

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 38

*INVOCATION is an occasional publication of SAVITRI BHAVAN
in Auroville. All correspondence may be addressed to:*

**SAVITRI BHAVAN
AUROVILLE 605101, TN
INDIA**

*Telephone: 0413-2622922
e-mail: savitribhavan@auroville.org.in*

*This publication has been funded by SAIER
(Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Unless otherwise indicated all quotations and photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are copyright of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees. We are particularly grateful for permission to use the word 'Invocation' in Sri Aurobindo's handwriting as our banner.

*Edited by Shraddhavan for Savitri Bhavan, Auroville
Design by Prisma, Auroville
Printed at All India Press, Pondicherry*

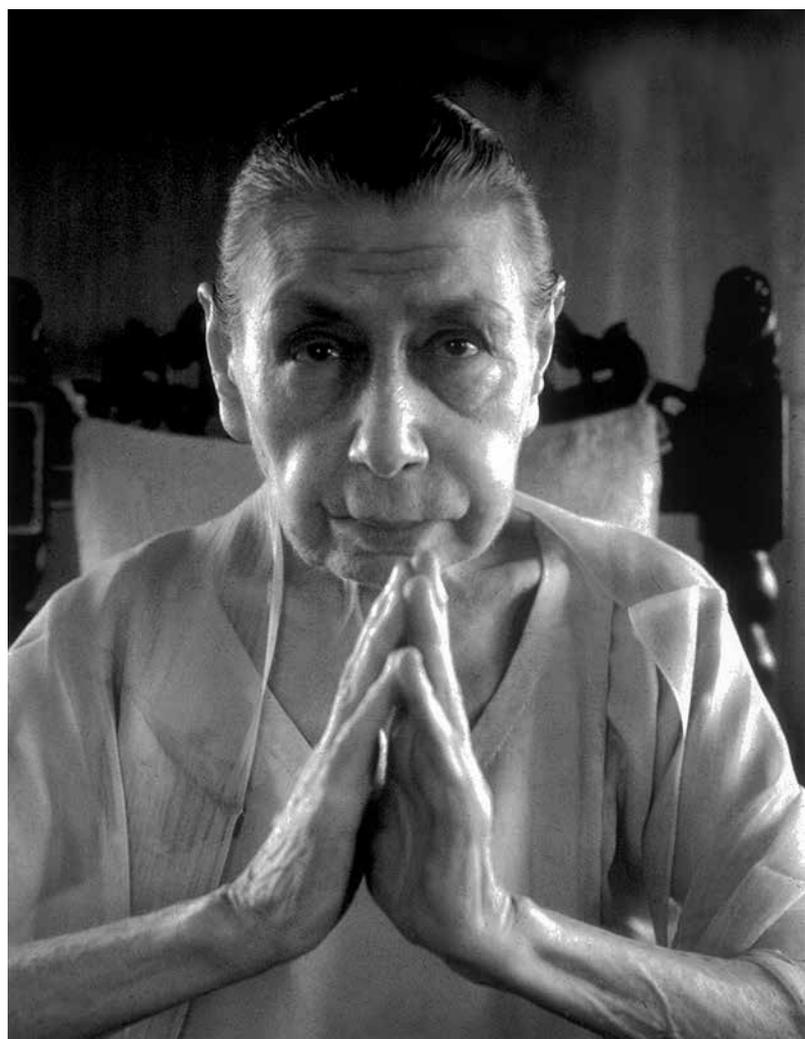
April 2013

C O N T E N T S

The Journey of Love <i>Dr. Alok Pandey</i>	4
The English of <i>Savitri</i> (7) Book One, Canto Two, lines 117-185 <i>Shraddhavan</i>	28
<i>Savitri</i> : An Epic of The Soul <i>Dr. K. Ujjwala</i>	38
Letter to the Editor <i>Dr. Raja Marathe</i>	43
The Mantra	48
Sri Aurobindo on <i>Savitri</i> : (1) Extracts gleaned from his Letters <i>Jayantibhai Gathiawala</i>	49
Research Activities of Savitri Bhavan (1) ' <i>Living Research</i> ' Survey	57
The <i>Savitri</i> Study Circle <i>Dr. Larry Seidlitz</i>	68
News of Savitri Bhavan	70

*Truth alone can give to the world
the power of receiving and manifesting
the Divine's Love*

THE MOTHER



*Salute to the
advent of the Truth*

The Journey of Love

*The 3rd Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture
given by Dr. Alok Pandey at Savitri Bhavan
on August 23 2012*

It is a joy and a privilege to speak on any aspect of *Savitri*. And today the joy and the privilege are in a way doubled, because it is Dr. Nadkarni's Memorial Lecture. I remember when, quite a number of years ago, during one of the Nainital Camps, before I took premature retirement, I was debating with myself whether I should continue speaking at these camps or not. Dr. Nadkarni was also speaking there in the same camp. This debate had been going on in me for some time during those years because I wanted a very clear answer from the Mother about whether I should be doing this. I always feel that this is a very risky territory: this speaking business is not always a good business. So before retiring from the Indian Air Force I thought 'Let me take retirement from this speaking part'. I shared this feeling with him. I was actually just thinking aloud, because I knew this answer had to come from inside – it could not come from anyone outside. But as if foreshadowing the answer that was to come, he said, 'It would be a great loss for the work.' That was all he said. I was still not sure, frankly I was not too convinced about it, because I really believe that the Mother's Work carries on in so many ways. Often silence is more powerful than speech. Nevertheless it has so happened that over the years a closeness developed between me and Dr. Nadkarni. He came to stay in my house when he came to Bangalore and it was really such a joy: what simplicity despite such a great intellect! I was very touched by some precious moments that I spent with him. Then the year that he left us for the lap of the Divine Mother, a few months before, he asked me 'Could you take the November Camp?' I was really nonplussed. I answered him, 'Nadkarni-ji, surely you will be taking it.' He said 'No, no – I am not feeling too well.' I have shared this with some people personally, but I have never before shared it publicly; but since this is Dr. Nadkarni's Memorial Lecture a few words may be appropriate. So I responded 'Well Nadkarni-ji, you will

be fine by November. People will come wanting to listen to you.’ He said, ‘Let us see.’ Finally after much hesitation I said, ‘All right, they can put my name in the announcement in *All India Magazine*, but I do hope that you will be fine and that you will take the Camp.’ He said, ‘All right’. Then I felt that to take camps on both *Essays on the Gita* and *Savitri* would be too much for me because of the medical work, so I said ‘I will take up *Savitri*.’ He said ‘All right’. I don’t remember the exact date when this conversation took place – maybe a month or at most two months before he left.

This is a difficult moment for me, but I am sure that everyone will bear with it. That morning I had a call from Meera-di that the end had come. I happened to be the first doctor that reached there. Dr. Nadkarni had already left his body. Right behind me Dilip-da came, and all of us then came together. It was such a swift and sudden event that at one level it seems a Grace that he left the body so painlessly, so swiftly – no suffering, no fuss It was something remarkable. I have seen so many deaths in my practice but this is one of the exceptional departures that I have seen. If any sign is needed that he was indeed an exceptional being, this is one. So here we are on this day remembering him, and what better remembrance than to read *Savitri* – something which he loved, and he loved to sing about it.

So coming to the theme : ‘The Journey of Love’ ... When I think about *Savitri*, about what *Savitri* is, I am reminded of some lines from the poem itself – for *Savitri* contains everything within it, including what *Savitri* is. These lines come at the end of Book Two, Canto Eight, when after the Descent into the Night, King Aswapati has torn through the veil of darkness: Night has been cleaved and cut asunder. And these lines emerge :

The lyric of the love that waits through Time
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscient Fire.

p.232

This is what *Savitri* is, expressed in a single phrase – the lyric of love. But the amazing thing is that when Sri Aurobindo writes about *Savitri* in his ‘Author’s Note’ he uses an interesting adjective, which I have often felt has not received enough attention. He mentions ‘*conjugal love conquering Death*’. Now I believe that the great ones in the past

who wrote these beautiful stories – which did really happen – they were not just writing symbolically. There was a realism in all that they wrote. It was not just an ethereal possibility but a very material possibility. That often hits me hard. I cannot say that I have fully understood, grasped the full import of what it means – except that it is possible in a human body, in flesh and blood, that love which is hidden in the heart of Creation and works silently can manifest in a human body and in human relationships; it is possible.

This is the Age of Truth and we all know that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through their tapasya, their great sacrifice, have brought down to earth the supramental Truth-Consciousness. Unfortunately, like all terms, the word ‘Truth’ also evokes a certain sense and meaning in us. We are so accustomed to truth in terms of Science. Science explores Truth. What about the heart? ‘Oh, that is mere sentimental emotionalism.’ I feel that if there is one civilisational disease which has become chronic, with which human beings have been and continue to be suffering is the lack of love. Both as a practitioner of the path of Yoga and as a psychiatrist and a doctor, if I look around, having gone around the world, I see that people suffer because of lack of love. All education caters to knowledge: knowledge, more and more knowledge – knowledge for power, power, power – for mastery; the heart is ignored in the process, it is stifled, and the response of the heart to Truth is lost. We do not even hear its language. It is crushed, kept aside. It is not even spoken of, it is considered bad to speak about it. As people grow up, you are not supposed to cry – it is like that: mentioning love is almost an anathema to a modern civilised person. This is understandable because love is also the first power that has plunged into the Creation. Therefore – this may be a very funny way of looking at it, but – it would be the last to emerge: a lot has to be made ready to enable this power to emerge.

I am reminded of an analogy. I am in the habit of reaching airports early, and I feel comfortable that I don’t have to wait for a long time to check in. I always thought this is very logical – why would I want to rush at the last minute? But once somebody told me ‘No, there is a reason why it is better to go towards the end: if you give your baggage in the beginning, it will come out last.’ I started observing it and I saw that it is really true. But old habits die hard, and I still

prefer to get there early and receive my baggage last rather than to miss the flight.

So something like that has happened in this creation. We know the great story of when Being plunged into this darkness. The Being plunged. Sri Aurobindo speaks about it, it is very interesting, the Being – not some bare Truth. For Sri Aurobindo brings Truth, but it is not the truth of the material scientist: bare, cold, impersonal, heartless, something which can be resolved into a whirling dance of protons and electrons and atomic particles. That is not the Truth that Sri Aurobindo means. That is a truth, one amongst many, not *The* Truth. Similarly it is not the truth of the mystic, sitting aloof, detached from all, indifferent to the pain and pangs of this world, sitting on the peaks of some inmost recess, or in some cave, inaccessible to the world, waiting in some trance of the Infinite, to merge and be dissolved in it. It is not the truth of either of these two extremes. Sri Aurobindo brings a Truth that is one with Love.

A truth that is not one with love will be harsh. It is not that kind of truth that Sri Aurobindo wants to establish upon earth. The Mother took particular care to remind us that the Superman ... what powers he will have, that is left to the imagination of each of us, but what he will not have has been very very clearly stated... he will not be a cruel being. He will embody in himself the Truth of Love:

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-white Love
Caught all into a sole immense embrace;
Existence found its truth on Oneness' breast
And each became the self and space of all.

pp. 322-23

This is the Truth that has plunged into Creation.

But to come back to the story – when darkness was there engulfed within darkness, the Gods had to go in, to rescue all the energies that had deviated from their true purpose, gone out and plunged into the Darkness and assumed that shape and colour, were hidden from the Light of Truth: where are they, where are they? None of the gods is willing to leap into it. It is too dark, it is such an immense task. Then Agni, the representative of the Divine Consciousness and Will, says 'I will go, but I have one condition.' The condition is that, looking at the

Divine Mother, Aditi, Agni says ‘I see in your heart a most beautiful resplendent Light, shadowless, pure, intense. If you give us that, I will go.’ And if Agni goes, all the other gods will follow. So the Divine Mother poured that Light, a drop of that Light from her fathomless heart of Love and Bliss. That light, that pure shadowless light from her heart has plunged into the Creation, and since then it has been engaged in the labour of Love. It is that Love which crystallised itself as the psychic essence. That is what we are told. It is that drop – and following it the Gods: Agni, Mitra, Varuna, Bhaga, Indra, Soma, the Ashwins, the Ribhus – the artisans of Immortality. All these plunged into the darkness because there went as the spear-point the flame-white Love from the heart of the Divine Mother. This is the origin of that Love. Beings plunge into this darkness, to rescue it.

It is very interesting that when we speak of the Divine, He is not just an impersonal universality. Nowadays there is a tendency to say that every path leads to That Reality. This word ‘reality’ is a very interesting one and even though there is but One ultimate Reality, it can conjure a host of meanings. There is scientific reality, there is material reality, there is psychological reality – Reality with a capital ‘R’. There is a reality of the Advaitin, there is a reality of the Buddhist, there are all kinds of reality. But the Reality which Sri Aurobindo speaks of is not just an impersonal universality. It is a Being, a transcendent Being; and that Being has plunged himself into this darkness. This is beautifully brought out in *Savitri*, (everything is beautifully brought out in *Savitri*, so it is understood) on page 141, in ‘The Kingdoms of the Little Life’:

In the enigma of the darkened Vasts,
In the passion and self-loss of the Infinite
When all was plunged in the negating Void,
Non-Being’s night could never have been saved
If Being had not plunged into the dark
Carrying with it its triple mystic cross.

pp.140-41

So when we are told to renounce, to sacrifice, these words have no meaning at a human level. Because what do we really renounce and sacrifice? We leave dirt, mud, mire, and what does the Divine Mother give us in exchange? Pure diamond! So how can we say ‘We

have left this, we have left that’? Whatever we have left was worth nothing; it was only a useless entanglement – weeds, thorns, all these things. But if there is an unparalleled example of renunciation, it is the renunciation which the Divine makes, to assume a human body. When the Mother speaks of the relevance of *Savitri*, one of the things she mentions is ‘The experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated.’¹ We cannot imagine what it means to renounce That and to enter into this mortal body, to live that, to endure that. Just for a being of a higher world, leave aside the Supreme, to be in a human body is a great suffering, because it is like being in a cage, such a small little space, a tiny hole. For a being of a higher consciousness when he takes such a body it is a great suffering because he brings with him memories of lost felicities, of a power, of a godly estate, and to assume a body is really to enter into a misery, even in the best of surroundings. Such people are very uncomfortable with their surroundings, they feel like a stranger. About this descent of the Divine, Sri Aurobindo very beautifully says in the second canto of *Savitri*, ‘*Repeating the marvel of the first descent*’². And every time the Divine renounces his infinity and enters into this creation the Mother says that it is with only one objective: to transform Matter. So he loses himself completely, identifies with Matter. This is the Origin of all subsequent descents. In the Origin, this is the first descent. The Mother speaks about meeting this Being who has plunged into the Darkness, and she calls him ‘the first Avatar’.

If Being had not plunged into the dark
 Carrying with it its triple mystic cross.
 Invoking in world-time the timeless truth,
 Bliss changed to sorrow, knowledge made ignorant,
 God’s force turned into a child’s helplessness
 Can bring down heaven by their sacrifice.

p.141

This is the first sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Divine himself. He shows the way to us, the path. The return is also through sacrifice. As evolution takes place, at each level, Nature performs the sacrifice normally. It

1 MCW 13:24
 2 p. 14

is not we who do the sacrifice; until the human level Nature does the sacrifice. This is the whole story of evolution: Matter must sacrifice its peaceful stability and inertia, in order to begin to crawl and run and jump – otherwise it will not. Matter is at ease, at peace, and stable. It must sacrifice that. When Life comes everything becomes unstable, at every moment there is a change taking place, death comes with it, suffering comes with it. Matter does not experience these things. That state of the peace of inertia, immobility, must be sacrificed for Life to emerge. Again in living forms we see progressive sacrifice: the fish must sacrifice its gills, its lovely home in the wonderful ocean to come onto the land; the creatures of the land must sacrifice their vitality, the snake must sacrifice its ability to crawl in order to be able to fly; the bird must sacrifice its wings to be able to run on the plains; and the animal with its sinews and muscles and strength and vitality and force and speed, it must sacrifice all that to be able to think in Man. This is the law of sacrifice: all evolution is sacrifice: the sacrifice of that which was, for that which yet can be. And here we stand at the human stage, with a mighty intellect: if we are willing to really ascend to the intuitive stage, we must be willing to sacrifice this, the rational mind that comes in the way. It is like a hard lid, which will not break open unless by some Divine Grace we are hammered. We meet the contradictions of life and they compel us to widen, to look afresh at things.

So this is the great sacrifice:

Being became the Void and Conscious-Force
Nescience and walk of a blind Energy
And Ecstasy took the figure of world-pain.
In a mysterious dispensation's law
A Wisdom that prepares its far-off ends
Planned so to start her slow aeonic game.

p.141

This is the first act of Love. And always throughout life, if one sees what love really is, to put it one word – love is sacrifice. There is no other word that is better suited to express love. Mother says in one of her short messages :

They always speak of the rights of love but love's only right
is the right of self-giving.¹

¹ MCW 14:121.

The moment there is expectation, wanting to receive, to get, it is no longer love, it is something else, it is a cry of the Titan.

I am just flipping through the poem, which is what I love to do. On page 506 we find the voice of the Titan. See what love has become here, while the original love is sacrifice: the sacrifice of the very highest – it is one thing to sacrifice the lower for the higher, but the Divine has sacrificed the highest to enter into this darkened state. How many can do it? To sacrifice all the gains, the inner experiences, the richness of the life of an ascetic, the wish to be an ascetic in some forest. It is a big temptation: when the hostile forces cannot work in any other way then they try a very nice trick, that trick is there in *Savitri*. Death tells Savitri, ‘Fine, I agree that there may be some God, some ultimate Divine Self above, but you won’t find him in the world. Leave this world, go into some forest and there you meditate and find that Self.’ This is one of the tricks. They do this, and it is very very convincing, especially because the Indian mind is so much stamped with asceticism that these thoughts come: ‘Nothing else works out, so better go to the forest, to some far place and remain aloof. Why be in the world with all these hassles and problems?’

The original sacrifice is the other way round, and Sri Aurobindo speaks about it in several places in *Savitri*. In one place he says, ‘*A god come down and greater by the fall.*’¹ He becomes greater. The Divine assumes this body and enters into this darkness because the end result is something greater than what originally existed. He has come down for the sake of that glory.

But meanwhile, what is our stage? For from there we begin – on page 506 – with the voice of the Titan hidden within us. How does he speak, what does he whisper from behind?

I have loved, but none has loved me since my birth;

These are the thoughts which the Titan whispers.

My fruit of works is given to other hands.

How sad! And then you know there are people who will talk about karma – ‘your karma’ – so, in fact there are other lines, above that.

1 p. 343

I am shown God's stamp and my own signature
Upon the sorry contract of my fate.
I have loved, but none has loved me since my birth;
My fruit of works is given to other hands.
All that is left me is my evil thoughts,
My sordid quarrel against God and man,
Envy of the riches that I cannot share,
Hate of a happiness that is not mine.

And then it gives the secret: why love has become this disfigured
Titan's whisper in our hearts :

I know my fate will ever be the same,
It is my nature's work that cannot change:

Why?

I have loved for mine, not for the beloved's sake,
I have lived for myself and not for others' lives.

This is the problem. As the Divine enters into the arena of this earth all the forces want to capture and claim it as their own. In one of her prayers the Mother laments that all the great asuras who have accepted to play the role of helping the work want to keep some of the Force for themselves.¹ Nobody wants to give back everything to the Divine. It comes from the Divine – everything belongs to the Divine – we want to appropriate it: 'my love', 'my life', 'my knowledge', 'my power', 'my strength'. The moment the 'my' comes, it is deformed, it is disfigured: love becomes a cause of suffering, pain and misery. The beauty is, that in spite of all this we can still feel this power. There have been ages of Knowledge, there have been ages of Power, but there has not yet been a convincing age of Love. There have been myths created, for example around a brief time in Brindavan when all was rapture and felicity and everybody danced around God – for a short while; but Brindavan could not last and on earth it was a creation of the mystics, who saw the possibility of such a love. There have been such stories. Christ came to embody that love, but it had to end with a supreme sacrifice; we may add the word 'strategic' – a strategic sacrifice that helped to humanise humanity. There have been moments

¹ *Prayers and Meditations* August 16, 1914

of love but not something that has endured. There have been ages when there was Knowledge, Wisdom; there have been ages when there was Power – when we read about Atlantis, the Mayan civilisation, the Mahabharata – what tremendous power and knowledge they wielded! But look at what happened to that knowledge and power: we have seen that movie ‘The Planet of the Apes’ – man blew himself up, because what was missing was love. And yet the beauty is that if we look around life and creation, if there is one thing that we are sure to find every day as we walk through life, it is love: the smile of love. We can see it everywhere. And that is what Sri Aurobindo reminds us through *Savitri* again, on page 139 :

Always a heaven-truth broods in life’s deeps,
It is always there, and from time to time it blossoms out.

In her obscurest members burns that fire.
A touch of God’s rapture in creation’s acts,
A lost remembrance of felicity
Lurks still in the dumb roots of death and birth,
The world’s senseless beauty mirrors God’s delight.
That rapture’s smile is secret everywhere;

Even if we handle Matter a little carefully it is amazing how it responds to love. I have had this experience a number of times. With material objects it is amazing that they may respond to knowledge and of course they may respond to power too, when we manipulate the machinery, but they can respond to love. Cars, scooters, objects that are used every day, they can respond to love. If we really treat them with love and care they respond to it. Plants can smile at us, flowers – they can take away our depression, just absorb it in themselves. How beautiful! ‘*That rapture’s smile is secret everywhere;*’ As the Mother says, in the evening, love in the plant aspires to go up to heaven.

It flows in the wind’s breath, in the tree’s sap,
Its hued magnificence blooms in leaves and flowers. p.139

One comes out of the house feeling not too good, and as one walks there is a lovely breeze – it caresses us, and then within minutes we feel so good – it is almost like the Divine Mother’s touch.

In beast and in winged bird and thinking man
It made of the heart's rhythm its music's beat;

Bliss, love and beauty are one: they assume three aspects, so love is the flower, bliss is the fruit – that's how one can put it.

It forced the unconscious tissues to awake
And ask for happiness and earn the pang
And thrill with pleasure and laughter of brief delight,
And quiver with pain and crave for ecstasy. p.139

When nothing else works in life, love does work, but it has to be persistent. Somebody asked the Mother, 'When you have faith in someone and he lets you down, you are deceived, cheated — what should you do, and what does it mean?' Some of the Mother's answers widen us to limitless horizons! She said 'Your faith was not sufficient.'

Love has a power to change. I remember an incident someone shared with me. His son studied here and had to be taken out of the school. He went into drugs and it was a miserable journey. Towards the end of his brief life – for he developed malignancy and was in a rehab. home etc. – he was asked by his father, 'You have seen nothing but misery in life, what have you learned from all this?' He wanted that at least his son could say some words that would give the old father's heart some solace, that after all his life was not a complete waste – when you are witnessing your child dying at a young age, in his forties. The boy recounted an incident: "When I was going out I went to the Mother, and she told me, 'My child, remember two things: first – never hide anything from me; second – the Mother always loves you.' I don't know about the first, but the second one has sustained me throughout." And the father was so relieved. When he was sharing this with me I could sense what a relief it would be to a father to know that with all his brief life, with all the difficulties and problems, a life that can be called a miserable life, still this boy managed to remember one thing: "The Mother loves me." I think that if somebody can remember it, even for a few years, it is a great sadhana and yoga. It is a great sadhana to remember just this much: "The Mother loves me." We cannot love her; but the same love which has entered into this creation, the Divine Love, as it evolves it turns into love for the Divine. The Mother says 'There is only one love –

there are no two loves'. In this creation, all lower forms of love turn eventually into love for the Divine.

We have these magnificent lines speaking of the evolution of love, on page 632. This smile, this rapture which we feel in plants, is not the end of the journey. We read on page 632 :

A mystic slow transfiguration works.

Where does it work? It works in the depths of Nature because love is behind everything and it works from within.

All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky

Every day we see hope everywhere, for everything starts from earth and ends in sky.

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

So it is the same Love which evolves, layer by layer: madness in the heart, rapturous madness, comradeship in the mind, that becomes a wide spiritual yearning's space:

A lonely soul passions for the Alone,
The heart that loved man thrills to the love of God, ...

These are two steps and stages. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the psychic being, in the beginning, loves man; it leans towards human beings, even those who are God-lovers, God-seekers. But its highest form is when it begins to love the Divine for the sake of the Divine. That is the highest kind of ecstasy possible to it.

A body is his chamber and his shrine.
Then is our being rescued from separateness;
All is itself, all is new-felt in God:

This love transfigures us.

A Lover leaning from his cloister's door
Gathers the whole world into his single breast.
Then shall the business fail of Night and Death:

p. 632-33

This will be the Victory of Love – the Mother says this categorically. Only Love has the supreme power of transformation. Nothing else can fully transform. But to embody that Love, a great sacrifice is needed, the kind of sacrifice that I can think of no other example in the history of the earth, except in Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo’s love, when we look into his eyes! Everybody speaks of him as a thinker, a philosopher – what an absurdity to reduce him so many notches down! Even to speak of him as a poet and a mystic comes a bit closer to truth; but to know him as the one who truly loved – and loved in what a way! ‘His love has paved the mortal’s road to heaven’ – this is how the Mother expresses his sacrifice. Even though the crowd jeers and mocks, people say ‘Oh, it’s a failure, it’s a failure!’ yet he was willing to make that sacrifice, and the Mother too. The Mother reminds us always: ‘Two things you must never forget – Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion, and the Mother’s Love.’

It is really very interesting that the only way to really understand Sri Aurobindo, is, as she says in one of her messages : ‘Who can understand Sri Aurobindo? He is vaster than the universe and his teaching is infinite.’ There is no end to what he has revealed. ‘The only way to understand him, to come a little closer to him, is through love, and to give oneself unreservedly to his work of earth-transformation.’ This is the only way that we can come to understand him a little. Again Nolini-da reminds us, when he speaks about Sri Aurobindo’s words, he says it is difficult, but the way you can understand is by loving them. We do the reverse : ‘Oh my god, I have to read *The Life Divine!*’ To start with, the mind begins to play. ‘It is going to be so tough, so difficult! Sri Aurobindo’s English is so difficult!’ The devil has already started his work before the Divine has a chance.

What is the way to read Sri Aurobindo through love? There is a very simple analogy to it. In the Bhagavat, Udhav tells Krishna, ‘You are a great trickster, that is well known. These gopis love you madly, and you are enjoying this love, right? You don’t tell them that this is not the real thing, that the real thing is Brahman and Brahman can only be reached by jnana, and jnana can only be had through deep meditation. You don’t tell all this. You let them cry and weep, jump and dance ... It is not good! You know Brahman, but you are not telling them. It is not right!’ Then Krishna answers, ‘You know I am

very busy with many things, it must have slipped my mind. Udhav, you are a Jnani – why don't you go and tell them about Brahman and disabuse their minds about love for a mere mortal like me? It will do good to you and good to them also.' Udhav replies, 'All right. But they will not listen to me. They are madly in love with you – you send me as your representative.' So Krishna signs a letter saying 'Please listen to him. I am sending him to give a lecture – please arrange for a suitable audience at a certain time in a nice place, and don't trouble him, arrange some nice refreshments ...' Krishna has sent a long letter and signed it. So Udhav goes, all solemn and grim, meditating all along the way: 'I am going to give some great knowledge' In his mind he is turning over all the shastras, the Vedas, the Upanishads, what slokas he will quote, and so on. As he is on his way, some of the gopas and gopis recognise him and call out, 'Oh, Udhav-ji, you are coming from Krishna! Have you met him?' 'Yes.' 'Has he sent something for us?' 'Yes, he has given this letter ...' But before he can read out the letter, they all jump, each of them wants to see it, to read it – but they cannot read. The letter is torn in pieces. Udhav says, 'You are fools! You have no patience! You can't even wait for me to read out what is written in the letter.' 'We don't need all that. You just keep quiet. All we want is a touch of Krishna – and now we all have that.' What can he say but 'You people are truly mad fellows, but I have come to give you jnana. Sit in line.' They all sit down quietly, because Krishna has said something. Udhav doesn't say what Krishna had said. He starts teaching them abstract Vedanta. So they become restless. They say 'Tell us what Krishna has said.' 'No no no – I shall teach you Pranayama.' So the gopis ask him 'What is Pranayama?' He says, 'You have to master your breath and do these movements.' So the gopis say, 'You know, we have only one problem ...' Udhav says, 'What is your problem – you can't hold your breath?' Then they answer, 'No – we have one breath, one life, and we have dedicated all this to Krishna. Now if you are telling us to practice all this, we shall have to take it back from him!' So the end of the story is, to cut it short, Udhav gets chastened and realises what great heights of realisation one can have just through bhakti. Sri Aurobindo says it is the crown of all experiences. And in *Savitri* he says it is '*the key to the flaming doors of ecstasy.*' It is the key. With Knowledge, God admits us into his study room; his servant he

allows a little more inside; but to his lover he says, ‘Come with me into my bed and I will reveal to you my dreams for the future.’ This is the special privilege of the God-lover. So Udhav comes back to Krishna and says, ‘You are truly a trickster!’ ‘Again you are telling me this?’ ‘You told me that I am going to give them some teaching, but I have come back after learning something.’ So Krishna says, ‘Those are my ways. These are my works and my cunning.’ So that secret smile is everywhere. It is that which is working, that which is evolving, it is that which is leading us on the great journey. When he ‘*Gathers the whole world into his single breast / Then shall the business fail of Night and Death.*’¹

When will Death end, when will Darkness end? How beautiful! Not just with Light, but with Love – why? Because Love alone can join that which is now parted or twain.

Sri Aurobindo says in Book One, Canto Four, ‘The Secret Knowledge’, ‘*We must fill the vast lacuna we have made.*’ What is the lacuna? The gap between Spirit and Matter. What power can bridge them, reunite them? That is why it is very interesting that in *Savitri* it is Love versus Death, not Life versus Death. Life and death are two sides of one coin. What is Death? Death is the power that divides. And the final division that Death creates is between the Divine and the Creation. This is the final division. So in *Savitri* until the last he does not give up. He says ‘No – you can have Satyavan if you want, but only up above.’ But Love is the power that unites. It has gone out to reunite Creation with the Creator, and therefore it carries that capacity in it. And because the psychic is nothing else but the Mother’s love crystallised in Creation, it is the very nature of the psychic to love. It cannot be otherwise. Wherever the psychic blossoms, it loves rightly, beautifully – even in human love. When the Mother was asked ‘If love comes our way, what should we do? We are supposed to love only God’ she laughed and said, ‘Ah, go through it.’ Then she says something very interesting. She says that there are people who reject this. What happens? They become harsh and over a period of time they lose the capacity to love, and sometimes it takes centuries to recover this capacity. So instead, learn to love unselfishly, without

¹ *Savitri* : p. 633

expectations. If you go through it deeply enough, at the end you will discover behind the appearances the core of love, which is the same everywhere. Love in whatever form can become a sadhana, if one learns to go behind appearances. What are the appearances? ‘Oh, so and so gets angry, so and so has deceived me, so and so doesn’t take care of me, so and so doesn’t love me’ This is the voice of the Titan. But the voice of the sadhak of the integral yoga tells us that behind all these appearances there is the Mother’s Love. It has come to us in this form and through this everything can become a path, to one who is alert and awake. This is what is meant by being alert and awake: that everything becomes a path. This is the great journey. And ‘*Then shall the business fail of Night and Death.*’ In the same page, towards the end:

Our lives are God’s messengers beneath the stars.
To dwell under death’s shadow they have come,
Tempting God’s light to earth for the ignorant race,
His love to fill the hollow in men’s hearts, ...

If there is one thing which runs throughout the Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations*, it is love, love : ‘Teach me to be the instrument of Thy love’.

People speak about Narad’s bhakti sutras – I have read them, and you know they pale into insignificance once you have read the *Prayers and Meditations*. If there is one book that is all about bhakti in its highest, purest form, with all the signs in it, it is *Prayers and Meditations*. What a unique gift!

His love to fill the hollow in men’s hearts,
His bliss to heal the unhappiness of the world.

Everybody has his own image of the Mother – she is this, she is that – but if one were really to make a survey amongst the very few people who are left now (and I am so happy that in this audience we have some of those who have been blessed to have seen the Mother with these mortal eyes and been blessed by her) and asked, if one has to speak of the Mother as the embodiment of one single quality, what is it? And what one has experienced and felt is that most of all she was the Mother of Love, an embodiment of Love and Grace. And she has

said, ‘My child, do not treat me like a guru! I come many notches down if you treat me like a guru. I don’t want to be the guru of anyone. It is much more natural to me to be the universal Mother for all.’ The Mother’s love – ‘*The calm indulgence and maternal breasts ...*’ – that is how Sri Aurobindo puts it. When he speaks of the Mother’s love in another place, in Book One, Canto Five, he says:

Even were caught as through a cunning veil
The smile of love that sanctions the long game,
The calm indulgence and maternal breasts... p.41

That is how he could sense that love, which is indulgent. Sri Aurobindo says that the Divine Mother wants the soul to turn to her in all its difficulties, so that she can pour out her heart of love on her creatures. This is her love. We are here to embody that love in a miniature way, and the door to that love is the psychic:

His bliss to heal the unhappiness of the world.

And then in these marvellous lines Savitri tells Death how important love is, even love disfigured in human life :

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute. p. 633

The same thing is revealed to us again in Book Five, ‘The Book of Love’:

To live, to love are signs of infinite things,
Love is a glory from eternity’s spheres.
Abased, disfigured, mocked by baser might
That steal his name and shape and ecstasy,
He is still the godhead by which all can change. p. 397

Even when it is disfigured, even when it is most suffering, still with love there is a possibility of change, even at the human level. What happens when love enters our heart? Sweet sixteen, and suddenly everything changes. And the beauty of love is that love and anger work in two opposite ways: when anger is there, we see everything in the other person as bad, even the most beautiful things are bad,

horrible. We are only critical and it makes us more and more bitter inside. As the Mother says, it makes the consciousness taste bitter to the Divine. And when we complain and grumble, all sorts of adverse forces enter into us. But when we love someone, even the horrible things appear good. Try telling someone ‘You are loving a wrong person, there is nothing good and worthwhile in him’. If the person is in love he will never accept what you say. Why? Because love first transforms our consciousness. It is not that the person is wrong in saying that. But the intensity of the love pierces through the veil, cuts through all the surface appearances and for a moment a door opens and we glimpse something of the Presence within the other person. If we can sustain our vision of that Presence and the faith, the sraddha, the person will begin to change, because if all the time we keep believing and saying and repeating, ‘You are a wonderful person, a wonderful being’, why won’t the person change? But instead we start by saying ‘You are a beautiful being’; on the second or third day we want to have the compliment returned to us. When it doesn’t happen, after some time we change our tune: we say instead ‘You are a horrible person.’ Then we have lost the whole beautiful journey.

But even on a human level, even when love is disfigured, *‘He is still the godhead by which all can change’*.

A mystery wakes in our inconscient stuff,
A bliss is born that can remake our life.
Love dwells in us like an unopened flower
Awaiting a rapid moment of the soul,

So what is that moment of the soul? It is when one suddenly feels ‘here is the person’

The child-god is at play, he seeks himself
In many hearts and minds and living forms:
He lingers for a sign that he can know
And, when it comes, wakes blindly to a voice,
A look, a touch, the meaning of a face. ...
He seizes on some sign of outward charm ...

It is the god who is at play – how interesting! We think that it is the other person who has the charm. No. He fills everything, he paints

everything, colours everything. Suddenly we begin to feel a glow and see beauty in everything. But who is at play? The child-god.

Reads heavenly truths into earth's semblances,
Desires the image for the godhead's sake, ...
Love's adoration like a mystic seer
Through vision looks at the invisible

This is the capacity of love, and this is what is embodied in so many Indian stories. For want of time I am just shutting that part out of my brain because otherwise another story will flow about that power; how even the gods were changed – for example by Anasuya's love: so powerful is her love that she could turn gods into little helpless babes, just by the power of love. Then Mandodari's love for Ravana is regarded as one of the great loves. She is one of the five great ones. She loved a demon, a titan who opposed the Divine, and yet her love is regarded as one of the highest kinds of love. Why? Because that love had a power for good. She always advised him to stay on the path of the right and the light. And yet, despite everything that he did or did not do, she remained faithful. That love itself has a power. Look at this:

Love's adoration like a mystic seer
Through vision looks at the invisible,
...
All strives to enforce the unity all is.
Too far from the Divine, Love seeks his truth
And Life is blind and the instruments deceive
And Powers are there that labour to debase.
Still can the vision come, the joy arrive.
Rare is the cup fit for love's nectar wine,
As rare the vessel that can hold God's birth; pp. 397-98

The path of love is a path of fire. One is reminded of a famous Urdu couplet which says 'It is a stream of fire' – and you are not allowed to swim or fly over it: you have to drown in it, burn yourself completely, every bit of ego has to be reduced to ashes, because ego and love cannot stay together. If this applies to human love, how much more to our love for the Divine? Kabir says so beautifully : 'This is the home of Love – not your grand-aunt's place. So if you want to enter,

there is a price.’ What is the price? ‘Cut off your head, keep it at the door, then enter.’ If you are carrying too much, it does not go. Love is blind, obedient, full of trust; one that surrenders unquestioningly. Love gives itself without asking anything in return. This is the highest culmination of human love. Sri Aurobindo says that there are various kinds of bhakti: there is vital bhakti which calculates and bargains – ‘I love you God, but what am I going to get in return?’ Mental bhakti keeps always reservations, it doubts and doubts and doubts: ‘If you are God, you should not fall sick!’ Amitabh Bacchan’s father had come here to Pondicherry, he came along with Sumitranandan Pant, the poet who was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and has written beautiful poems, and he could not have darshan of the Mother because he was told that the Mother had a toothache. In his diary he wrote caustically, ironically : ‘Perfect, flawless – and yet has toothache!’ Then, not aware of what he was writing, he continues, ‘Anyway, strangely, that day I too had toothache. So I thought that if not in the light, at least in the difficulties I am one with her.’ Not realising that in the difficulties the Divine had become one with him.

Rare is the cup fit for love’s nectar wine,
 As rare the vessel that can hold God’s birth;
 As soul made ready through a thousand years
 Is the living mould of a supreme descent.

p.41

I don’t feel like stopping, but we must end, so we will end with the Mother’s own personality, her human personality. What was her human persona that could embody such a love? Sri Aurobindo describes who she is, even about her humanness. She is divine we know, but even to look at her as a human personality, how could she embody that love? What do we have to do to embody that love. In a way it is God’s example for all of us. That is what Sri Aurobindo says in the *The Essays on the Gita*, that Sri Krishna insists on God’s own example. He elaborates: God’s life is an example for us to follow – otherwise it has no meaning or purpose. It is an inspiration and an example for us.

Even her humanity was half divine:
 Her spirit opened to the Spirit in all,
 Her nature felt all Nature as its own.

Apart, living within, all lives she bore;
Aloof, she carried in herself the world:

p.8

So hastily we say, 'I am doing my own sadhana – don't disturb me!' Here is the Divine: even when he is shut away in a room, he is carrying within him the pain, the stab, the gunshot wounds of those who are on the borders, fighting the Second World War. That is his example :

I carry the sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.¹

About Savitri he writes:

The universal Mother's love was hers.

And

All in her pointed to a nobler kind.
Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflow the ways of Thought to unborn things. ...
Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun ...
A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came ...
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:

p.14-15

People went to her and they felt suddenly relieved, released into a wide freedom. The Mother tells in the Agenda, about when Nehru came: people asked her 'What did he say, what happened?' She says, laughingly, 'I gave him a bath of the Lord. This is all that I do when people come to me, I give them a bath of the Lord.' Devan Nair tells in his reminiscences how when he came, he was getting restless: 'I have to meet the Mother – what will I tell her? I am the President of Singapore. What will I tell her?' Then he looked around. He thought 'I will tell her 'Great Lady, you are doing a good job in the Ashram!' All this was in his mind, but he was also slightly nervous. So he says 'With all these thoughts in my head I went there. But when I saw her I forgot everything. I just knelt down and put my head on her lap.'

¹ SABCL 5: 120

Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise.

And then there is a beautiful description of how we can relate to her:

As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambience,
And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.

The essence of sadhana. A group of young people had come. They asked an elderly lady in the Ashram – she is no more – ‘How do you do sadhana here?’ She said ‘I don't know anything about that. Every morning we go to the Samadhi and tell all that is going on inside us to Mother. And whatever happens, if we are unwell, if we are depressed, we again go and tell her. When we are happy we go and tell her. And the surprising thing is, within a few moments after we have told her, we feel completely free and released.’

Mona-da says in one of his talks, as revealed to him by the Mother; speaking about the Samadhi, She says: ‘One cannot pass near that circle without being bathed in that supramental Light.’ It is so charged with those vibrations. They sacrificed their physical bodies, but brought down to earth the supramental consciousness; and the Samadhi, the Ashram, vibrates with those vibrations. Even now, even if there were a hundred thousand battles fought on its body, that is the Light of Truth and the Love of the Unnameable, the Unutterable, the Only One.

I close with just four lines from the end. Of course Savitri embodied that Love in the human body and this is the far destiny of mankind, one day we shall all embody that love. And that love does not cancel out earthly love. It is not just about the human soul turning to the Divine. It is about embodying that love in all relations. Our human relations are basically a distorted reflection of the divine relationships,

and it is possible to embody them here. We can embody that other sense of the sloka

Acharya devo bhava, pitra devo bhava, mata deva bhava

One sense is that the acharya is like a god, our father is like a god, treat him like a god. This is what the acharyas say. But children don't agree, they say there is another meaning: 'Acharya – be like a god! Father, be like a god! – with infinite patience. Mother – be like a god: infinite love' This is what one day will come about when all of us will be centred around Her, harmoniously and beautifully.

Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth: p.719

Our love has grown greater by that mighty touch. The Divine does not cancel out human love, the Divine purifies it, transforms it. Otherwise there would be no creation – everybody would be loving the Divine in their own hearts. He uses human love as a material to transfigure it. He uses human knowledge as a material to pour wisdom into it. He uses the struggling and stumbling human will, when we offer it, to transmute it into the omnipotent's force. So also he uses the human heart, its failings, its strivings, its stumblings and errors, to pour out the pure love and delight and the beatitude that can change our life and remake our world. This is *Savitri* and this is the sadhana of *Savitri* and this is what we have to live, the hope for the future and this is what will be one day.

To close, let us go to page 724, at the end. When Savitri is asked, 'What have you done? Conquered Death, brought back Satyavan? What did you do?' Savitri does not speak big things. She is not into drama – 'Oh, you don't know what I did, I sat in meditation and saw death, I dialogued and debated with it, and finally I burnt it, roasted it alive.' She does not say any of those things. They just notice the transfiguration in her: 'What sadhana have you done Savitri? We notice a marvellous change in your face. It is glowing as with the light of a thousand suns, and we see Satyavan – and today all these auspicious things have happened: Dyumatsena's eye-sight has returned, and all the rapid marvels of the day.' They ask Satyavan 'What gleaming marvel of the earth and sky stands by thy side?' He has only this to say: 'She is the cause of all – lay all on her.' So they

turn to her: ‘You tell us. Who are you? What have you done?’ And she replies, telling what this sadhana is in four lines. With that we will close.

“Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live ...

As long as we are divided and separate we are not even alive.

And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage.”

p. 724

“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.”

For your diary !

The Fourth

Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture

will be given by

Shraddhavan

**at Savitri Bhavan on
Tuesday August 13, 4-5pm**

**Refreshments will be served and
transport will be available from behind the Ashram
from 2.30 pm onwards**

Everyone is welcome

The English of *Savitri* (7)

Book One, Canto Two, lines 117-185

by *Shraddhavan*

There was her drama's radiant prologue lived.
A spot for the eternal's tread on earth
Set in the cloistral yearning of the woods
And watched by the aspiration of the peaks
Appeared through an aureate opening in Time,
Where stillness listening felt the unspoken word
And the hours forgot to pass towards grief and change.

Now Sri Aurobindo is taking us back in time. He says that the prologue to Savitri's drama was lived out in this beautiful place, this spot in the forest. A prologue is what happens before the drama starts. What was that prologue? It was the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan. This spot is a little clearing in the woods where the eternal can set foot on the earth, and this spot is set in 'the cloistral yearning of the woods'. '*Yearning*' means longing, aspiration for something. '*Cloistral*' is an adjective from the noun 'cloister'. A cloister is a place where people go to concentrate entirely on the divine; for example, in a monastery — a Buddhist monastery, a Christian monastery. It is a protected place where people can go just to concentrate, to pray, to serve God, to think only about the divine. In architecture, a cloister is the technical term for a walled courtyard with a garden, often with a fountain, and a covered area all around where people can walk and sit and study. It is a feature of a monastery or abbey, so that the idea of the cloister has come to mean an enclosed place where one can go to leave the world and dedicate yourself to the search for the divine. This word is associated with Christianity, but in all cultures that idea is there. He says that in the woods there is an enclosed spot that is like a cloister, and the woods all around seem to be longing for something higher; the surrounding mountain peaks are also trying to reach heaven, and they are watching this spot. As if floodlit with

sunlight, this place *'appeared through an aureate opening in Time'*, as if Time opened up and revealed the space where this prologue was played out. *'Aureate'* means golden. In the name *'Auroville'* we have the same sound, that suggests to us something golden. *Aureus* is the Latin word for gold. This is a spot and a moment in time; it is so still that it is as if in the silence we can hear the unspoken word, the thing that is not yet manifested. *'And the hours forgot to pass towards grief and change'* — as if time stood still in that happy moment when Savitri and Satyavan first met.

Here with the suddenness divine advents have,
Repeating the marvel of the first descent,
Changing to rapture the dull earthly round,
Love came to her hiding the shadow, Death.

In that wonderful spot in the forest she sees Satyavan, and very suddenly and unexpectedly, like a god coming down, a divine advent, the coming of a god, Love comes to her. Sri Aurobindo says this advent is like a repetition of the marvel and miracle of the very first descent, when creation began. The *'dull earthly round'*, the usual happenings, suddenly get changed, turned into miracle and rapture. Love came to her, and at the time she did not see that he was hiding a shadow, that behind that love, behind all the delight and miracle of that first meeting with Satyavan, there was hiding the shadow of Death which she would have to face.

Well might he find in her his perfect shrine.
Since first the earth-being's heavenward growth began,
Through all the long ordeal of the race,
Never a rarer creature bore his shaft,
That burning test of the godhead in our parts,
A lightning from the heights on our abyss.

The *'he'* is Love, this great unsatisfied godhead, mentioned in line 127; and Sri Aurobindo says that Love finds in Savitri his perfect shrine. The god of love finds in Savitri the perfect place where he can establish his dwelling. A shrine is a place where a divinity can live. Why is Savitri such a perfect shrine for the god of love? *'Since first the earth-being's heavenward growth began'* — from the very beginning of evolution, the beginning of this journey of evolution

from matter towards spirit, ever since that heavenward growth of the earth-being began, *'Through all the long ordeal'* — the many tests and trials and experiences that the human race has passed through — *'Never a rarer creature bore his shaft'*. The god of Love shoots you with an arrow, a shaft, and wakens love in your heart with his arrow.

In English, '-ward' as a suffix on the end of a word means 'in the direction of'; *'heavenward'* means towards, in the direction of heaven. *'Well might he find in her his perfect shrine.'* 'Well might' is an idiom in English that means it is correct, suitable, justified and appropriate. Many human beings have fallen in love since the beginning of this heavenward journey of the earth, but Sri Aurobindo says that none of them was so pure, so perfectly fashioned, so unique as Savitri. He also says that that shaft, the arrow of love, is a *'burning test of the godhead in our parts'*. Love is a test of how far our soul and our nature has developed on our heavenward journey. It comes like a stroke of lightning from the heights, from the heavenly ranges of consciousness, to our abyss. Here we are deep down in the darkness; to us comes that moment when we are struck by love and something divine wakes up in us. Usually, for most human beings, that divine awakening doesn't last very long because of our impurities and imperfections and limitations, but Savitri is different:

All in her pointed to a nobler kind.
Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.

Everything in Savitri is pointing to a nobler kind, a higher species, the next development in the evolution. *'Kind'* here means 'species', 'race'. Sri Aurobindo says that everything in Savitri points towards something higher than human, more than human, more noble. Now he is going to look at each level and part of Savitri's nature and show how they point to a nobler kind and make her fit to be a perfect shrine where Love can dwell. He starts with the highest part, her spirit. Her spirit is near to the wideness of the earth but it is also very closely connected to heaven. It is young, full of youthful enthusiasm and energy; and it is large-visioned: it has a large, wide scope of vision. It

is exalted — lifted up high, and it is swift — it can move very quickly. It travels, it is voyaging through other worlds, worlds of splendour and of calm. It is like a great winged being that flies very high and swiftly. It flies far beyond the paths of thought: '*overflowed*' — it flies high above, far beyond the ways of Thought to unborn things — things that have not yet been manifested. That is her spirit. Like a great bird, it can see so wide and fly so high and far.

Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.

Two more things: the will and the mind. Her will is unstumbling. The problem about our will is that it stumbles all the time because we can't see where we are going. Her will is self-poised — balanced in itself, not influenced by things from outside. It is sure-footed; she wills always the right thing. She wills with a flame, an intensity. '*Ardent*' means intense, burning. This is possible because her mind is absolutely pure, it is '*a sea of white sincerity*'. If the slightest insincerity creeps in, then the will is liable to stumble, isn't it? But if the mind is a sea of white sincerity then the will can be pure also. And it is passionate in its flow. Throughout the poem, Sri Aurobindo is always emphasizing this intensity, this passion, this flame that is in Savitri. In that '*sea of white sincerity*' there was '*not one turbid wave.*' '*Turbid*' means muddy and troubled, as when the waves have stirred up something dark and ugly from the depths. Although Savitri's mind is '*passionate in flow*' it remains absolutely clear and pure.

And then he describes Savitri's heart in a very beautiful and complex image:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.

It is the image of an oracle. Several times in the poem Sri Aurobindo refers directly or indirectly to the Oracle of Delphi in Greece at the shrine of Apollo, the god of the sun, poetry, music and inspiration. There, if one wanted to have an answer to one's question, the question had to be given to a priestess who lived in a cavern, an underground cave. That priestess in Delphi used to sit on a special three-legged seat, a tripod seat. Sri Aurobindo refers to it in several places in *Savitri*. Perhaps in that cave, it is very possible, there were some gasses, some vapours. She would go into trance and make sounds, as happens with the Tibetan Oracle. Then there would be a priest who would interpret the sounds and give you the answer to your question. She made some sounds; one couldn't understand, but it would get interpreted by the priest. It is the same with the Tibetan Oracle: he goes into trance and makes movements and sounds and there is an interpreter who gives the answers. That is how it was in Delphi. Sri Aurobindo is using that image as a starting point. Here, he says that the oracle — the divine revelation — is given in the form of a dance. There is a priestess in a cave, one of those priestesses who receive inspirations, revelations from above. She expresses the revelations she receives in the form of a dance — '*As in a mystic and dynamic dance*'. '*Immaculate*' means pure, without any stain or imperfection. She is '*Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault*'. She receives true inspirations from above. A vault is a curved roof or ceiling. The priestess '*Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods*' — a cavern or cave where she receives divine messages and expresses them in her dance. These are prophetic revelations, telling of things to come. Savitri's heart is like that: it is as if dancing to the rhythms of a higher revealing truth. And it is '*a heart of silence*' held '*in the hands of joy*'. It is beating, as our hearts beat, and its beats are rich and creative. And that heart is inhabiting, living inside, a body which is like '*a parable of dawn*'. A parable is a simple story that holds a deeper truth. Savitri's very body seems to express something of the new light that is to come. He also says that her body seems like '*a niche for veiled divinity*'. A niche is a little place where we keep the image of a deity; but in this case the divinity is veiled, covered up, all we can see is the niche. Or her body is like a beautiful golden door to a temple; when we see that golden door we can sense that if it opens we will see all the secret and divine things inside, the divine presence. When we see the

body of Savitri we have that sense that there are so many beautiful secrets beyond. Even her most external appearance is telling about that beautiful heart that is moving rhythmically within and telling of marvellous things to come in the future.

When the Mother and Huta came to this passage and wanted to make a painting of it, the Mother did not make a sketch. At the beginning of the project to do these paintings with Huta, Mother used to do quite detailed drawings. But when they came to this one, she didn't make a drawing. Instead, she stood up and showed a dancing pose, to show Huta what should be the position of this priestess of immaculate ecstasies moving in a prophet cavern of the gods. This picture in the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings gives the image of Savitri's heart, '*Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault*', and inhabiting '*A body like a parable of dawn*'.

Then Sri Aurobindo tells us about the way that Savitri's body moves:

Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.

When she moves, there is something divine about the rhythm of her movement. As a human being, Savitri is moving in Time, but immortal rhythms seem to be there in the way that she moves. Her look, her smile wake up a heavenly sense: the kind of senses that we have in our higher subtle bodies, senses like the gods have. When people see her look and her smile, even in their human nerves and senses a heavenly thrill wakes up, and the intense delight of seeing her pours a supernal heavenly beauty on the lives of ordinary human beings. That is what happened with our Mother to the people who were privileged to be with her, to see her as she was moving around in the ashram. Her look, her smile poured a supernal beauty, a beauty from higher planes, onto their lives. Savitri's smile and the way that she looks at you gives a thrill of delight. They wake up '*celestial sense*', the way that divine beings feel, even in our earthly stuff. Usually our bodies cannot feel heavenly things like that, but those who saw her had this experience. The intense delight in her look and her smile poured a supernal beauty, a heavenly beauty, on

men's lives. When we read these lines we can't help thinking of our Mother in Pondicherry.

A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:
Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise.

'A wide self-giving...' — that was just Savitri's natural way of being: to be self-giving, ready to give herself to everybody with a *'magnanimity'* — generosity: a generosity as wide and vast as the sea or the sky; a wide self-giving that enveloped everything in its greatness, everything that came into contact with her, and that gave the sense all around her that the world itself has become greater. *'Her kindly care'*, her solicitude, taking care of all the small details of life, was like a sweet temperate sun, not too hot, like a spring sun. *'Temperate'* means without extremes. At the same time she is passionate, not in a petty way, but with a high noble serene intensity, like that of a summer sky, perfectly balanced, equipoised, not going too far this way or that, perfectly balanced, smiling on everything.

As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambience,
And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.

The soul is often imaged as a bird. Sri Aurobindo says that in Savitri's atmosphere one could feel like a soul leaving our world of storms and trouble, escaping from all the tempest of earth life, flying like a bird that is being hunted and escaping into another world. The soul-bird, escaping from a hunter, or from a storm, with tired wings — the poor little bird is so exhausted, but then it reaches this quiet protected place where there are no storms, no hunters. It feels as if it has reached *'a remembered breast'*, as if it has reached someone very familiar, as if

it has found its way back to where it came from. When you come into her atmosphere, there is a sense that you have reached a safe place, a sanctuary. Not only do you feel safe but you can rest there — your wings are so tired, but now you can rest: it is so soft and comfortable and at the same time it is splendid, shining. There, the poor little soul-bird can rest and *'drink life back in streams of honey-fire'*, drawing wonderful warm regenerating energies back into itself. That poor, tired little bird can get back its *'lost habit of happiness'*. The soul should be always happy, but in this world of storms it may lose that happiness. In Savitri's atmosphere it can get back that lost habit of happiness and feel her *'glorious ambience'*, the wonderful atmosphere of her bright nature. There, the little bird can preen itself. Preening is what birds do: they clean themselves with their beak, put all their feathers back in order, make themselves beautiful again, after escaping from a storm. The soul can *'Preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.'* Near to Savitri there are no grey storm-clouds — her kindly care is like a sweet temperate sun, and her high passion is like a blue heaven's equipoise. That is the wonderful atmosphere that Savitri is spreading around her, welcoming every tired soul, ready to give it back life and energy and happiness. Can you imagine a very lovely warm energy that is also very sweet? Hers must be something like that. Honey is the symbol of *ananda*, and fire the symbol of purity and intensity and aspiration. That is the kind of energy that one can drink in, in the atmosphere that Savitri is spreading around her.

A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;
Love in her was wider than the universe,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.

A sanctuary is two things: it is a safe place where you can go and nobody can harm or touch you, and it is the centre of the temple, the most sacred place. The sanctuary is where the god is installed. In the old days, if people were chasing you, even if you were a criminal you would be safe if you could reach that sacred place and stay there under God's protection. No one could touch you if you stayed there. For those who came to Savitri, *'her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven'*, so that they could enter a higher state of consciousness. In her is a capacity for love that is wider than the entire universe. Easily,

the whole world can take refuge in her single heart. It is her mission to carry the whole world in her heart and offer it up to the Supreme. A *'deep of compassion'* means a deep place, as if in the sea, full of divine compassion. Her compassion is not just on the surface, it is deep, fathomless, bottomless, inexhaustible.

The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell:
Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air,
Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath
Spiritual that can make all things divine.

Here Sri Aurobindo is reminding us that he is describing in what ways Savitri provides the perfect shrine for Love. *'The great unsatisfied godhead'* is Love. Love is never satisfied; it is always looking for more things to love. But here in the shrine of Savitri's nature, this great unsatisfied godhead could dwell. He can dwell, live permanently, in her because there is nothing egoistic in her, her whole being is *'Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air'*. That is what we are carrying with us, with our little egoistic beings, we are carrying this small imprisoned atmosphere that keeps itself limited, which feels it has to protect itself against all outside things. That makes it difficult, even impossible, for us to love as widely and completely as Savitri could love. Her mood is able to *'harbour'*, to hold, Love's *'sublimer breath'*, his spiritual breath. There are many different levels of love. Love expresses itself in different ways on the different levels of our nature. Because Savitri doesn't have any of this *'dwarf self'* in her, she can hold Love's highest breath, that breath of divine love that can make all things divine. 'Dwarf' means very small. We all have our little dwarf self and must grow into our true self which is much vaster.

For even her gulfs were secrecies of light.
At once she was the stillness and the word,
A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire;
The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.

Savitri has in her these things which seem like opposites: the stillness, and the power of the creative word. She is both a continent, a solid substance, of peace spreading, radiating, and at the same time a vibrational ocean of *'untrembling virgin fire'*: intensity, purity,

aspiration, on the energy level. ‘Continent’ implies a substance, here, perhaps, a subtle substance. So she has the strength of the gods and the silence of the gods. Silence and strength: these are qualities of Savitri which Sri Aurobindo will come back to over and over again, showing how she can reconcile intensity and peace, intense action and will and at the same time calm and silence. ‘Gulfs’ refers to the deeper parts of the being. In most of us, the subconscious levels are dark. In her they were secretaries of light. For all these reasons, because of all these qualities, which point to a state far beyond the human — ‘a nobler kind’ — Love can find in Savitri ‘his perfect shrine’

In her he found a vastness like his own,
His high warm subtle ether he refound
And moved in her as in his natural home.
In her he met his own eternity.

Nothing to explain; it is clear, yes?

Sri Aurobindo has written a letter about an earlier version of this passage. He wrote :

This passage is, I believe, what I might call the Overmind Intuition at work expressing itself in something like its own rhythm and language. It is difficult to say about one’s own poetry, but I think I have succeeded here ... in catching that very difficult note.

1936
Savitri pp.764-65

Here I have tried to explain the meaning of some words and phrases and images that might be difficult to understand. But to be able to catch the full power and mantric vibration of this wonderful passage, it is essential to read it in the original, with full devotion and concentration, with the correct rhythm and pronunciation. In fact this is true of the whole of *Savitri*. All that I can do in these classes is to possibly assist those who aspire to understand the English to take some first steps towards experiencing something of the inexhaustible magic and richness and power of Sri Aurobindo’s incomparable poetry. This fact should never be forgotten or over-rated.

(to be continued)

Savitri : An Epic of The Soul

by Dr. K. Ujjwala

Dr. K. Ujjwala holds a Masters degree in English Literature. She subsequently studied Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* for her M. Phil. and Sri Aurobindo's poetic criticism for her Ph. D. from Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur Andhra Pradesh. She is currently working as Associate Professor of English at K. L. University, Vijayawada.

Abstract

Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is the epic of modern age. As an epic of the soul Savitri stresses that the world is the manifestation of the 'Divine' and therefore meaningful. It also reveals that man is not just 'an image of clay'; he is really a son of God. His final destiny is to become equal to God. Savitri tells the story of love that conquers death. It also narrates the adventures of spirit, from the Inconscience to the Superconscience. Besides, it presages that man is to emerge as superhuman after the descent of the Supermind in the terrestrial consciousness. The action of Savitri takes place only in the soul of man. It transmutes the secular and theological structure of traditional epic into a spiritual one. Savitri has the outstanding features of both Primary and Secondary epics; Savitri deals with spirituality; so it is appropriately regarded as an epic of the soul.

Summary

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* has been compared with the Western epics to point out that it uses their structure for its own purposes. But it differs from them in its subject matter and is more lyrical than a narrative poem in its essence. It has therefore the utterness of speech of the spiritual and not the glimmering beauty of mystical experience; it is not the Sybil who speaks here but the seer. Referring to the poetry of the future and the poet of the future, Sri Aurobindo explains the epic of the soul as follows:

The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are [the poet's] greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed will be the song of the greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and presence and ways and purpose of the divinity in man and the Universe.¹

Homer's Epics and Savitri

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are primary epics which deal with heroic deeds in order that such deeds may not be forgotten. Homer draws the picture of human life at a high intensity of impulse and action. Sri Aurobindo says,

When we read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we are not really upon this earth, but on the earth lifted into some place of a greater dynamics of life, and so long as we remain there we have a greater vision in a more lustrous air and we feel ourselves raised to a semi-divine stature.²

Like Homer, Sri Aurobindo plans his *Savitri* on a cosmic plane and links this earth with many occult worlds. Again, like Homer, he adopts a popular legend to explain the meaning of immortality. Like Homer, Sri Aurobindo also repeats key ideas, phrases, epithets and situations, in *Savitri*. He says:

The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common kind. This kind of repetition I have largely used in *Savitri*.³

1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*. Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p.267.

2 *Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

3 Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri: a legend and a symbol*. Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1979, p.792.

The Aeneid and Savitri

Virgil's *Aeneid* is a literary epic; the theme, and not the character, is its dominant motif. It depicts the destiny of a nation. There Aeneas struggles and suffers for Rome, and so stands for what a Roman hero is. According to W.A. Camps,

The *Aeneid* is a poem wholly different from the Homeric poems. Yet it recalls them on every page, and is constructed largely by the remoulding of Homeric materials.¹

Virgil adopts the technique of enlargement to greaten the events and characters. Like Virgil, Sri Aurobindo divides his epic into twelve books and stresses the themes of the poem which are yoga and spirituality. Moreover, he employs the techniques of enlargement to interpret the significance of each incident.

The Divine Comedy and Savitri

Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is really a wonderful fusion of allegory and philosophy in poetry. It is a voyage through hell, purgatory and heaven; but allegorically, it is a search for an understanding of the order and the nature of the universe. Like *The Divine Comedy*, *Savitri* is an epic of the soul that harmonizes philosophy and poetry in a symbolic language. The mystic travels of Aswapati and Savitri might be connected with the journey of Dante. Like Beatrice of Dante's epic, Savitri too becomes one of the protagonists in the struggle that she wages both as woman and cosmic power, her victory affecting both the individual and the universe as a whole. In *The Divine Comedy*, we are reminded of Dante's descent into hell. Dante sees the penitents purging their sins through prayer coming to the tree of knowledge. Similarly, Aswapathy perceives mankind aspiring to get rid of matter's weight by pigmy thought, intelligence and reason. Both Dante and Sri Aurobindo, writing in their respective cultural milieus, reveal a total vision of the cosmos.

Paradise Lost and Savitri

Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* are literary epics which are cosmic. Like *Paradise Lost*, *Savitri* opens with the introduction of a crisis which leads us directly to the middle of

¹ Camps, W.A., *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid*, Oxford, 1979, p.75.

the story. It also reminds us of the ending of *Paradise Lost* which suggests a new world where man can redeem himself from his sins through constant efforts. Milton seems to believe that Paradise can be regained by control of one's thoughts, but Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that one has to realize one's soul in order to achieve one's lost divinity.

In the *Iliad*, we have the highest reach of Hellenic mind. In the *Divine Comedy*, we have the highest attainment of Christian mystical experience; in *Paradise Lost* we have the highest elevation of Christian ethical striving. Unlike these, *Savitri* has the clarity of direct revelation which is the characteristic of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

Indian Epics and Savitri

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the great epics of India, are called *Itihasa*. Sri Aurobindo explains the term *Itihasa* thus:

The *Itihasa* was an ancient historical or legendary tradition turned to creative use as a significant tale expressive of some spiritual or religious or ethical or ideal meaning and formative of the mind of the people.¹

Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are products of inspired intelligence with a high poetic tone and both are ensouled images of a great culture. These epics give us the spiritual significance of individual and collective life from a strong and noble thought-power of a mind that has high social, political and ethical ideas and is artistically delicate and refined. *Savitri* too offers us a whole world of experience, but it is altogether a new world of experience, a world in which the life of man – in fact the whole view of the cosmos – undergoes a radical change. *Savitri* is a vision of the world in terms of current laws of human evolution as seen by the ideal mind.

Savitri like the *Ramayana* is a poem of dharma, which is related to love and compassion. Sita is a wife devoted to her husband. Like Sita, *Savitri* is also a devoted wife who is ready to lay down her life to save her husband from death. The *Ramayana* deals with the

¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Vyasa and Valmiki*. Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1964, pp.211-12.

struggle between the forces of truth and the powers of falsehood and affirms that truth ultimately triumphs. Savitri's encounter with death is really the struggle between the forces of good and evil. Sri Aurobindo says of his epic:

It has been planned not on the scale of *Lycidas*..., but of the larger epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor *Ramayana*.¹⁶

Savitri prophesies the reign of truth on earth and opens up a new world of consciousness for mankind.



*In 'Huta's Room', February 2013, the Mother's chair
with one of her gowns*

1 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.792.

Letter to the Editor

from Dr. Raja Marathe

with responses from Shraddhavan

Dear Shraddhavan,

I really want to thank you for the immense work you have done for all the people like myself for whom English is the second language, by reciting the whole of *Savitri* in a beautiful, chaste English accent (possibly the kind that Sri Aurobindo had) changing your tone, stress, pace and accentuation in line of the meaning of the phrase, sentence, passage or for that matter the whole canto.

For example, you have recited Book One, Canto 1 at a very slow pace, for a night and a dawn to emerge. A few other lines that I immediately recall are : ‘*Muttered incessantly their muffled spell*’ (p. 13) (in your almost muffled voice); ‘*An arrow leaping through eternity*’ (p. 77) where one really feels an arrow shooting from a bow with high speed; and there are many, many such instances.

I am glad that my recorded reading of the whole of Savitri is fulfilling its aim of helping people to appreciate the music and something of the meaning of Sri Aurobindo’s mantric epic. We are told that Sri Aurobindo had ‘a perfect Cambridge accent’ – which is likely to mean something more like the accent of Winston Churchill or David Attenborough than my own version of ‘Standard English’, dating from the 1950s. But although the pronunciation of the vowel sounds of English has changed over time – from Shakespeare’s day to our own – and is still changing, the rhythms seems to have remained more constant. And Sri Aurobindo has mentioned (in his essay On Quantitative Metre) that the natural rhythms of spoken English form the correct basis for effective poetic metre. This is certainly true for Savitri – nowhere in the epic are the natural rhythms of the words and phrases violated – I mean of course the rhythms that are natural to an educated native speaker.

I read several cantos and passages while listening to the recording in November and December 2012, and now that is helping me also to read *Savitri* independently as I am understanding the iambic pentameter (with or without enjambment!). I recently looked this up on Google and was amazed to discover that this is the most popular metre in English language including Shakespeare's plays and Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*.

Yes – iambic pentameter is the most natural metre in English. But it is also interesting that it allows so many different ‘voices’ – Shakespeare's plays are so varied, and all of them completely different from Milton's writings (whose earlier writings are very different from his epics too); then all the great English poets have stamped their own voices on the language while using this metre. Of course other metres have been used too. Sri Aurobindo has used many different metres, and has been praised for showing that the classical hexameter can be successfully used at length in English – in his poems Ahana (2 versions) and his mini-epic Ilion. He has written in alexandrines (the metre typical of French classical poetry) and adapted many metres from classical and Indian languages, just to show that it can be done – all with great success. He was indeed a ‘born poet’. And in Savitri he has used the familiar iambic pentameter in a completely unique way – this poem has a rhythm that has never been matched before, one that in its effect resembles only the great Indian scriptures, the Vedas and Upanishads.

I also want to share an intuitive insight which was revealed to me after listening to your recording of almost the whole of *Savitri* (except Book Two) in a short period of 2 months in Pune.

While listening to *Savitri*, certain questions were arising in my mind:

Who were these characters Savitri, Aswapati, Satyavan, Death, Narad, Dyumatsena, the Queen? Were they based on any real human beings? What was their significance? Why is there so much importance given to Aswapati and Savitri but hardly any reference or development of the characters of Satyavan, the Queen, Dhyumatsena? Is Savitri in

the epic some human being who has been born in the past, or a living human being, or someone to be born in some distant future ?

Why did Sri Aurobindo spend such enormous amount of time and energy on the writing and rewriting of this epic? What was his purpose and aim in writing *Savitri*?

What is the meaning of the ‘Author’s Note’?

The intuitive insight which came to me is as follows:

Sri Aurobindo is Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, the human father of Savitri, the Lord of Tapasya who has brought down *Savitri* (the book) that is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who has come down and is born to save. Satyavan (humanity at large, including people like myself) is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance

Sri Aurobindo is the ‘human father’ (as in Mahatma Gandhi being called the ‘father of the nation’) of the book *Savitri*.

The characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces ...and they take human bodies [*as characters in the book Savitri*] with whom we can enter into concrete touch.

This intuitive insight occurred while I was reading Book Four, ‘The Book of Birth and Quest. I found that Cantos 1 and 2 can be easily and consistently interpreted as Sri Aurobindo’s composition, writing and development of the book *Savitri*. Cantos 3 and 4 can be consistently interpreted as Sri Aurobindo releasing and sending forth the book *Savitri* on the quest to find suitable Satyavans in humanity in order to help Man (the evolved and developed aspiring souls) and show them the way from their mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

Sri Aurobindo by revealing *Savitri* has in a way given us the tantra of our own transformation through listening to, reading and studying *Savitri* and thus given us a path to realize the Upanishadic mantra ‘*Asato ma Sat gamaya; Tamaso ma Jotir gamaya, Mrutyor ma Amritam gamaya*’.

In my humble opinion, this insight alone can justify his herculean efforts spanning 30 odd years on this work, since he need not have spent so much effort if the Mother were to be equated with Savitri – for the Mother was very much present and living beside him; and so what was the need to write *Savitri*? – although the Mother certainly personified the qualities of the character Savitri.

It is unlikely that Sri Aurobindo would have spent so much effort to write a biography of a living, mythological or forthcoming incarnation of the Divine Mother, as some people imagine Savitri to be – for that leaves the Yoga of Aswapati in a meaningless void.

It is also unlikely that Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri* as a means of ‘*his own ascension*’ as some people misinterpret that one letter of his. For as *The Record of Yoga* and his evening talks (A B Purani’s book) show, he was already aware of and had ascended to the Supramental and the planes above, and he would have no need to work for 30 odd years by writing *Savitri* to ascend to such planes. He has at several places said that he has no such need and all the work he was doing was for humanity.

As Sri Aurobindo says in that letter later,

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.

The book *Savitri* has the power to create in us states of consciousness and is creative to transform our consciousness.

My insight stands by itself on intuition, and I am giving this reasoning on the mental plane to share my understanding with a rationale consistent with Sri Aurobindo’s words and lifework. I have no desire or need to convince anyone about it but am sharing it in the hope that it might open some more doors as it has done in my case. I will appreciate if you can publish this in a coming issue of *Invocation* as a letter to the Editor.

Sri Aurobindo has mentioned in the letter you refer to that he used the writing of Savitri ‘as a means of ascension’ – but you are right in saying that he cannot have meant by this that it was necessary

for him to ascend to the higher planes. Amal Kiran has explained this very clearly somewhere, telling us that each time Sri Aurobindo realised a new higher level of consciousness, he used the writing of the poem as a field of experimentation to see how far – as he says – poetry could be written from his own yogic consciousness, and how far that new level of yogic consciousness could be made creative. This is the justification of all the writing and rewriting and expansion: he wanted the whole poem to be as far as possible at the same height of expression, so every time he was able to reach a new higher level of creative expression, he wanted to bring all the rest of the already written material up to that same level. And of course that is how it has become ‘mantric’ – in the sense of being able to evoke higher states of consciousness in us and help in transforming our consciousness. And you yourself have now experienced how this contact with the creative force of Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness has sparked a new previously untapped vein of poetic creativity in yourself – Congratulations!

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.

Savitri p.703

The Mantra

The mantra ... is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. Its characteristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater.

Sri Aurobindo

22 June 1931

Letters on Poetry and Art CWSA 27, pp.26-27

Savitri is a mantra for the transformation of the world.

The Mother

(in conversation with Udar Pinto)

The word is a sound expressive of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantra and of japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible, "God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light." It is creation by the Word.

Sri Aurobindo

6 May 1933

CWSA 27, p.7

Sri Aurobindo on *Savitri* :

(1) Extracts gleaned from his Letters¹

by Jayantilal Gathiawala

Jayantilal I. Gathiawala is a regular participant at the Sri Aurobindo Centre Surat and the Shri Arvind Sadhana Kendra, Vasna, Ahmedabad. He is keenly involved in an attempt to understand Sri Aurobindo through his own expressions and is in search of material as an aid in this research.

“Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol” ... was in intention a sort of symbolic epic of the aim of supramental Yoga.

15 September 1931
p. 261

As to *Savitri*, there is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not be a magnum opus at all. Besides it would have been only a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing.

19 September 1931
p. 261

What I wrote at first was only the first raw material of the *Savitri* I am evolving now.

4 July 1933
p. 262

I have done an enormous amount of work with *Savitri*. The third section has been recast if not rewritten – so as to give it a more consistent epic swing and amplitude and elevation of level. The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation. The “Life” part is in a way finished, though I shall have to go over the ground perhaps some five or six times more to ensure perfection of detail. I am now starting a recasting of the “Mind” part of which I had only made a sort of basic rough draft. I hope that this time the work will stand as more final and definitive.

1938
p. 269

¹ As given in CWSA vol. 27 – all page references are to this volume.

Savitri ... is attaining a giant stature, she has grown immensely since you last saw the baby. I am besides revising and revising without end so as to let nothing pass which is not up to the mark.

18 March 1945
p. 270

[H]ow do you know that *Savitri* is or is going to be supramental poetry? It is not, in fact – it is only an attempt to render into poetry a symbol of things occult and spiritual.

1933
p. 271

I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular – if part seemed to me to come from any lower level, I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All has 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 far that could be made creative.

29 March 1936
p. 272

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.

3 November 1936
p. 274

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

3 November 1936
p. 274-5

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

3 November 1936
p. 276

This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to “hew the ways of Immortality”.

10 November 1936
p. 276

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

25 December 1932
p. 276

[The] First Book is divided into sections and the larger sections into subsections; ... E.g. the first section is “the last Dawn”, i.e. the dawn of the day of Satyavan’s death (but it must be remembered that everything is symbolic or significant in the poem, so this dawn also), the next is the Issue – both of these are short. Then comes a huge section of the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse (Aswapati, father of Savitri) relating how came about the birth of Savitri and its significance – finally the birth and childhood of Savitri.

25 October 1936
p. 277

Savitri was originally written many years ago before the Mother came as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond (these two parts are still extant in the scheme) each of four books – or rather Part II consisted of 3 books and an epilogue. Twelve books to an epic is a classical superstition, but this new *Savitri* may extend to ten books – if much is added in the final revision it may be even twelve. The first book has been lengthening and lengthening out till it must be over 2000 lines, but I shall break up the original first four into five, I think – in fact I have already started doing so. These first five will be, as I conceive them now, the Book of Birth, the Book of Quest, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate, the Book of Death. As

for the second Part, I have not touched it yet. There was no climbing of planes there in the first version – rather Savitri moves through the worlds of Night, of Twilight, of Day – all of course in a spiritual sense – and ended by calling down the power of the Higher Worlds of Sachchidananda. I had no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme. As for expressing supramental inspiration, that is matter of the future.

31 October 1936

p. 277

Here is the beginning of the second section which is entitled “The Issue” – that is of course 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, ignorance.

31 October 1936

p. 278

You will see when you get the full typescript [*of the first three books*] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then. There are now three books in the first part. The first, the Book of Beginnings, comprises five cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed but contains also much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapati and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos with many thousand lines. There is also a third sufficiently long book, the Book of the Divine Mother. In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga, and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is a third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten. So it will be a long time before *Savitri* is complete.

In the new form it will be sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem. I am trying, of course to keep it at a very high level of inspiration, but in so large a plan covering most subjects of philosophical thought and vision and many aspects of spiritual experience there is bound to be much variation of tone: but that is, I think, necessary for the richness and completeness of the treatment.

1946,
pp. 279-280

Do not forget that the *Savitri* is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. Done on this scale, it is really a new attempt and cannot be hampered by old ideas of technique except when they are assimilable. Least of all by standards proper to a more intellectual and abstract poetry which makes “reason and taste” the supreme arbiters, aims at a harmonized poetic-intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration, a restrained emotive element etc. The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psycho-physical concreteness. I do not know what you mean exactly here by “obvious” and “subtle”. According to certain canons epithets should be used sparingly, free use of them is rhetorical, an “obvious” device, a crowding of images is bad taste, there should be a subtlety of art not displayed but severely concealed – *summa ars est celare artem*. Very good for a certain standard of poetry, not so good or not good at all for others. ... I cannot bring out the spiritual objectivity if I have to be miserly about epithets, images, or deny myself the use of all available resources of sound significance.

...

Every word must be the right word, with the right atmosphere, the right relation to all the other words, just as every sound in its own place and the whole sound together must bring out the imponderable significance which is beyond verbal expression.

31 October 1936
p. 282-84

I can perfectly understand your anxiety that all should be lifted to or towards at least the minimum overhead level or so near as to be

touched by its influence or at the very least a good substitute for it. I do not know whether that is always possible in so long a poem as *Savitri* dealing with so many various heights and degrees and so much varying substance of thought and feeling and descriptive matter and narrative. But that has been my general aim throughout and it is the reason why I have made so many successive drafts and continual alterations till I felt that I had got the thing intended by the higher inspiration in every line and passage. It is also why I keep myself open to every suggestion from a sympathetic and understanding quarter and weigh it well, rejecting only after due consideration and accepting when I see it to be well founded. But for that the critic must be one who has seen and felt what is in the thing written, ... he must be open to this kind of poetry able to see the spiritual vision it conveys, capable too of feeling the overhead touch when it comes, – the fit reader.

22 April, 1947

p. 288

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

....The mystic feels real and present, even ever-present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. ... To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. ... The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

19 March 1946

p. 315-16

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. This accusation has been brought against me by many that I think too much and that when I try to write in verse, thought comes in and keeps out poetry. I hold, to the contrary, that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends upon how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but something of its beauty, its light or its power.

p. 316

[The expression of *Savitri*] aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience; it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself by identity.

p. 317

The philosophy of *Savitri* is ... persistently there; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience, it uses without scruple, not admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. That need not be an introduction of technical jargon, that is to say, I suppose, special and artificial language, expressing in this case only abstract ideas and generalities without any living truth or reality in them.

19 March, 1946

p. 318

In mystic poetry... repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example

the consistent repetition of the word *Ritam*, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. ... It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *avritti*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. This kind of repetition I have used largely in *Savitri*.

19 March 1946
p. 320



At certain times of the year, as the sun sinks in the West, we see the shadow of Sri Aurobindo's statue on the narrow wall behind. This is how it looked around the Mother's Birthday in February 2013.

Research Activities of Savitri Bhavan

(1) 'Living Research' Survey

Savitri Bhavan has been created as a place where all kinds of materials and activities can be gathered that will support a deeper understanding of the Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, focusing especially on Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic *Savitri – a legend and a symbol*. The aim is to foster the growth of consciousness by which alone a true and lasting human unity can be achieved.

The activities of Savitri Bhavan are focussed on the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and we find that they have told us that the conditions under which human beings live are the product of the state of their consciousness. If we want to see a better world for ourselves and the whole of humanity, we must start by working on ourselves, to raise our level of consciousness and understanding, and to open ourselves to the higher forces that are working for the progress and higher evolution of the whole world.

A first step is to open our minds and hearts to the Light that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given to us. While the Matrimandir, the Soul of Auroville, is a place for individual silent concentration and opening to the higher Light, we conceive of Savitri Bhavan as a place where the minds, wills and hearts of individuals can be opened to receive that Light – another essential step in allowing it to become an active force in daily life – by studying their writings together. It should also be a centre of living research towards the spiritualised consciousness that alone can lead to true and lasting human unity.

With these considerations in mind, it was decided to conduct a Survey amongst people regularly participating in some of the Savitri Bhavan activities, to see how far and in what ways they themselves felt that they were being helped by their participation. The results of this survey are being reported here.

In 2009 it was decided to request some of the people who are regularly making use of the facilities and activities at Savitri Bhavan to give

an assessment of what this place and the opportunities it offers mean to them.

This survey was conceived and undertaken partly in response to a remark by Ameeta Mehra of the Gnostic Centre in New Delhi, who is a member of the Savitri Bhavan Advisory Group. She said that she considered the main task of Savitri Bhavan to be ‘living research’ – by which she meant, she said, ‘research that changes the consciousness of the researcher’. There was a strong resonance with this illuminating remark of hers amongst the Savitri Bhavan team members. As Aurovilians, we feel that all our life here should ideally be research-oriented, as the Mother has mentioned in the Charter that Auroville wants to be the site of material and spiritual research towards a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

A circular requesting feedback was distributed to regular participants of three weekly activities : the *Savitri Study Circle*, held every Sunday morning from 10.30 to noon; a reading group for Sri Aurobindo’s major philosophical work *The Life Divine*; and a class called ‘The English of *Savitri*’ which caters mainly to people who have an interest in Sri Aurobindo’s epic, but whose native language is not English.

The Activities

The *Savitri Study Circle* is the core activity from which the Savitri Bhavan and all its buildings and activities have developed. The average attendance at present (February 2013) is about 65-70 people each week; at the time when the Survey was made, about 25 people were attending regularly. Some participants have been attending the Circle since it first started in November 1994, before Savitri Bhavan was even dreamed of; others have joined over the years as the Bhavan has developed; and it is normal, each week, for new people to attend just once or a few times, when they are in the area on a visit.

The format of the Circle is arranged to accommodate both regular and occasional participants. The text of the poem is read and studied closely; currently (February 2013) we are engaged in the 6th reading of the full poem. Each week we start where we left off the previous week. When one canto is completed, we make a review of its contents

before starting on the next one. When starting a new canto, we first read it through fully, each person in the Circle getting a chance to read a page or half a page as they feel. Then we go back to the beginning and study it in detail, two or three sentences at a time. One person will read a short passage; then we take time to read the same passage silently to ourselves, absorbing it as much as possible before taking time for sharing insights and questions. When we are all ready, we move on to the next passage. Sometimes a particular passage or question may give rise to extended discussion, but we try to avoid wandering too far from the text – this is a Study Circle, not a discussion group.

The English of *Savitri* is a weekly course that has been running for several years, led by Shraddhavan who is a native English speaker and a graduate in English Language and Literature. The aim is to assist people who have an interest in *Savitri* but for whom English is not their native language, to understand Sri Aurobindo's words better and at the same time improve their comprehension and command of the English language.

In the class, a page or a page and a half is first read by Shraddhavan, to give an idea of the correct rhythm and pronunciation. Then each participant is given the chance to read one sentence. Their pronunciation may be corrected. Then together we look at the difficult words in the sentence and the way in which the words in the sentence are connected, to get a first idea of the meaning. This is related to what has been read earlier, and to the overall context of the passage in the poem as a whole. When each participant has read a sentence, and the passage has been closely examined, it is read in unison by all together. In this way, the whole of the poem was read in the class over a period of about 4 years, with Book Twelve being completed in May 2009. A new series was started, from the beginning of the poem, in August 2009. Participants in the new series average about 25 people per week.

Reading *The Life Divine* was started in December 2009. Regular participants number about 20. Several of them have already studied the book with various teachers. The intention of this course is to read Sri Aurobindo's words carefully together, aiming for a shared study and understanding.

Some participants attend only one of these activities, some two, a few attend all three. Several are also attending other courses on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, at Savitri Bhavan or in the Ashram.

Findings

The circular requesting feedback was distributed to all the participants of all three groups, 55 people in all. Responses were received from 14 people, about one quarter of the total participants. The circular was not a questionnaire; it merely suggested certain points that people might wish to include in their response. Those who replied each did so in their own personal way, and sometimes in their own mother-tongue. However it was found possible to arrange the responses received under several headings, namely : *Personal details; Course(s) attended; Aim or expectation; Participating since? Homework undertaken; Other Savitri Bhavan activities participated in; Benefits experienced; Suggestions for improvement.* Additional feedback was also received from several respondents.

Summary of Responses

No. of respondents : 14 (about 25% of total participants of the 3 courses)

Gender : Male 4; Female 10

Age groups : Under 30 (1); 30-40 (3); 40-50 (3); 50-60 (1); 60-70 (3); 80-90 (3)

Mother Tongues : Tamil (4) German (2) French (2) Gujarati (2) Dutch (1) Telegu (1), Hindi (1) Korean (1)

Occupations : Teacher (4) Gardener (1) Business executive (1) Translator (1) Psychotherapist (1) Retired (1), Researcher (1), Sportsman (1), Body-work Instructor (1) Accountant (1) Administrative Officer (1)

Activities : The survey was conducted amongst participants in three activities : *Savitri* Study Circle (5) ; English of *Savitri* (10) ; *The Life Divine* (7). 7 participants mentioned attending one of the three activities: for all of them it was the ‘English of *Savitri*’ course; 4 attended two of them: three of these did not attend the English of

Savitri course, but the Study Circle and the *Life Divine* reading; 3 of the respondents attended all three groups.

Aims : Twelve respondents mentioned their motivation for joining the classes. For most of them, this was to get help in reading and understanding *Savitri* (5), or more generally to deepen their understanding of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (5). Other motivations mentioned were ‘to experience Inspiration, Hope and Joy’ (1); ‘to get the direct Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’ (1), ‘to develop the capacity for concentration and meditation’ (1), ‘being with people of similar interests’ (1).

Participating since ? : The responses ranged from 1995 (14 years) from two respondents, to six months before the date of the survey from another. One respondent had been participating since 1999 (10 years). Several others joined at the same time, in 2004 (4); others more recently, in 2006 (1), 2007 (1) and 2008 (3).

Regularity : All those who responded to the survey were attending the activities very regularly, once, twice or three times a week depending on how many courses they were involved in – apart from when they were ill or out of town.

Homework : 8 respondents mentioned that they were following up on the classes with some kind of homework. In each case it was different. One mentioned memorising lines of *Savitri*; another preparing for the *Life Divine* reading by reading ahead at home and looking for the correct pronunciation and meaning of difficult words; another said she is following up on what is read in the *Life Divine* class with study in reference books and commentaries; another mentioned, more generally ‘Reading at home; trying to practice in day to day life.’ One participant is translating Sri Aurobindo’s *Synthesis of Yoga* into her mother-tongue; another is regularly doing research into different topics in *Savitri*. One native Tamil speaker is noting down in Tamil the explanations given in the English class; and one participant elaborated ‘I read Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s teachings every day for 2 hours; I read with friends, with discussion, 1 hour per day.’

Other Activities : 8 respondents mentioned their participation in and appreciation of other activities being conducted at Savitri Bhavan or

by Savitri Bhavan team members, such as exhibitions (*Meditations on Savitri* paintings (3)) and other special exhibitions from time to time (3); slide-shows and films (2), guest lectures in English and Tamil (2), cultural programmes with local children (1), the OM Choir (1), and other regular courses such as those on the Upanishads (2), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (5), *Foundations of Indian Culture* (3), *The Mother's Entretiens* (2). One respondent mentioned appreciation of the *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* course being conducted in Pondicherry by Savitri Bhavan team member Vladimir Iatsenko.

Benefits : All the respondents gave details about the benefits they feel they are experiencing as a result of attending the courses. In each case these are naturally personal, and correspond to the aims with which they joined the classes. As these responses are the very touchstone of the survey, they have been given separately below.

Suggestions : 5 respondents gave suggestions about how the present Savitri Bhavan activities can usefully be supplemented. Of these, 3 pointed out the need for some guidance about the practical application in day to day life of the teachings we are learning about in the classes. One student requested that at the beginning of each class, a flower might be shown and the Mother's significance for it explained. One long-term participant said 'If we could get Dr. Ananda Reddy to give a class at least once a month my cup will be full'.

Other feedback : Many of the respondents mentioned their gratitude and appreciation for the activities of Savitri Bhavan in general, its special atmosphere, and for the particular courses covered in this survey, expressing the wish that they should grow and continue. These remarks have been included at the next section.

Benefits reported

1. *Aims* : Inspiration, Hope, Joy

Benefits : Surely I have benefited from the activities in Savitri Bhavan. I get lots of inspirations and love for the Divine and from the Divine, the Divine Grace. The energy of Savitri Bhavan makes me very peaceful.

2. *Aims* : none mentioned

Benefits : *Savitri* readings helped my progress a lot, externally and internally. Externally: in 2005 I became a Newcomer, and in 2007 an Aurovilian. In 2007 I started Matrimandir service; I finished Yoga Teacher Diploma in Pondicherry University, and a Computer course; now I am studying in the 2nd year of B.Sc Psychology course.

Internally : I have been guided to memorise some lines of *Savitri* and some of Sri Aurobindo's poems; I have learned the pronunciation and meanings of words; I am getting opportunities to recite *Savitri* lines and Sri Aurobindo's poems in different places. This is helping me to feel more Energy and inner progress. I am regularly reading *Savitri*. Though I cannot explain in detail, my faculties are improving and I feel it. For all this development *Savitri Bhavan* is instrumental and I am grateful.

3. *Aims* : I thought that *Savitri* is a holy book and that while reading it we will get the direct blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Benefits : After coming to the *Savitri* class I am able to experience the blessings while I am holding the Ashram Prasad flowers in my hands. I was very much touched by one line from *Savitri*: '*All can be done if the god touch is there*'. This line teaches me to be humble and steady and patient whatever work I am doing. After coming to this class only I am able to know that by true yoga we can achieve certain stages. But I am only in the first step.

4. *Aims* : For many years I tried to read *Savitri* by myself, but did not succeed. I needed help.

Benefits : My English and my concentration have improved a lot. Slowly I begin to understand *Savitri*, when my consciousness reaches a higher level. A wonderful wideness is experienced, and amazement at what Sri Aurobindo has written. I am very grateful for the classes.

5. *Aims* : I wanted to read *Savitri* because I had read the Mother saying that all the answers to our questions were there; but studying at home made me sleepy and the vocabulary was too difficult – I had to look for too many words in the dictionary. I started coming to the English of *Savitri* classes, and now the Study Circle.

Benefits : With these activities I feel more complete, as they feed and satisfy my intellectual side. Studying *Savitri* has made me go through

a heavy labouring towards a rewarding satisfaction where I can now follow the epic and looking for the precise meaning of a word is more like a pleasure than a necessity. What was arduous has become a pleasure. I improved my English, my feeling for poetry – even in my native language – and perhaps my intellectual capacities.

6. *Aims* : none mentioned

Benefits : As we read Sri Aurobindo's words, especially works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Savitri*, – to put it in Vedic language 'stage by stage is born': there is an ever-unending unfolding of the bud within as if petal by petal. Every unfolding is a thrill, and the being waits athirst for the more to open. These studies, when done with someone who has more understanding, more grasp, integral hold, and they are shared with ease and love, get right through and appease the thirst and at the same time awaken for more, because it feels at the same time that there is more, yet more to fathom, more, yet more. It gives rise to intensity to live and to experience what is learnt; for only then can He be fully grasped and the Life Divine be lived.

7. *Aims* : Help in reading *Savitri*.

Benefits : I love to hear English spoken in the right English way; and the atmosphere is so serene and peaceful and beautiful.

8. *Aims* : None mentioned

Benefits : By attending the 'English of *Savitri*' classes I have learned the correct pronunciation of many words. As all my English teachers were Tamils I didn't have the opportunity to learn the correct pronunciation.

9. *Aims* : To get the right understanding of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's philosophy of the life divine on earth.

Benefits : My faith and conviction in applying Integral Yoga to day to day life has been really strengthened. My mind is more calm, my skill in my sport has improved – even I am in good health.

10. *Aims* : To deepen in knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's teachings, and develop the capacity for concentration and meditation.

Benefits : The classes have really helped me to begin to understand what Sri Aurobindo explains. I like that we take time to understand every sentence, and that we stick to their ideas and words. I also had

some unexpected ‘energetic experiences’ during some classes. It is too early for me to evaluate the fulfillment of my initial aims, but I am satisfied and feel nourished by participating in the classes.

11. *Aims* : I wanted to try to understand *Savitri* deeply and feel the presence of the Mother and the Master.

Benefits : I feel the compassion and special atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo when reading *Savitri*.

12. *Aims* : Help in reading *Savitri*

Benefits : The *Savitri* reading classes at Savitri Bhavan have led me to the new world of *Savitri*. As my eyes go through the lines, I feel as if a veil has been suddenly lifted and lo! I am in the vast expanse of *Savitri*. The understanding of *Savitri* is happening in a very spontaneous way, just like a flower opens its petals.

13. *Aims* : Deeper understanding of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo; being with people who have similar interests.

Benefits : The way that *Savitri* is explained in the class makes this difficult book accessible even to people who do not read much and barely understand English, so that they become enthusiastic.

14. *Aims* : To delve deeper into Sri Aurobindo’s teaching.

Benefits : None mentioned

Additional Feedback :

Several respondents gave additional feedback about the courses and Savitri Bhavan in general, for example :

The energy of Savitri Bhavan makes me very peaceful.

I am quite happy with the present activities.

While viewing the Savitri paintings one feels as if entering into a new world, the World of Savitri – and the feeling remains even after coming out of the Gallery. There is an atmosphere at Savitri Bhavan which I may call the atmosphere of the Soul of Auroville.

I am trying to practice the Integral Yoga as well as I can; in this my daily concentration at the Matrimandir, my individual and group readings, and my attendance at the Savitri Bhavan classes are a great support.

I am satisfied and feel nourished by participating in the classes. I will continue to come as often as possible.

Thank you very much to all the team of Savitri Bhavan for your professionalism, your enthusiasm and will to share.

All the people in the group are connected to each other by the joy of aspiration to know about *Savitri*. Even though the composition of the group changes, the joy is still there. This could be because of what Mother has said – ‘Wherever *Savitri* is read, Sri Aurobindo’s Presence is there.’

When I heard the *Savitri* recitations by the Tamil girls from Morattandi village for the first time, I was wonderstruck, spellbound! These girls, who had very little English studies at school, could read such difficult poetry! I saluted the *Savitri* classes without which it would have been impossible for these girls to even know about *Savitri*.

There should be more of such talks that are easy to understand.

A friend of mine from Bombay, an able teacher whose English was very good, came to stay a few days with me. She came to this class, and she was thrilled that such a difficult subject was made lucid and understandable : it was the highlight of her stay here.

Writing this report has brought back some of the joyful times of my life. Thanking you!

I feel the special atmosphere of the Master whenever I start reading *Savitri*. Some of us Tamil-speaking Aurovilians started meeting once a month in each other’s houses. This gave the idea of a Full Moon Gathering at Savitri Bhavan.

Thank you for taking us through the journey of *Savitri* in a very wonderful way.

The one and only reason why I came to Auroville is the yoga. And to be in Savitri Bhavan, breathing the atmosphere of *Savitri*, is great.

I really admire the way that *Savitri* is explained in the Thursday class, because to talk about such a difficult book in a way that even people who don’t read much or barely understand English are enthusiastic is great.

The work in Savitri Bhavan is a marvelous opportunity to delve deeper into chosen aspects of Sri Aurobindo's teaching through *Savitri*, and I enjoy the luminous explanations. Wishing a prosperous and lightful continuation of Savitri Bhavan's activities for a long time to come.

Conclusions

The findings are encouraging to the Savitri Bhavan team. Going through the responses received, it becomes clear that the participants who responded to the survey are highly motivated towards progress in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and that they feel that the activities of Savitri Bhavan are supportive to them in their quest. They also suggested some ways in which the activities could helpfully be extended and enriched.

While the responses received came from only about 25% of the regular participants of these three activities, we feel that they are quite representative of the whole range, and they seem to indicate that for a significant number of Aurovilians from varied backgrounds Savitri Bhavan is contributing usefully to their personal research and development of consciousness.

Only one point causes some regret : the survey highlighted that, at least for these three activities, there was only one participant below the age of 30. This indicates that some special attention needs to be given to the younger age-groups.

It may be useful to repeat this exercise, or a similar one, with people who are attending other activities at the Bhavan, in order to get a more detailed picture of the usefulness and possible shortcomings of the programmes being organised here.

We hope these findings will be of interest and value to people who wish to know more about the activities and research that is going on at Savitri Bhavan.

The *Savitri* Study Circle

by Dr. Larry Seidlitz

Larry Seidlitz became involved with Sri Aurobindo's yoga as a college student in the USA in 1976, and with the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in 1981. After returning to school to complete his studies, he received his doctoral degree in Psychology from the University of Illinois in 1993, and worked as a researcher in psychology in the USA between 1993-2000. He was a resident of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California between 2000-2004, after which he began working at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry, facilitating online courses on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings, (especially in Yoga Psychology). Since 2004 he has been the editor of *Collaboration*, a journal on Integral Yoga, and since March 2012 has also been working with the editorial team of *Auroville Today*.

This tribute is part of the statement prepared for the presentation of the AuroRatna award of the Overman Foundation to Shraddhavan along with Dr. Prema Nandakumar in November 2012

Savitri Bhavan is one of the few spaces in Auroville in which one can learn about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's vision and work, and that speaks to its importance. There are classes not only on *Savitri*, but also on other major works by Sri Aurobindo. For example, currently there is a class on *The Life Divine* led by Shraddhavan, and a class on the book *The Mother* led by Ananda Reddy. There are meditation classes and a weekly session of the Om Choir. Periodically there are presentations by speakers, and of films and video recordings of interesting and inspiring talks by various speakers. There are individuals who are engaged in various kinds of research and study, and there is an excellent library of both hard copy and digital materials.

I have had the good fortune to be in Auroville for the past 8 months and have been attending the *Savitri* Study Circle being led by Shraddhavan each Sunday morning. These sessions are quite popular, with about 40 people in attendance. It is not so much an intellectual study, but more

of a meditation and contemplation of the poem. These classes are so remarkable that I think it is worthwhile describing how she does them.

She generally begins each session by briefly reviewing what we have read previously, providing a broader context for the current section. When starting a new canto, we first read it through once without interruption, taking turns, each person reading about a page. After finishing, we read it again, this time in short passages, each passage followed by a few minutes of silence to allow it to sink in deeply, and to contemplate its meaning. This silence is followed by an explanation of the passage by Shraddhavan, often in response to questions from the participants. These explanations help participants with limited mastery of English to understand the basic meaning of words and lines, but Shraddhavan also has a subtle ability to convey the deeper meanings and profound messages of the poem and bring its powerful atmosphere and presence into the room. She finds ways to respond to even superficial questions in expansive and penetrating ways which reveal something more about the poem. Each class closes with a recording of the Mother reading lines from the passages we have just read. After we have gone through the entire canto with these detailed explanations, which may take several weeks, we have a special session in which we watch a film of Huta's paintings of the canto, accompanied by the Mother's own reading of the corresponding passages and her organ music.

I am very grateful to have been able to participate in these classes and have been deeply touched by them, as I am sure many, many others have been over the years.

A new convenient way to send your support to Savitri Bhavan

It is now possible to send offerings in support of the Mother's Work at Savitri Bhavan from anywhere in the world by credit card through PayPal on the internet.

Access www.auroville.com/donations and enter the amount you wish to offer. Amounts of INR 500 to INR 10000 are accepted. Specify Savitri Bhavan as the recipient.

News of Savitri Bhavan

Calendar of Events,

October 2012 to February 2013

Regular Weekly Activities :

- Sundays** 10.30-12 noon *Savitri* Study Circle
- Mondays** 3-4pm ‘Cultivating Concentration’, led by Dr. Jai Singh
5-6pm On ‘*The Mother*’, led by Dr. Ananda Reddy
- Tuesdays** 9-10.30am *Sounds of Savitri* – practice for pronunciation and rhythm led by Patricia
3-4pm *Cultivating Concentration* led by Dr. Jai Singh
4-5pm *L’Agenda de Mère* – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
5-6 pm *Savitri* study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan
5.45–7.15 pm OM Choir
- Wednesdays** 9-12.30 Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi
5-6pm ‘*Mudra-chi*’ led by Anandi
5.30-6.30 pm Reading *The Life Divine*, led by Shraddhavan
- Thursdays** 4-5 pm The English of *Savitri*, led by Shraddhavan
- Fridays** 9-12.30 Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi
3-4pm *Cultivating Concentration* led by Dr. Jai Singh
4-5pm *L’Agenda de Mère* – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
- Saturday** 4-5pm *L’Agenda de Mère* – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi

Monthly Activities :

Full Moon Gatherings in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue every month on the Full Moon Day.

Special Events :

October:

- 1-31 Exhibition: *Meditations on Savitri* Books 2 and 3: 108 paintings prepared by Huta under the Mother's guidance
- 1 Film: *Meditations on Savitri Book 10, The Book of Double Twilight*: film by Manohar of Huta's paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 3- 7 Pranayama Workshop led by JV Avadhanalu
- 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: *Writings on Savitri* by Amal Kiran (K.D.Sethna) Part Two : 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.

November:

- 5 Film: *Meditations on Savitri Book 11, The Book of Everlasting Day*: film by Manohar of Huta's paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 12 Films: *The Mother, Glimpses of Her Life* and *Four Aspects of the Mother*
- 19 Film: *The Mother, Terrace Darshan 1965-1973*: 106 photographs of the Mother selected by her; photographer: Sudha Sundaram; photo-presentation prepared at Savitri Bhavan by Tatiana.
- 23-27 Well Being (Pranayama) Workshop conducted by JV Avadhanalu.
- 26 Film: *Satprem*: A film by Georg Stefan Troller from 1981 in French with English subtitles and some German translations.

December:

- 1 The University of Human Unity sponsored two six-week courses in philosophy on Saturday mornings from December 1 to January 5:
 - 1) *Critical Thinking : modern symbolic logic* presented by Shivi Elambooranan
 - 2) *The Philosophy of Evolution (3) : Mind and Supermind* presented by Rod Hemsell
- 4-31 Exhibition: *Meditations on Savitri* Books 4, 5, 6 and 7: 125 paintings by Huta, made under the guidance of the Mother
- 3 Film: *The Mother on Sri Aurobindo*: film made in 1992.
- 10 Film: *Meditations on Savitri* Book 1 Canto 4, The Secret Knowledge Part I.
- 15-31 Exhibition: *Geometry of the Heart*: digital paintings by Juergen P.
- 17 Film: *Meditations on Savitri* Book 1 Canto 4, The Secret Knowledge, Part II.
- 19-23 Well Being (Pranayama) Workshop led by JV Avadhanalu
- 24 Film: *Home* by Yann Arthus-Bertrand shows the beauty of the Earth seen from the sky.



'Togetherness' – performance by the Dua Space Dance Theatre from Malaysia

January:

- 7 Film: *Meditations on Savitri*: Huta's Introduction and Book 12, Epilogue, The Return to Earth: film by Manohar of Huta's paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 14 Film: *Journey of the Universe: Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth and Human Transformation*, written by Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker.
- 17 *Sacred Circle Dances* facilitated by Irene Reintjens.
- 20 Dance performance: *Togetherness* by the Dua Space Dance Theatre of Malaysia.
- 21 Film: *Adam Kadmon and The Evolution*: video of a talk by Georges Van Vrekhem
- 28 Film: *'The Mother'* by Sri Aurobindo read by the Mother, Part I.



*February 2013 : Exhibition 'The Mother's Yoga 1956-1973'
arranged by Loretta*



In the orchid area of the exhibition, 'OM' made for the Mother by Champaklal which she would see when walking for japa

February:

- 4 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.*
- 7 Poetry and music: *Stars in the Soup* – Shradhavan read from her collection of poems and Gordon Korstange played carnic flute.
- 11 Film: *The Teachings of Flowers, The Life and Work of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram* by Loretta Shartsis, Caren Lindfield, Jean-Christophe Bonnafois.
- 14-28 Exhibition: *The Mother's Yoga: 1956-1973: photos and texts arranged by Loretta*
- 18 Film: *The One Whom We Adore as The Mother*, made by the Sri Aurobindo Archives in 2010.
- 21 Film: *About Savitri: the Mother's readings and comments on passages from Canto One of Savitri*, illustrated by paintings of Huta
- 25 Film: *Building Matrimandir, Labour of Love 1971-2008*

March

- 4 New course begins : *The Integral Yoga in Savitri* led by Dr. Ananda Reddy
Film : *Savitri, the Way of Love* – video of the 1st Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture given by Narad in 2010.
- 7 More Poetry and Music : *Krishna's Flute and other poems* presented by Shraddhavan and Gordon Korstange
- 11 Film : *The City of Dawn* – film by Francis Rothluebber of interviews with Aurovilians sharing their experiences in the development of Auroville.
- 18 Film : *Sunlight in Water, Aquadyn* – this video describes the research and work of a team of Aurovilians fascinated by the mystery that is water.
- 25 Film : *Meditations on Savitri Book One, Canto I: The Symbol Dawn* – film by Manohar of paintings made by Huta under the Mother's guidance.
- 29 *How to Read Savitri*, a sharing with Richard Pearson from the Ashram



Savitri Study Circle, March 2013

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”

For all correspondence and queries, please contact

Savitri Bhavan, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, INDIA,

Phone : +91 (0)413 262 2922

e-mail : savitribhavan@auroville.org.in

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

Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother