts and photos prepared in the Ashram.
- 6: 2 films – ‘*Savitri Bhavan Documentary*’: the Inauguration, early years and special events with Nirodbaran, Udhar Pinto, Dr. Nadkarni and others and ‘*Sri Aurobindo & Mother : Finding the Psychic Being*’, a film by Loretta.
- 8: Book Release of ‘*Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri : The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire, an Introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s epic*’ by Dr. M.V. Nadkarni.
- 13: Film – ‘*Sri Aurobindo & His Dreams for the Future of Mankind*’, a film made in Auroville based on Sri Aurobindo’s Independence Day Message.
- 16: ‘*The Seven Jewel-Centres of Mother Earth*’, a lecture and PowerPoint presentation by Michael Miovic.

- 20 : Film – ‘*Pictures inspired by poems of Sri Aurobindo*’, paintings and recitations by Huta, Parts 1 & 2.
- 23 : ‘*The Journey of Love*’, the 3rd Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture, given by Dr. Alok Pandey.
- 27 : Film – ‘*The Teachings of Flowers : The Life and Work of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*’, a film by Loretta.
- 31 : ‘*Once in a Blue Moon*’: when there is more than one full moon night in a single calendar month, the second one is called a ‘Blue Moon’, so in addition to the regular monthly Full Moon Gathering, there was an extra ‘Blue Moon Gathering’.
- 22 & 29 ‘*The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*’: two Inner-work Workshops led by Ashesh Joshi.

September:

- 1 : Inauguration of Savitri Hostel.
- 3 : Film – ‘*Meditations on Savitri*, Books Eight & Nine’, film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by The Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 8 : Concert – Ladislav Brozman (solo violin) played Sonatas by J.S. Bach, Prokofiev and Ysaie
- 10 : Film – ‘*Life After Life*’: a film by Peter Shockey based on the research work of Dr. Raymond A. Moody.
- 24 : Film – ‘*2012 & 1956 and the Destiny of Planet Earth*’, video of a talk by Georges Van Vrekhem.

October:

- 1 : Film – ‘*Meditations on Savitri*’, Book Ten; film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 8 : Film – ‘*God Within, God Without*’, video of a talk by Georges Van Vrekhem.
- 15 : Film – ‘*Preparing for the Miraculous*’, video of a talk by Georges Van Vrekhem
- 22 : Film – ‘*Journey to the Life Divine, Part One*’ – the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from childhood up to November 24, 1926.
- 28 : Book Release of *On Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri* : Writings by Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna), Part 2: Collected Comments
- 29 : Film – ‘*Journey to the Life Divine, Part Two*’ – the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother from November 1926 to the present day.

Hostel Inauguration

By the Grace and Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and thanks to the support of many generous people, the Savitri Hostel has been completed and was inaugurated on September 1st at 4.30pm, in the presence of about 100 donors and other guests.

The ribbon was cut by our elder brother Mahalingam, the oldest Aurovilian, and one who has received personal blessings not only from the Mother but also from Sri Aurobindo himself. As he performed the ceremony a rendering of Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra was played.

The guests then moved into the entrance area of the Hostel for a short concentration with mantras of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo followed by a recording of the lines from *Savitri* read by our original patron Dr. Nirodbaran when he laid the foundation stone of the Savitri Bhavan complex on November 24, 1994.

After the concentration, Shradhdhavan spoke some words of thanks to all who had made the realisation of this latest element of the complex possible, and gifts were presented by Nergez – also one of the oldest Aurovilians, a founding member of Savitri Bhavan still regularly participating in the activities here – and Mrs. Nadkarni.

A few words were also said about the precious relic of the Mother recently gifted to Savitri Bhavan, displayed for the first time on this occasion.

Then the guests were served refreshments and had the opportunity to explore the beautiful new building.

The Hostel is intended to provide simple temporary boarding and lodging to people involved with the work of Savitri Bhavan for shorter or longer periods. It has 10 rooms, allowing accommodation for 12 people at a time, as well as a kitchen and dining area and housekeeping and storage facilities.



S. Mahalingam cutting the ribbon.



A special art-work recently gifted to Savitri Bhavan formed the centrepiece for the Concentration. The straps of the Mother's sandals are ones used by her, while the soles are made from one of her oft-used gowns.





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

Savitri Bhavan is a project of SAIIER
(Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)
100% exemption is now again available for offerings from Indian
tax-payers under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT Act.

- Cheques and DDs should be payable to **Auroville Unity Fund (SAIIER)** and sent to the address given below.
- If you have an Auroville Financial Service account, you can transfer an offering to account no. 240001, mentioning “Savitri Bhavan” as the purpose.
- **If you live in India**

If you would like to send your offering through Internet Banking or direct transfer, it should be sent to **State Bank of India : Branch code No. 03160 : Account No. 10237876031 ; or (if you wish to avail of tax exemption for Social Sciences Research) to account no. 31612623238**. If you do send an offering in this way, please inform us at the time of sending, so that we can check up with the bank and acknowledge receipt as soon as possible.

If you are offering Rs. 500 or less, please consider sending it by money-order or DD, since the charges for cashing out-station cheques have become very high. If you feel like sending a regular modest offering, it may be better to send it every three months rather than monthly, for the same reason.

- **If you live Abroad**

To send your offering by SWIFT Transfer, please use the following 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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Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother