

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 54

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

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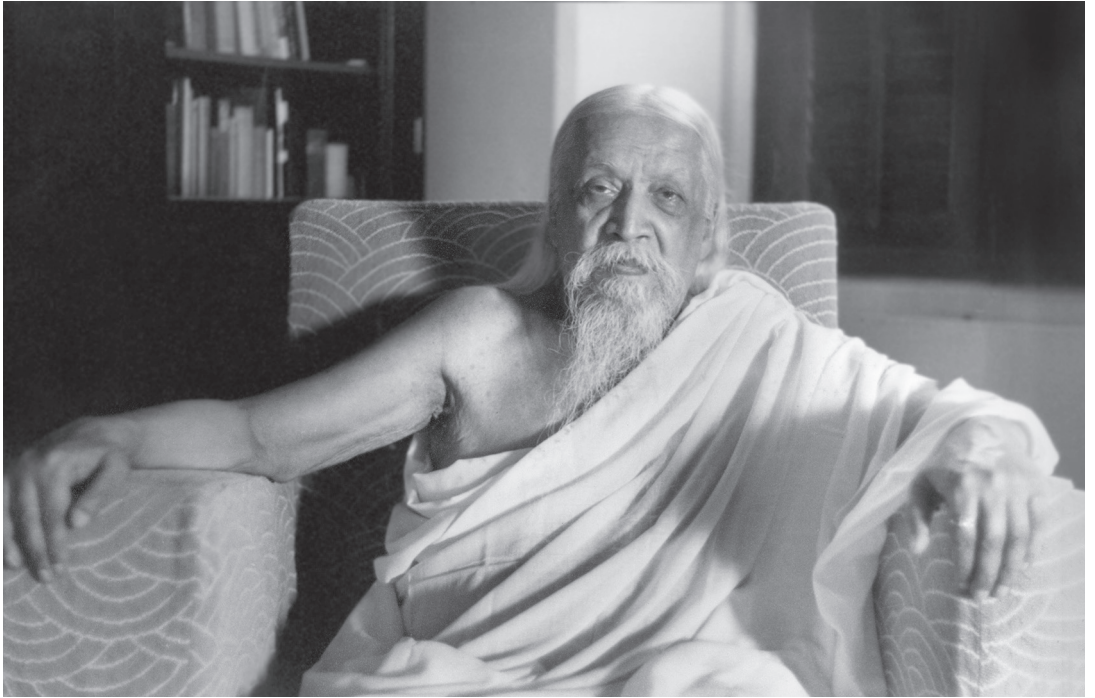
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C O N T E N T S

Shraddhavan	4
Remembrance of Shraddhavan <i>Narad</i>	8
Shraddhavan – A Very Dear Friend <i>Ananda Reddy</i>	9
The Ever Smiling <i>Alok Pandey</i>	11
Shraddhavan – The Mother’s Mahasaraswati Aspect <i>Dhanalakshmi</i>	12
My Memories of Shraddhavan <i>Manohar</i>	15
<i>My English of Savitri</i> Journey with Shraddhavan <i>Rema</i>	19
A Brief History of Savitri Bhavan	23
Reminiscences of Sister Shraddhavan <i>Hemant Tewary</i>	43
Poetry as Mantra <i>Shraddhavan</i>	45
Reflections on Passages in <i>Savitri</i> : King Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo <i>Larry Seidlitz</i>	47
News of Savitri Bhavan	60

*The Timeless looks out from the travelling hours;
The Ineffable puts on a robe of speech
Where all its words are woven like magic threads
Moving with beauty, inspiring with their gleam,
And every thought takes up its destined place
Recorded in the memory of the world.*

(Savitri, p. 662)



Shraddhavan

Shraddhavan is the Sanskrit name given by the Mother in June 1972 to a young Englishwoman who left her country to join the upcoming project of Auroville in 1970. Shraddhavan means 'one who has faith in the higher being'. She fully embraced her name.



Shraddhavan

*As your name and wear
this ring as coming from me
love and blessings of*

She was born Anne Margret Robinson on June 4th, 1942. Her father was a protestant pastor and her mother, Winnie (known to many in Auroville), was a teacher. Before leaving England, she studied English Language and Literature as well as Library Science at Bristol University. Before coming to Auroville she travelled extensively throughout Europe, Asia, including India, and Australia.

When she arrived in Pondicherry in November 1970, she was sent by the Mother to Auroville to teach in the newly started school in Aspiration.

But the work for which she will always be remembered is her work as Project Coordinator of Savitri Bhavan, which along with her partner, Helmut, she built up from its inception.

Shraddhavan undertook an in-depth study of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She was a teacher, a poet (she published a book of her poems 'Stars in the Soup'), a translator, a researcher, an efficient administrator and above all a great sadhak. Several of her poems, stories, essays, articles and book reviews have been published in the Ashram journal *Mother India*, *Heritage magazine*, *Collaboration*, etc. She was the editor of the journal *Invocation: Study notes on Savitri*. She has been honoured with the 'Auro-Ratna Award' by the Overman Foundation on 18 November 2012.





Shradhdhavan conducted classes on *The Life Divine*, *Essays on the Gita* and *Savitri*. Many AVI centres were happy to host her for her classes in their countries and via Zoom link. They continue with regular classes guided by Shradhdhavan's books and videos.

The depth of her understanding of Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic poem *Savitri* was reflected in the joy her students experienced during her Sunday Savitri Study Circle, which has been going on for the last 25 years, and in her 'English of Savitri' classes.





Her sentence-by-sentence explanations of Sri Aurobindo's great epic have been published in 12 volumes, the last of which is yet to be released. They are an unparalleled guide for *Savitri* lovers around the globe. Shradhdhavan declared that this was her life's work.



Late last year, she gradually began to fade away and left her body on 19 July 2022, aged 80 years.

As the Mother wrote in *Prayers and Meditations*:



Some give their soul to the Divine, some their life, some offer their work, some their money, a few consecrate all of themselves and all they have – soul, life, work, wealth; these are the true children of God.

Helmut, Judith and Dhanalakshmi
on behalf of the Savitri Bhavan Team

Remembrance of Shraddhavan

Narad

I would like to offer a very brief remembrance of one of the most special Aurovilians I have known, Shraddhavan. I am aware that much has been written of the construction of Savitri Bhavan which I consider the second most sacred place in Auroville after the Matrimandir.

Shraddhavan and I were close in the way that children of the Mother are always close, in the unity of soul and the aspiration to live a life based on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. We spoke at times of passages in this greatest epic ever written and, of course, the longest written in English. Shraddhavan was masterful in her command of the language and her teaching bears this out.

Personally we rarely met anywhere except in her office at Savitri Bhavan where she would often speak of the need of funds to continue her work, especially the Savitri Hostel. In the United States, Dakshina would sell my books and of the proceeds half the donation would always be sent for Shraddhavan's work at Savitri Bhavan.

Although there were always special events at Savitri Bhavan, Shraddhavan would always try to accommodate the OM Choir which I have always felt to be one of the Divine's chosen places for the work of bringing down the new music which was Mother's first adesh to me. Shraddhavan's attention to detail was impeccable and she personally saw to all correspondences.

I would wait for *Invocation* to arrive each month for it was one of the most important journals.

Shraddhavan for me was one of the true Aurovilians sent by Mother to do Her work on earth and she did it in a calm humility that I shall remember all my days. I know she is still Mother's true child and will continue to serve Her in all lives to come.

Shraddhavan – A Very Dear Friend

Ananda Reddy

No wonder the Mother gave the name “Shraddhavan” to Margret, who had come to join Aspiration School, Auroville. “Shraddha” comes from two Sanskrit words: *shrat* (*shrad*), which means “faith”, “will to believe” and “*dha*” which translates “to put or place; to direct one’s mind toward.” And indeed, Shraddhavan was given by the Mother the direction of her inner journey: to walk on the path of utter faith and trust in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

We were together in the Aspiration School in the early ’70s as teachers. She taught English to the young children in such a way that the students loved her dearly. Most of the students, be it from the local villages or from abroad, had learnt to speak in English very fast, because the whole community spoke in English. But the real task was to teach them to love reading and writing the English language.

After the initial years, we lost touch with each other because of a serious disruption that had uprooted the Aspiration School. In the political storm that had taken over the whole of Auroville, we were lost to each other and went on our own ways. Whatever the upheavals on the socio-political level, Shraddhavan stood rock-like in her faith in the Mother. It was a long period of isolation and suffering, but she did not sway in her faith and ultimately came through the storm stronger.

We met again when Shraddhavan started the *Savitri* reading classes in the premises of the Savitri Bhavan. There was only a hut surrounded by “the green of the forest and the blue of the sky”! All of us, maybe ten to fifteen, sat on the ground and read loud and clear the magical verses of the epic. It was as if Nature around us too listened to the mantric verses, for she was all silent and solemn. It was an idyllic

atmosphere reminding of the ancient Upanishadic rishis chanting the Vedas amid the tall Himalayan forests.

As her inner faith increased in leaps and bounds, it manifested itself in the building of Savitri Bhavan. Soon its sacred existence came to be known all over the Sri Aurobindo and Auroville centres. People came to visit it as a part of their pilgrimage. Especially in recent years, it became the most sacred spot after the Matrimandir, partly because of the overwhelming statue of Sri Aurobindo that was installed at the entrance of the Savitri Bhavan on 21st February 2008.

I had the privilege of giving classes at the Savitri Bhavan on *The Life Divine*, *The Mother*, *Savitri*, etc. for many years. Visitors to Auroville and the inmates were the regular enthusiastic participants. It was a special experience for me to give these classes because of the spiritual ambience of the place. I missed these classes during the pandemic and post-pandemic period.

Shraddhavan had a clear vision for the growth and development of Savitri Bhavan. She had invited eminent speakers, like Nirodbaran, Prof Basu and Dr MV Nadkarni, to deliver the true message of *Savitri*. She kept to a high standard in her own regular classes on *Savitri*. She has firmly established not only the building but the vision of its future direction. It will always be the home for Sri Aurobindo studies at Auroville.

The English of *Savitri* Volume 11

**Book Four – The Book of Birth and Quest
and**

Book Five – The Book of Love

is now available from SABDA and Savitri Bhavan

Published 2022, hardbound, 315 pages

ISBN 978-81-955260-6-2

Price Rs.600

It is also available in e-pub format from

www.auro-ebooks.com

The Ever Smiling

Alok Pandey

Mystics speak of two types of souls. The first are ordinary souls that are seeking doors of escape from the difficulties and challenges of earthly life. The second type are rare heroic souls that come charged with a mission and a purpose to serve the Divine in the mysterious play. Their birth and works are part of the Divine's occult arrangement. Shradhdhavan surely belonged to the second type, the heroic souls that have chosen the hard conditions of the struggle so that God's Light and Love and Beauty may increase in the world.

This of course is an inner impression based on my limited interactions. But these interactions were based on the deeper ground of a common work for the Mother through *Savitri*. Her preoccupation with the Mother's service was truly exemplary and inspiring. Her human qualities were no less. Kind and gentle, generous and smiling with a heart full of gratitude, Shradhdhavan surely left an indelible mark on all who met her. Her smile spoke and conveyed so much. It is rare to see a smile with such beauty and grace. It was a clear sign that she had found her soul.

I feel fortunate to have been able to attend upon her, however briefly during her last couple of months of this bodily life. It was enough to glimpse into her beautiful soul that extended far beyond her body. Her decision to leave was clearly a conscious one. A few hours before her departure she gave one of her extraordinary smiles. Though visibly distressed she said she is fine and wanted to stay in the Ashram atmosphere rather than be shifted anywhere. She needed a well deserved rest and surely she is resting well in Her lap of Light and Love preparing to return soon for Her Work. People like Shradhdhavan never die. They simply move on to greater fields of work and live on forever.

Shraddhavan – The Mother’s Mahasaraswati Aspect

Dhanalakshmi

I came to join in Auroville in 2008, and from the month of April 2008 I started working at Savitri Bhavan one day a week on Wednesdays. When I was first introduced to Shraddhavan by Suriyagandhi, an Aurovilian, Shraddhavan simply said “I know Dhanalakshmi very well before itself”. It is true that I had visited several times to Savitri Bhavan while I was living near the Ashram from 2003 to the beginning of 2008.

I was asked by Shraddhavan to assist her in the day-to-day administrative works of Savitri Bhavan. My Auroville journey started under the direct guidance of Shraddhavan. Assisting in all her day-to-day affairs I made a close association with Shraddhavan.



Just observing how she manages all the multitude mode of tasks was itself an amazing experience. Replying to emails including queries on Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*, as Editor of the journal, organizing various exhibitions and events, publishing books, preparing speeches, taking care of administrative things and financial matters, welcoming donors and others and giving them time to share with them Savitri Bhavan's activities and taking them around the building, all of that on top of giving classes on *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*. The list would be much longer if I narrated all her duties.

When I joined Savitri Bhavan, I thought I was the more computer familiar person. But I felt ashamed when it so happened that I witnessed Shradhdhavan at the computer and how she was using all the minute comforts that are given in the software to make a perfect Word document. She meticulously corrected every comma and semicolon and looked into every detail.

Whenever she entered the Savitri Bhavan building with a smile she looked at each and everything, the dog that is lying at the entrance, the trees, the plants, and nothing escaped from her gaze.

She assigned me the work of Editor for the Tamil journal *Prarthana* which comes twice a year from Savitri Bhavan. I had absolutely no experience as editor for a journal nor as a translator, but she gave me these two works and encouraged me with unwavering faith. She showed me how she collected articles and what are other things involved for an editor.

She never failed to extend her help to anyone who sought from her. And again, I could say that she has helped many people both materially and inwardly.

Shradhdhavan's wisdom on Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* is well-known to the Aurobindonian family around the globe. But I was quite amazed to see the in-depth knowledge she had of all the major works of Sri Aurobindo. She could instantaneously quote references from any of the books of our beloved Mother and The Master.


In the sweet little book *The Mother* Sri Aurobindo says:

This Power is the strong, the tireless, the careful and efficient builder, organiser, administrator, technician, artisan and

classifier of the worlds. When she takes up the transformation and new-building of the nature, her action is laborious and minute and often seems to our impatience slow and interminable, but it is persistent, integral and flawless. For the will in her works is scrupulous, unsleeping, indefatigable; leaning over us she notes and touches every little detail, finds out every minute defect, gap, twist or incompleteness, considers and weighs accurately all that has been done and all that remains still to be done hereafter. Nothing is too small or apparently trivial for her attention; nothing however impalpable or disguised or latent can escape her. Moulding and remoulding she labours each part till it has attained its true form, is put in its exact place in the whole and fulfils its precise purpose. (p. 22)

I could always see Shraddhavan as the Mahasaraswati aspect of the Mother.

I could not accept the deterioration of her health during the beginning of this year, as in the past she was able to come out of any illness with her infallible will. And I still cannot accept her loss because she is there at Savitri Bhavan everywhere. I am grateful to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo to have me work with Shraddhavan for more than 15 years. It has been a long and meaningful part of my journey here in Auroville.

The Spiritual Evolution of the Soul Essentials of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy and Yoga	
	Larry Seidlitz
Available at SABDA and Savitri Bhavan	
White Falcon Publishing	
2020	
PB 212 pages	
ISBN: 978-1-63640-030-3	
Rs. 300	

My Memories of Shraddhavan

Manohar

It was 2005, during my second year as a resident of Auroville, when I started attending the Sunday morning's collective reading of *Savitri* at Savitri Bhavan, guided and inspired by Shraddhavan.

This would become a weekly habit, and soon I found that these collective readings, and above all the wise and knowledgeable guidance by Shraddhavan, were offering me precious insights and inspirations from Sri Aurobindo's great poem, a bridge between Indian spirituality and European culture.

When Shraddhavan discovered my special attraction for the visual, or rather, the "visionary" side of the poem, expressed by the 472 paintings created by Huta under the guidance of Mother under the title "Meditations on Savitri", together with a series of corresponding passages from *Savitri*, chosen by Mother, and read by Her and illustrated by Her and Huta, she asked me if I wanted to take care of a Power Point presentation of this collection of images.

I suggested that "modern technology" would allow to make motion picture films instead of Power Point presentations, real movies with pictures in movement, voice and music, and offered to take care of this project. To my surprise, there was already a planning of "chapters" on which we started to work together, and that would lead, in the end, to the creation of 3 boxes containing 6 DVDs each, for a total of 18 DVDs, with an average duration of 40 minutes each.

The first obstacle was the poor quality of the photographic reproduction of Huta's paintings, made in low definition photo-slides in the sixties. Luckily, the originals of Huta's paintings were available in Savitri Bhavan itself, so, together with Giorgio, a professional

photographer also resident in Auroville, we could arrange some weekly photo sessions and finally get high resolution professional photos of each and every painting. Immense was my emotion in handling these paintings still charged with Mother's energy, one by one, for positioning them under Giorgio's photo-camera.

The results were excellent, and finally I could start utilizing these digital images for creating my movies, always under the guidance and in strict collaboration with Shraddhavan, certainly among the best and most dedicated experts in this field.

When the first DVD was ready we convinced Huta to come and view it in Auroville, in Savitri Bhavan itself. Her reaction was enthusiastic and she even said that "this is the final result that Mother would have liked for the "Meditations on Savitri" project.

From that point a long collaboration started, which lasted months, even years, as this was not my main job in Auroville. At the same time I was taking care of the Auroville's website, of some agricultural work in Adventure, the community where I was living at the time, and on documenting with photos and videos the various cultural events happening in a rapidly growing Auroville.

The vicinity and friendship with Shraddhavan in this job helped me to understand more deeply the meanings and implications of the poem *Savitri*, and specially, working on images, an intuitive and more subtle connection which often, also during our Sunday morning readings, would lead me to inner visions inspired by the words we were reading.

In those years, the progressive building of Savitri Bhavan was going on, and I was invited by Shraddhavan to document in photos and videos all the different construction steps, poojas, laying of first stones, inaugurations, together with documenting lectures, cultural, musical, dance, theatrical and social events that kept happening in Savitri Bhavan. All this video material is still available, both as DVDs that I donated to the Auroville Archives, and later on put on YouTube.

The collaboration with Shraddhavan extended to other fields connected with Huta's paintings. Working so closely with the paintings and photos, I noticed that deterioration was taking place.

Very often I had to use Photoshop to correct black spots which, although almost invisible to the naked eye, would become visible and disturbing when an image of the painting would be projected on a big movie screen. Together we did a research, sent small samples of the paintings to an Italian expert working as Chief Conservator of Paintings for the Province of Liguria in Italy. She even came to Auroville, to Savitri Bhavan for a complete examination of the paintings, and gave instruction for better storage conditions, after they were cleaned, retouched and re-varnished by Huta herself.

The organization of our work on the paintings involved a strict collaboration: for each chapter, as originally selected by The Mother, Shraddhavan would give me instructions and a basic guidance about the poem, which I didn't know very deeply at the time. Then I would work on the videos, adapting a movement of the images in synchronicity with the length of the words and organ music by Mother. Frequent were the adjustments and corrections to be done, always with loving care and wisdom by Shraddhavan. When the final individual DVD would be ready, we would show it to Huta, and every time her way to appreciate and thank me for this work was with small presents. Sometimes these would be useful household utensils or books, but in one case, two small dishes which she told me had been used by Mother, and which I still keep in veneration as precious relics. The final approved DVD was offered in a special premiere vision in Savitri Bhavan, with interested public coming even from the Ashram in Pondy for the occasion.

Huta was alive in time to view the complete finished DVD packages, before leaving her body and reaching Mother, without giving me the best present I had asked her for: to go and visit together the Inner Chamber of the Matrimandir, where she never wanted to go, in spite of the fact of having been the one who gave the first idea of it to Mother after a dream, and having been appointed by Mother as a caretaker of the Matrimandir itself, with a special accommodation nearby.

After the work on the 18 DVDs was completed, there was other technical and graphic work which, again, was taken care of by Shraddhavan.



Of course, this close working collaboration led to a friendship with Shraddhavan and Helmut, which included participating in each other's birthdays, and other spiritual occasions.

One Sunday morning, on her way to the Sangam Hall that was being used for the Savitri Study Circle, I saw Shraddhavan falling on the steps in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue, and it was then that her health started to decay, first with back pains, later, during the Covid pandemic, with a fast deterioration of her mental concentration.

Of course, it became more difficult for me to meet her, like before; occasionally we met during walks in the Matrimandir gardens. The last social occasion we met was on the occasion of her birthday in 2021, in her house, when there was a small gathering of friends. There I had the occasion to present her with a printed copy of a photo that she had appreciated so much – an image of the Sri Aurobindo statue at Savitri Bhavan, taken as a silhouette from the back against the sunset.

My *English of Savitri* Journey with Shradhdhavan

Rema

During my newcomer period in Auroville in 2015, I expressed my interest to do some voluntary work at Savitri Bhavan, and sent an e-mail to Shradhdhavan mentioning, among other things, that I have some experience in copy editing work. I was immediately called for a personal meeting with her and she assigned me the work of copy editing the *English of Savitri* series, of course on a trial basis. During our first meeting, Shradhdhavan explained the objective of the classes as well as the book series: It is an attempt to bring this epic poem within the grasp of ordinary people who can only read and understand simple English. As she wrote for the covers of the books in the series, '*Each sentence is examined closely, and explanations are given about vocabulary, sentence-structure and imagery*'. Those who attended the classes of course had the additional advantage of listening to and reading the poem together. This is very important because each sentence has its own rhythm and when read with full concentration, pausing at the right places, the poem flows like a mantra and reading itself becomes a spiritual experience.

At first I was assigned the work of copy editing the text of the talks for the *Invocation* journal. After the first few sections of the text Shradhdhavan felt satisfied with my work and thus started my *Savitri* Journey. After she finished Volume 1, she started working on Volume 2 of the series, covering Book Three of *Savitri* rather than Book Two, and I helped with the copy editing. Shradhdhavan had skipped Book Two because she did not intend to cover the full text of *Savitri* in this series. Volume 3 covered Book Seven, and Volume 4 was on Book Ten. Volume 5 covered just the first four cantos of Book Two, and at first she did not intend to cover the remaining

cantos of Book Two. Volume 6 covered Books Eleven and Twelve, and ended with the words 'The End', which somehow had some finality to it.

However, all of us who were involved in the publication of the series as well as the readers who eagerly awaited the publication of each volume encouraged her to take up the remaining cantos of Book Two and finally she relented. By then she started developing various health issues. Failing eyesight and a shoulder injury she sustained due to a fall that took a long time to heal had slowed down her work quite a bit. Savitri Bhavan Team members Kavitha and Dhanalakshmi became more involved in the project, helping Shraddhavan with reading and typing. She also needed help in keeping track of the files and e-mails too.

Book Two was completed in another four volumes (7, 8, 9 and 10). With that the major part of the work was over. But for the sake of completeness we started on Volume 11 covering Books Four and Five of *Savitri*. This was completed and went to the press a few weeks before her passing. When the printed copies arrived she was not there to receive them. The final Volume 12 covering the remaining Books Six, Eight and Nine is presently being prepared based on the transcripts from her classes and is expected to be published in January.

My involvement in the work increased with each completed volume. Though I had started with just the copy editing (checking spelling, grammar, punctuation, formatting, etc.) gradually Shraddhavan started involving me even in preparing the first draft from the transcripts. Of course, the first drafts would go through several revisions, and I cherished the opportunity to read and re-read each volume till it was ready for the press. I would check for any unfamiliar words that were left unexplained and point out the parts where further explanations were needed. Sometimes I would leave queries in the form of questions which she would answer patiently. Some of my questions (and their answers) have found their place in the published volumes.

Receiving an autographed copy of the book every time a new volume came fresh from the press directly from her always brought tears into my eyes. She was always kind and generous with her words. In one

volume she wrote: *'To very dear Rema, without whose meticulous help this volume could not have been published satisfactorily.'* She always treated me with utmost love and kindness. I received a personal invitation from her to attend the award ceremony at the Ashram School Auditorium when the Sri Aurobindo Purashkar was conferred on her by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkatta.

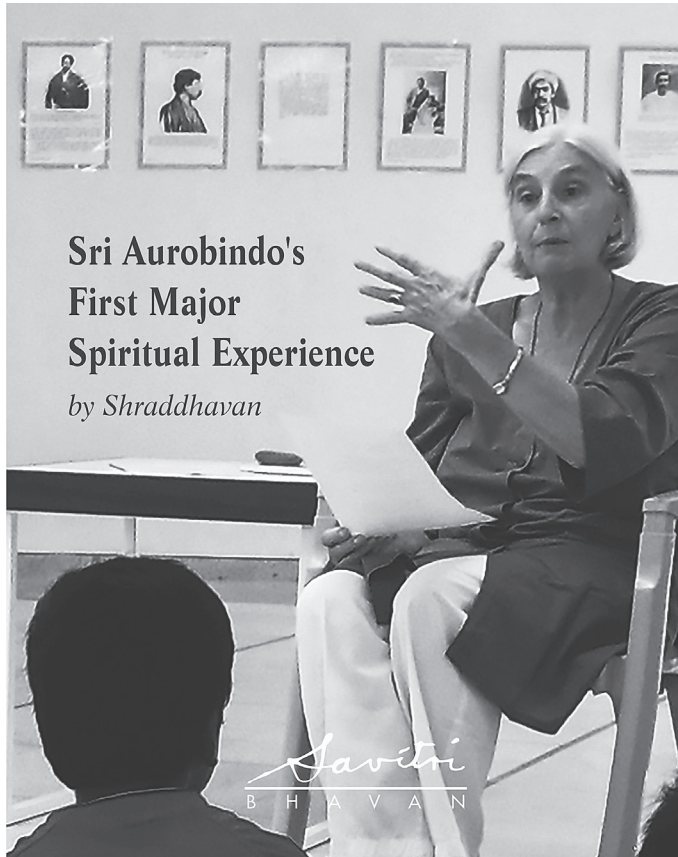
Apart from all these external aspects, the change of inner atmosphere brought about in me by this work goes beyond words. I owe it all to you Shraddhavan. Please be with us and guide us, the Savitri Bhavan team, to complete the remaining volume of this series, work on which is now in progress.

In February 1972 the Mother had remarked: *'In fifty years the whole world, all the receptive section of humanity (I am not saying intellectual, I am saying receptive), all the receptive section of the world will be embraced—not "embraced": ABSORBED in the power of Sri Aurobindo's thought'*.¹ Shraddhavan has chosen to leave her body exactly in the fiftieth year after this prophecy was made. The door she has opened for the masses to be *'ABSORBED in the power of Sri Aurobindo's thought'* through the *English of Savitri* series will remain as her best service to the humanity. For anyone who is overawed by the language and content of the poem and hesitates to take the plunge, this series of books will be a real boon.

During my last meeting with her at her residence in the first week of May 2022, I had a strong feeling that she was at a different level of consciousness and struggling to keep her contact with the physical world. Her words had different suggestions, distinct from their direct meaning, which I only half-understood.

Thank you Shraddhavan for teaching many of us how to read *Savitri* and understand a little bit of it. May your onward journey be full of Peace and Light.

1. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, 16 February 1972



**Sri Aurobindo's
First Major
Spiritual Experience**

by Shraddhavan

Sri Aurobindo's First Major Spiritual Experience

This book is based on the
Presentation given by
Shraddhavan, January 7, 2008

Price Rs.120 PB 26 pages
ISBN 978-81-9555260-2-4

Published 2022
by
Savitri Bhavan

A Brief History of Savitri Bhavan

The Savitri Study Circle and the Aspiration for a Home for Savitri
Savitri Bhavan began with the Auroville Savitri Study Circle. Shradhdhavan and Helmut separately came into contact with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings, and became enamoured of this special book *Savitri*. At the Ashram, they had the idea to meet regularly to read it and discuss it, as it was evidently a profound and difficult book to read and understand. In Auroville they came into contact with others also interested in this idea, and began reading under the Banyan Tree at the centre of Auroville, or at other places out in the open, and this group gradually grew. Other people outside Auroville and India also began learning of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and of this book *Savitri*, and hearing of this group reading *Savitri* in Auroville they would ask questions about the poem.

On 24 November 1994, an auspicious and annually celebrated day in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, Shri Suresh Dey, who was then Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, gathered a group of Aurovilians together and suggested that the Aurovilians should be studying *Savitri*. Before that there were people in Auroville reading *Savitri*, but the idea of studying *Savitri* together was new. Shradhdhavan and others in the reading group decided to take it up, and from then onwards the Savitri Study Circle would meet every Sunday morning. It began studying *Savitri* from the beginning at the Laboratory of Evolution in Bharat Nivas, led by Shradhdhavan. The way the Study Circle has proceeded ever since that time is that with each new canto, everyone present reads in turn going through the whole canto to get an overview of it. Then the group returns to the beginning of the canto to read it a second time, but just two or three sentences at a time. After each short passage, the group keeps silent for a while, at least long enough for everyone to re-read the passage silently to themselves. Then if there are any



comments or questions, they are shared before moving on to the next passage. Help is sometimes also taken from written comments that are found, or from the remarks of any visiting speaker. Proceeding in this way, the Study Circle completed its first full reading of *Savitri* on Sunday, 16 January 2000, a little more than five years after it began. The *Savitri* Study Circle has continued basically in this same manner ever since, typically taking four to five years for each full reading, except during a hiatus during the recent Covid 19 lockdown.

One of the participants of the Study Circle who is no longer with us, Narayan-bhai, who worked for many years at the Matrimandir, suggested to Shraddhavan one day while they were both on duty at the Matrimandir that there should be a place in Auroville where all the materials that could help us understand and appreciate *Savitri* better would be collected. He envisioned a place that would have such a wonderful atmosphere that anyone who set foot there, if they were a little bit sensitive, would feel that there is something special about this place, such that they would become interested and want to find out more about Sri Aurobindo. Shraddhavan felt it was a wonderful idea and shared it with the Study Circle. They discussed it with Shri Suresh Dey the Foundation Secretary and he arranged a meeting with Roger Anger who was receptive to the idea. Given the international interest in *Savitri* and the activities of the Study Circle, its present location in the International Zone was chosen. Practically, it was also becoming clear to the group that it would be good to have an address and a physical roof where books could be stored and from where they could communicate with others outside India about *Savitri*. The name Savitri Bhavan was suggested by someone and it struck a resonant chord.

On 24 November 1995, in the presence of many well-wishers from the Ashram and Auroville, Nirod-da invoked the Presence and Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and laid the Foundation Stone for the new project — the real beginning of Savitri Bhavan. After that, the weekly Study Circle started meeting under the trees on the site. Members also started planting the garden together.

Then, on 24 November 1996, architect Helmut Schmid presented the Master Plan and Model for the Savitri Bhavan complex. Helmut notes that whereas some were suggesting a modest project, a simple room for meetings of the Study Circle with an attached bathroom, he had argued for a more ambitious project that would allow for growth and that could be constructed in stages when funds became available, and this concept was represented in his Master Plan. The inspiring vision for the material form of the complex, written by Shraddhavan, was the following:

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.

Helmut noted that in accord with this vision, the structure was designed to be very simple, natural and harmonious, with very little ornamentation, all in white, with elegant locally-quarried white granite floors, and teakwood doors and window frames. Its various curved walls and sloping ceilings lend grace and charm. Its open spaces and benches invite relaxation, contemplation, and interchange.

Initial Fundraising and the First Permanent Building—The Reading Room

A year and half later, in May 1998, a fundraising effort was organised by Dr. Beena Naik and family of Navsari, Gujarat. As Helmut describes it, Dr. Naik, an occasional visitor in Auroville from Gujarat, was present when he was discussing his building plan for Savitri Bhavan with the reading group, and there was skepticism expressed regarding the acquisition of the large sums that would be required for funding the proposed project. Dr. Naik spoke up and mentioned that she had fund-raising experience in working with the Red Cross, and that she would look into the matter. Later In Gujarat, she approached Mme. Hema Malini, who is a famous dancer and actress in India sympathetic to spiritual and humanitarian causes, who agreed that whatever dance performances could be arranged for her, she would donate the proceeds to Savitri Bhavan. The reading group, with their inexperience and enthusiasm, decided to take up the challenge. Fortunately, the concert was a success, and approximately 6-7 lakhs of rupees profit was made through the event, which gave the reading group confidence to begin construction of the first building, which was projected to cost about 15 lakhs.

A temporary keet shelter was inaugurated on 9 August 1998 by Nirodbaran and Prof. Arindam Basu, and on 13 December 1998, the first brick was laid for the Phase 1 building (the small building

on the right side of the present complex). In addition, the first issue of *Invocation* appeared on 24 November 1998. On 8 August 1999, the inauguration was held for the completion of first permanent building. Nirodbaran performed the ceremony, planted a sapling of Supramental Sun (Kadamba, *Anthocephalus indicus*), cut the garland



across the door of the new building, lit the ceremonial lamp, and gave a brief address. The small building functioned as a multipurpose hall, an office, an archive/storage space, and as a physical basis for the further development of the Bhavan. It became known as the Reading Room, and the Study Circle began holding its sessions there. People took note of the developing project, funded through its own efforts, and financial support began to build, based on what Helmut calls the power of facts. Eventually, the Government of India would also take note and begin to offer assistance.

Second Building: The Multipurpose Hall

On 24 November 2003, the ‘first brick’ ceremony was held for the Phase 2 hall, which was being funded by the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER), and on 21 November 2004, the completed building was inaugurated with a simple consecration ceremony. This Multipurpose Hall is the large square hall with domed roof on the right side of the complex, just near the Reading Room. More than 200 friends came for the occasion, and all could fit in the lovely new space, though it was a tight fit! The hall is now used for exhibitions and sometimes for other functions. Nirodbaran was not well enough to attend the consecration function



in the morning, but the guests listened to a recording of his reading from Book Eleven of *Savitri*, the same passage he read on the first foundation day in 1995. In the evening, General Ashoke Chatterji brought him in his car to see the building. He looked into it through the open doorway without getting down from the car. That was his last visit to Savitri Bhavan, at the age of 101.

A Home for Huta's "Meditations on Savitri" Paintings

On 11 June 2001, members of the Savitri Bhavan team went to Huta's apartment to receive the set of her 472 oil paintings, "Meditations on Savitri", which she had made under the Mother's guidance from 1961 to 1966. One could say this was a collaborative project of the Mother and Huta, for the Mother drew rough sketches for the paintings, and advised and worked closely with Huta in their execution, as well as poured her inspiring force into Huta. After being exhibited in the Ashram Exhibition Hall in February 1967, the paintings had been taken to two rooms in Golconde and set aside according to the Mother's wish. In January 1999, Huta had moved them to her apartment at the request of the Golconde management. The paintings were being stored in unpolished jamun-wood frames and storage cupboards prepared according to the Mother's instructions and design. When received at Savitri Bhavan, the paintings were put in safe storage, and on 7 July 2001, Huta visited to inspect the temporary arrangement that had been made for them and gave her approval.



Huta had taken a very supportive interest in the Savitri Bhavan project from the very beginning, providing xerox copies of many valuable materials and allowing use of them. She had said that she once expressed to the Mother her feeling that “Savitri must have her own home”, and that after a deep concentration the Mother responded, “It will be”. Huta felt that Savitri Bhavan was destined to be that place. This feeling was in accordance with the aspiration of the Savitri Bhavan team that it would house all possible materials to enrich our understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Sri Aurobindo’s revelatory epic. Thus, Huta’s paintings were entrusted to the care of Savitri Bhavan, along with facsimilies of the Mother’s original sketches, written instructions and comments, copies of her recorded recitations of selected passages, and of her recorded explanations of *Savitri*. This unique treasure is a goldmine for scholars and devotees seeking to gain a deeper understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s vision. However, in 2001 at the time of receiving the paintings, it would still take years of further development of the Savitri Bhavan complex before a suitable gallery could be constructed for their permanent display.

In the original design of the Savitri Bhavan complex, space had not been provided for an art gallery where the “Meditations on Savitri” paintings could be kept on permanent display. However, space had been provided for further expansion if a future need arose, so it was possible to utilize an outdoor courtyard to create a gallery for a portion of the paintings. The Mother told Huta that these art-works are not mere paintings but living beings, meant to bring the powers and beauties of the higher planes closer to this material world. Moreover, before they were exhibited in the Ashram in February 1967, the Mother concentrated intently on each one, charging them with her Consciousness, Light, Force and Love, so that they have become even richer and more vibrant.

Preservation, Photographic Reproductions and Films of Huta’s Paintings

Following the construction of the new Multipurpose Hall, Helmut undertook research on suitable display conditions for Huta’s paintings. It was important that they should be properly protected from dust, insects, and geckos, from possible human interference,

from harmful UV light and fluctuations in temperature and humidity. It was concluded that only controlled temperature and moisture in a protected storage room would allow the required conditions. On the basis of this research an appropriate place was integrated into the design and built in the autumn of 2005, with the help of a grant from the Foundation of World Education, USA.

Ever since the paintings came to Auroville in 2001, Huta had been asking for a new set of films to be made of the paintings to replace an earlier series that had been prepared in Germany. It became possible to take up this work in June 2005 with the help of Italian Luigi, now known as 'Manohar'. Manohar recommended that new digital photographs should be taken of the paintings, and that the films should be prepared from these. Another Italian, Giorgio Molinari, a highly experienced professional photographer, set up a photographic studio where the paintings were safely being stored and along with Manohar completed photographing the paintings in June and July 2005. Manohar then took up the task of preparing the films from the photographs along with the soundtrack provided by Huta of the Mother's reading of the relevant passages from the poem. The first three films, covering Cantos One, Two and Three of Book One of the poem were shown at Savitri Bhavan in August 2005, February 2006, and April 2006.



Giorgio's photographs also provided the possibility for making archival quality prints from the photographs in the actual size of the paintings, which could be used both as curatorial records and for display. Display of the prints instead of the original paintings would allow the latter to be kept in safe and proper conditions for their preservation. A start was made on this work in October 2005, when Giorgio prepared 44 prints covering Cantos 6-15 of Book Two of *Savitri*. These were exhibited in the new Multipurpose Hall from December 2005 to January 2006.

While this photographic work was going on, it was noticed that some of the paintings had developed dark or rusty-looking spots on the surface. When these were shown to Huta in August 2005 she expressed her readiness to take up the task of cleaning and retouching the paintings before they were put on display. At this point Manohar contacted, through a mutual friend, Dr. Laura Tacelli, the Senior Conservator of Paintings at the Regional Laboratory of Restoration of Liguria, located in Genoa, Italy. At Savitri Bhavan's invitation, she visited Auroville in April 2006. She met with Huta, saw the Savitri paintings, and discussed the methods and materials to be used for cleaning and retouching. She also had discussions with Helmut and Shraddhavan regarding the storage facilities and the prototype display cabinet that had been made for their storage. She was able to make some suggestions for modification and together with Shraddhavan prepared a report and recommendations for the future conservation of the paintings. This report was submitted to Huta who accepted the recommendations fully, and forms the basis for the future care and display of the paintings.

The Main Building

The first section of the main building was officially inaugurated on 29 September 2006 by Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. This section constituted the one storey front part of the building housing the reception area and the expansive foyer leading to the Multipurpose Hall, and opens out in the back to an amphitheatre and beyond to Mahasaraswati Park. This part of the building is elevated above ground level, with an artificial hill gradually leading up to it giving the appearance that the building is elevated atop a grassy hill. Moreover, the tree shaded space in front



with its benches invites relaxed conversation and contemplation. Inside the reception area, seats are also provided to allow perusal of books that are displayed and sold there.

The second section of the main building was inaugurated on 30 March 2008, again by Dr. Karan Singh. This two-storey section provided on the first floor classrooms and research facilities, service and administration areas, an outdoor stage, a picture gallery for exhibiting a large selection of the “Meditations on Savitri” paintings. The ground floor provided rooms for research and workshops, a laboratory for picture conservation, a climate-controlled storage room for the originals of the painting collection, and auxiliary features such as toilets, utility rooms, storerooms and technical facilities. The construction of the main building was financed by a Grant from the Government of India, Ministry of Human Resources, under the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) Development Scheme. On 8 August 2008 the opening of the Picture Gallery dedicated to Huta’s paintings “Meditations on Savitri” was held with a first exhibition of 87 paintings covering Book One, Cantos 1 and 2 and Books Eleven and Twelve of Sri Aurobindo’s poem. This initial part of the Picture Gallery was too small to display all the paintings, and an extension was planned to be built in the future.

The Bronze Statue of Sri Aurobindo

At the same time the core building was inaugurated, the large bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo at the front of the complex was also inaugurated, having been moved to the location the previous month on the Mother’s birthday, 21 February 2008. The idea for the statue came from Dr. Karan Singh, and he had chosen the location for the statue during a visit in September 2007. The statue was a gift of the Indian Government to Auroville for its 40th birthday, and like similar ones now standing in the Parliament Building in New Delhi and UNESCO headquarters in Paris, was prepared by a team of artist-craftsmen under the direction of Lalit Verma of Pondicherry. Mr. Varma had enlisted a team of craftsman from Bengal to his home in Pondicherry which has a courtyard garden where, using a set of photographs of Sri Aurobindo, they designed and created a full size model of the statue in silicone. Shradhdhavan, Helmut and Nirodbaran were invited to examine it, and Nirodbaran approved,



saying “yes, it has something of Sri Aurobindo”. The statue was then cast by pouring molten bronze in four gypsum forms there in the garden, and the four sections were afterwards welded together. It was brought out to Savitri Bhavan, lifted into place with a crane, and cemented onto a pedestal which contains relics of Sri Aurobindo. Like many monumental statues around the world, its bronze casting allows it to weather over decades and even centuries under the open sky. With time, the metal develops a beautiful surface called a ‘patina’ due to a natural chemical process. Artificial cleansers or polishes would inhibit this process, so the only care recommended is the regular removal of dust with water and drying with a soft cloth. Sri Aurobindo’s presence at Savitri Bhavan in this new form was initially celebrated on Auroville’s birthday, 28 February 2008, by a visit of a small group from the Ashram, including Managing Trustee Manoj Das Gupta accompanied by Jhumur Bhattacharya and others. There was a reading of passages from *Savitri* under the trees for half an hour, and then the guests enjoyed the special exhibition prepared for Auroville’s 40th birthday in the main building.

The Hostel

The ‘first brick’ ceremony for the Hostel building took place in the early morning on 29 March 2010. The Hostel had been part of the Master Plan for the Savitri Bhavan complex since the beginning, and it was a great joy that a specified donation enabled the team to make a start on it. The aim of the Hostel was to provide simple temporary



accommodation for visiting speakers and teachers, students and researchers, and volunteers offering their services at Savitri Bhavan. Funding for the construction of the Hostel came mainly from a donation by Shraddhavan, with help from other private donors.

The Hostel comprises ten rooms with attached bathrooms, plus a common kitchen and dining area. There are eight single rooms and two double rooms, making it possible to accommodate 12 people. By the Grace and Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and thanks to the support of many generous people, the Savitri Hostel was completed and then inaugurated on 1 September 2012 in the presence of about 100 well-wishers and other guests. The ribbon was cut by our elder brother Mahalingam, the oldest Aurovilian, and one who has received personal blessings not only from the Mother but also from Sri Aurobindo himself. As he performed the ceremony, Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra was played.

Sangam Hall

The 'first brick' ceremony for Sangam Hall was held on 24 November 2015. This hall is a large circular hall, accessible from both the ground floor and the first-floor levels of the Main Building, and contains stepped up seating to accommodate at least 200 people. It is intended to host larger gatherings for *Savitri* reading and study, as well as the OM Choir and talks by guest speakers. Multimedia facilities are also provided. Funding for the Hall came both from the Government of India and from private donors.



On 29 January 2017, the weekly Savitri Study Circle met for the first time in the new Sangam Hall which was then nearing completion, in order to test the suitability of its acoustics for reading and study. It was found that we could hear each other clear from all levels of the hall. On 19 February 2017, Dr. Ananda Reddy was invited to declare the Sangam Hall officially open before giving the 7th Dr. MV Nadkarni Lecture. About 300 interested devotees attended the lecture.

Extension of the Picture Gallery

On 21 February 2017, the ‘first brick’ ceremony was held to launch construction of the long-planned extension of the Picture Gallery dedicated to displaying the “Mediations on Savitri” paintings. The existing gallery had not been big enough to allow all the 472 paintings of the series to be exhibited at the same time; only about 120 paintings could so far be displayed. This extension, which was funded partly by the Government of India and partly by private donors, would enable the permanent display of the entire series of paintings. This extension was completed and then inaugurated on 21 June 2018 with the full series of paintings on display. This inauguration also marked the completion of the construction of the Savitri Bhavan complex, except for the development of the Savitri Park.

Activities at Savitri Bhavan

Savitri Bhavan has hosted hundreds of regular and one-time events and activities over the years, many focused on *Savitri*, but many others pertaining to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teachings more broadly. Programmes have been held in the four languages that the Mother advocated for Auroville: English, French, Sanskrit and Tamil. We have already mentioned the weekly Savitri Study Circle, the permanent display of Huta’s “Meditations on Savitri” paintings,

and the development of films by Monahar on Huta's paintings accompanied by the Mother's recitations and music. Also mentioned was Savitri Bhavan's journal *Invocation*, of which a Tamil version called *Prarthana* was also started in 2004 at the request of many devotees of Tamil Nadu. In addition to these primary activities, many other events have taken place or are currently taking place at Savitri Bhavan. A wide selection of these are briefly mentioned below to give an idea of their variety and scope, and we extend our apologies to those whose valued contributions have not been noted here.

In addition to the original Savitri Study Circle, Shraddhavan also led another weekly class on *Savitri* called "The English of Savitri", which would focus more specifically on the language of the poem for non-native English speakers. Furthermore, Shraddhavan would also lead other study groups, on Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* from December 2008 to September 2017, and afterwards on *Essays on the Gita*. Below are some of the many other activities:

Ongoing weekly workshops titled "Introduction to Integral Yoga" and a separate weekly "Satsang" for informal discussion of topics in the Integral Yoga and about Auroville, led by Ashesh Joshi

Regular classes by Dr. Jai Singh on various aspects of Sri Aurobindo's teachings

There have been classes by Ananda Reddy on various subjects

Ongoing listening of recordings of *L'Agenda de Mere* in French as well as consultations on *Mother's Agenda*, led by Gangalakshmi

Classes on the pronunciation and rhythm of English in *Savitri*, led by Patricia

Classes on Savitri Study in Tamil, led by Buvana and Sudarshan

Pranayama workshops, and Health and Happiness Retreats, led by JV Avadhanulu

Weekly sessions of the OM Choir, initiated by Narad and sometimes led by Margrit or other associates of Savitri Bhavan when he is unavailable

Weekly films on various topics, often recorded talks by various distinguished speakers on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings and work, organised by Margrit

Weekly classes on Mudra-Chi, a body-prayer in Tai-chi form based on the Mother's Mudras, led by Anandi F

A monthly full moon gathering for meditation in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue, organised by Murugan

The annual MV Nadkarni Lectures in which invited speakers have given lectures on a selected topic on *Savitri* (videos of these talks are available on the website)

Occasional exhibitions of art, photographs

Occasional seminars on various topics, such as "The Vedic Gayatri Mantra", led by Nishta

Occasional lecture series on various topics

Occasional musical and dance performances

Study Resources at Savitri Bhavan

Savitri Bhavan has a reading room housing an extensive collection of reference books and journals to facilitate study and understanding of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (including various translations of *Savitri* into other languages), Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Teachings, and Auroville. It also has a Digital Library with a rich collection of recorded talks, video-films and music relating to *Savitri*, the life and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the aims and ideals of Auroville.

Savitri Bhavan Website

The Savitri Bhavan website was started in 2013 and includes a wealth of information about *Savitri* and ongoing and upcoming activities at Savitri Bhavan. It has a digital collection of past issues of *Invocation* and the Tamil version *Prarthana*, videotaped recordings of the MV Nadkarni Lectures and other talks, 18 videos of Huta's "Meditations on Savitri" paintings set to Mother's music along with the Mother's readings of the relevant passages; audio recordings of Shraddhavan's reading of the entirety of *Savitri*; audio recordings of Shraddhavan's reading of Book 1 of *The Life Divine*; audio recordings of Ravi

Shankar's reading of Sri Aurobindo's book *Essays on the Gita*; and audio recordings of the Savitri Study Circle. It also has links to video live streams and previous sessions of the Savitri Study Circle on YouTube. It also has a link to the Savitri online Encyclopaedia: <https://encyclopedia.savitribhavan.org/> which was created in 2018 by associates of Savitri Bhavan, Mr. Sebastian with the help of Mr. Gopal Ahir of Gujarat.

Research

Savitri Bhavan also provides a venue for conducting research on various aspects of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings. Various researchers over the years have conducted extensive research programs at its facilities.

Information

Savitri Bhavan has a Reception Desk that is open from 9-5 daily, 6 days a week, to receive visitors and answer queries. Queries from students and researchers are also dealt with by e-mail and correspondence. Books, recordings and other learning materials related to the activities of Savitri Bhavan are available from the Information Service.

The Present Moment

Shraddhavan has been the mainstay of Savitri Bhavan since its inception, and her passing on 19 July 2022 marks a critical moment in its development. It is gratifying to note that she was able to see the construction of the complex through to its completion, which will stand far into the future as part of her legacy. Of course, Helmut also deserves much of the credit for the complex, as he was its architect and looked into all the details of its construction, but he has noted Shraddhavan's importance as an inspiring mentor in that endeavour. He said that the architect never works alone but always with a client, and that the success of the project depends largely on their mutual understanding and collaboration. It is also gratifying that Shraddhavan was able to foresee the completion of her 12 volume set of *The English of Savitri*, which she had once referred to as her life's work. At the time of her passing, 10 volumes had been published, Volume 11 was at the press, and Volume 12 was being prepared from the transcripts of her classes by her assistants. Shraddhavan



also led central activities of the Bhavan, such as the Savitri Study Circle, her classes *The English of Savitri*, *Reading The Life Divine*, and *Essays on the Gita*. She also edited this journal *Invocation*, and oversaw the publication of other books and pamphlets, including Nadkarni's book *Savitri – The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire*. As Helmut has noted, she certainly had authority, that is, she was respected and people responded to her and her work. Many senior sadhaks and authorities on *Savitri* and Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings and work lectured or gave presentations at Savitri Bhavan at her invitation. Her authority also garnered a lot of financial and other support for the Savitri Bhavan project. Beyond this, Shradhdhavan encouraged and fostered many, many people in their emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth, not as a guru, but as a loving example and friend. Many have blossomed in the light and atmosphere of Savitri Bhavan.

Shradhdhavan's presence is profoundly missed, but her diligence has provided a platform which is strong and can support Savitri Bhavan's continued development. Some time back she had appointed Dhanalakshmi, a devoted friend, student and capable worker, as Co-Executive of Savitri Bhavan. Dhanalakshmi has written, translated and edited *Prarthana*, the Tamil version of *Invocation*, and has been

largely taking up Shraddhavan's administrative activities. Helmut has also stepped up to help in the administration of Savitri Bhavan, and is a wise and valued advisor for the many issues that can arise in the running and maintenance of such an institution. Shraddhavan had called on Larry Seidlitz to lead the Savitri Study Group whenever she was unwell during the last few years, and he is grateful to continue this work. Just prior to Shraddhavan's passing, he also agreed to take up the editorial work for *Invocation* with Helmut's and Dhanalakshmi's assistance.

Shraddhavan had also assembled a solid team of other contributors to Savitri Bhavan to carry on its activities. Some of these have been mentioned in the list of activities above, including Jai Singh, Ashesh Joshi, Gangalakshmi, Margrit, Patricia, Buvana, JV Avadhanulu, Anandi, Alexander Pereverzev, Paula Murphy, Nishtha, Divyanshi Chugh, Murugan and the Divine Flowers team. There are speakers and performers that are close associates of Savitri Bhavan who may be called on such as Alok Pandey, Narad, Ananda Reddy, Deepshikha Reddy. The technical team of Suresh, Zech, Sungeui Jang, and other volunteers are essential to its activities. Murugan has assisted with accounts, assets, and managed the maintenance of the buildings and grounds. There are also valued personnel for the Reception Area and the "Meditations on Savitri" gallery, The "Golden Chain" group of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram is regularly helping in the park and garden. There are many unmentioned others.

With a dedicated Savitri Bhavan team in place, perhaps what is most important at this moment is the continued support of the wider Savitri Bhavan community of guests, students, viewers, listeners, readers, friends and well-wishers. As Helmut has noted, Shraddhavan was primarily responsible for outreach to supporters and friends with her wonderful ability to communicate and inspire. In her absence, it may be necessary that these supporters and friends extend themselves a little bit more to help in the continued work of Savitri Bhavan, the abode of Savitri.



Reminiscences of Sister Shraddhavan

Hemant Tewary

Knowledge (*Jnāna*) is the very foundation of liberation (*moksha*), and Shraddha (unshakable faith) is the first condition and foremost basis to assimilate knowledge. Shraddhavan possessed and demonstrated during her entire life an “unshakable faith” in an “education” for the spiritual evolution of the Earth consciousness that is based on the knowledge that the Lord Sri Aurobindo and the Mother brought to mankind. That, I trust, is what the Mother foresaw in her and thus changed her name from “Margret” to “Shraddhavan”. The Gita says “*Shraddhavan labhte Jnanam*” meaning “The One who has faith attains to knowledge” (Sri Aurobindo). Shraddhavan was an outstanding living example of one who has faith that Auroville was gifted with!

All those who had opportunity to have even a brief communication with her will find Shraddhavan a true child of the Mother, a child with bright, sparkling eyes, a soft and sweet voice, a gentle smile on her face irrespective of the host of intricate issues she had to tackle with, coupled with a staunch dedication to her work at Savitri Bhavan – such as the study circles and classes – was the personality of sister Shraddhavan.

After nearly 25 years of my life in England and USA for higher education, scientific research and corporate financial management, when I moved from America and wished to settle in Auroville in January 2011, I thought I must contribute my work experience to the community. Somehow I was drawn to Savitri Bhavan and met her there for the first time. It was so touching to see her in her 70s when she said, “See, I am here doing the job of a cashier”. She wanted me to take up job of streamlining the financial accounting at

Savitri Bhavan. Wow! I jumped up! Soon after, I was taken around by her and got introduced to other members of Savitri Bhavan. I immediately took up the job and streamlined the entire “financial accounting system” in about a month or two. This work continued by other members even after I left Auroville after about nine months to “have the flavour of life” of the Ashram in Pondicherry. This was actually a change of gear for my spiritual journey. There was a very special “instruction” for this movement which I realized later in life.

Sister Shraddhavan was a model example to all of us. She was taking classes on *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* during those days. After lunch break in the afternoon, in spite of the scorching summer heat, she would be seen bent on her seat driving her “little moped” from her residence to the Savitri Bhavan. Whenever other members would have some difficulty or a kind of “disharmony” in our working, she would step in and gently sort our issues. She would always encourage us and listen patiently and give her opinion on various issues – whether literary or “house management”. It was really hard for me to depart from her then, but it was also the Mother’s instruction to proceed.

The most remarkable reminiscence I have of her life is when I was listening to her during the inauguration of the Savitri Hostel in 2012. “When something has to be done, I don’t mind whatever it takes” she said, referring to the difficulty of managing the funds to construct the Savitri Hostel. Her inspiration towards building the Savitri Hostel was to enable those students who wished to engage in deep research on the literature of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was remarkably prophetic!! In fact, I foresee an outstanding contribution of Savitri Bhavan towards the education of mankind for spiritual evolution in the light of the Integral Yoga of Transformation.

Shraddhavan is now not among us physically, but her spirit which started this project of “Education in Integral Yoga” at Savitri Bhavan will be with us to guide us on the right path. I believe she will again come back to Auroville in her new body. As the Mother said, “There is no death”. We are an eternal portion of the Supreme! “We are of one family and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth.” (The Mother, 7 April, 1929, CWM 3: 3).

Poetry as Mantra

Shraddhavan

The theme on which I have been asked to say a few introductory words today, “Poetry as Mantra” is summed up in a single resonating line from Sri Aurobindo’s mantric epic *Savitri* as:

Sight’s sound-waves breaking from the soul’s great deeps.
(p. 383)

The ancient rishis of India, seized with the inspired word, expressed their intuitive knowledge in rhythmic words which were simultaneously seen and heard. My beloved mentor Amal Kiran has written of experiencing this intensest state of poetic inspiration when receiving the extraordinary lines collected in his ‘*Adventure of the Apocalypse*’.

Also in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo has described the effect of the Mantra on one who hears and sees it:

The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body’s self
Are seized unutterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change;
He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech ... (p. 375)

In *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo, following the Vedic rishis, has described Mantra as ‘The rhythmic speech which ... rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth.’ (CWSA 26:10) and tells us that:

Neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are ... the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, [nor] its ... highest creators [but] ... only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. ... the more directly

the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. (CWSA 26:12)

The Instrument of Poetry

The instrument of poetry, says Sri Aurobindo, is the rhythmic word, which contains three elements: its sound value, its significance or thought value, its sound and sense, which separately and together have a soul value: a direct spiritual power, which is infinitely the most important thing about them, making the rhythmic word of the poet the highest form of speech available to man for the expression whether of his self-vision or of his world-vision.

Sri Aurobindo himself is of course the supreme example to us of the seer-poet, as well as of the Master of poetic technique and, as is well-known, the Mother has characterised his epic *Savitri* as ‘*the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision*’ and ‘*a mantra for the transformation of the world*’.

But the glories and subtleties of *Savitri* should not lead us to overlook his many other mantric poems: many of the sonnets and shorter poems share this power; also *Iliion* and *Ahana*, in which he has acclimatised the hexameter, used by Homer and the other classical Greek and Roman poets, for future use in English, and his many other varied ‘Metrical Experiments’, which include amongst other mantric poems *Rose of God*, *The World Game*, *The Mother of Dreams*, and the one with which I will close my remarks today: a personal favourite, because it seems to echo the majesty of the Vedas and evokes the presence of Sri Aurobindo himself:

Seer deep-hearted

Seer deep-hearted, divine King of the secrecies,
Occult fountain of love sprung from the heart of God,
Ways thou knewest no feet ever in time had trod.
Words leaped shining, the flame-billows of wisdom’s seas,
Vast in thy soul was a tide washing the coasts of heaven,
Thoughts broke burning and bare crossing the human night,
White star-scripts of the gods born from the presses of Light
Page by page to the dim children of earth were given.

(CWSA 2:677)

All Gratitude to Sri Aurobindo !

Reflections on Passages in *Savitri*: King Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo

Larry Seidlitz

Sri Aurobindo, in his Author's Note at the start of *Savitri*, explains that King Aswapati, the father of Savitri, "is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes." But at the end of the note, he adds, "Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life". Many commentators on the poem have suggested that King Aswapati represents Sri Aurobindo himself, or we might say, as Sri Aurobindo suggests here, that the Force that incarnated in King Aswapati also incarnated in Sri Aurobindo.

The description of King Aswapati and his realisations and experiences in the poem certainly are reminiscent of Sri Aurobindo and his experiences. And who could write with such living, vivid, vibrating detail about the experiences of King Aswapati on the summits of consciousness other than one who himself has lived those experiences? I think that for most of Sri Aurobindo's devotees who are conversant with *Savitri* this matter is not in dispute. What is particularly fascinating, however, are the penetrating and illuminating insights that Sri Aurobindo provides in the poem into his own being and nature and consciousness. These are many, of course, and run throughout the 48 cantos and the epilogue, though some are more general and cast light on his overall being, and some are more specific, lighting up a particular aspect or experience or vision. Here I will focus on the first long passage in which Sri Aurobindo introduces the character King Aswapati, at the start of Book I, Canto III, "The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul's Release", which gives us an overall view of his being and nature. It will be more convenient to present the passage, which extends a little over a page, in segments,

reflecting on each segment in turn, on how it seems to pertain to Sri Aurobindo himself and what luminous insights it suggests about him and about the nature of reality.

The passage begins:

A world's desire compelled her mortal birth.
One in the front of the immemorial quest,
Protagonist of the mysterious play
In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms
And limits his eternity by the hours
And the blind Void struggles to live and see,
A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,
Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power. (22)

The first line refers to Savitri, who was introduced in the previous cantos, that her birth was compelled by a world's desire. Then, in the next lines, Aswapati is introduced as "One in the front of the immemorial quest / Protagonist of the mysterious play / In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms / And limits his eternity by the hours". They suggest that, ultimately, this immemorial quest, this world's desire that compelled Savitri's birth, is a seeking of God for himself through forms in the world.

It may be noted that Aswapati is not explicitly introduced by name, and in fact, his name doesn't appear in the entire canto, nor in the following two cantos which also describe his spiritual realisations, nor in the whole of Book Two which describes his travels through the inner worlds. In this canto only the pronouns "he" and "his" are used to refer to him. The name first appears near the end of Book Three, Canto Four, when Aswapati implores the Divine Mother to incarnate in the world and change its vain and circling course. And it is significant that in his entreaty to the Mother there he gives expression to the "world's desire" mentioned in the first line of this passage, for he pleads: "Hard Is the doom to which thou bindest thy sons! / How long shall our spirits battle with the Night / And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death" (341).

Whereas the reader might well assume that the pronouns "he" and "his" in this passage refer to King Aswapati because of the title of the canto together with the explanation in the Author's Note about

King Aswapati, it is only towards the end of the canto that the author gives a clear hint that he is referring to the King in the line “Thus came his soul’s release from Ignorance”, which links the pronoun with the title of the canto, “The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul’s Release”. Although the reasons for this semi-obscure name regarding Aswapati’s name may be multiple and complex, it is interesting that he is introduced here as the “protagonist of the mysterious play in which the *Unknown* pursues himself through forms” (italics added for emphasis). Indeed this “mysterious play” is brought up again and recounted in detail in the next canto, “The Secret Knowledge”, particularly in the section which begins with these lines:

All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.
A playmate in the mighty Mother’s game,
One came upon the dubious whirling globe
To hide from her pursuit in force and form.
A secret spirit in the Inconscient’s sleep,
A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,
He was here before the elements could emerge,
Before there was light of mind or life could breathe. (60)

These lines and this whole section with its emphatic repetition of the pronouns “he” and “his” (in one place five lines in succession starting with “He”) seem to illuminate why Aswapati is not mentioned by name in the first part of the poem, and are consistent with the explanation suggested above. We are told that all here in this world are figures of the “sole transcendent One”, that behind the forms of life there is an “unseen Presence”. And then we are reminded of the “mysterious play” mentioned earlier by the lines “A playmate in the mighty Mother’s game, / One came upon the dubious whirling globe / To hide from her pursuit in force and form”. The links with the lines in the previous canto and the ones that follow tend to suggest that Aswapati is the outward expression of this “secret spirit”, “shapeless Energy”, “voiceless Word” and “transcendent One”. To put a name on him would emphasise the outer form and diminish the spirit of the “Unknown” hiding within. Similarly, we too may be deceived by

the outer form of Sri Aurobindo, and overlook the vast and eternal spirit that he was within.

King Aswapati is the “one” at the forefront of this “immemorial quest”; he is not simply another individual caught up in the “game” or a minor actor in the “mysterious play”. He is leading this quest that has been underway longer than anyone can remember, since ancient times, since at least the time of the Vedas, the earliest surviving scriptures of mankind which recorded this aspiration. It is noteworthy and pertinent to our discussion that it is Sri Aurobindo who deciphered and resurrected the deep spiritual significance and knowledge of the Vedas which had been lost to time and who clearly revealed the high and powerful spiritual aspiration embedded in them to modern humanity. This “immemorial quest” which Aswapati pioneers is reminiscent of the opening lines of *The Life Divine*:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to turn to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. (CWSA 21: 3-4)

Aswapati is not just at the forefront of the aspiration for God, but because he is the “protagonist of the mysterious play / In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms”, the lines suggest he is a power or representative of God, or even God himself incarnated in human form. The lines indeed suggest that God, the Eternal, limits his eternity by the hours, enters into Time and takes the leading role in the “mysterious play” of the earth life and its striving towards freedom and immortality. This implication is borne out more clearly in the lines that follow. This is the role of the Avatar, the incarnation

of the Divine Being as Sri Aurobindo has described it in his letters: “I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness—if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile” (CWSA 28: 476).

Continuing the discussion of the passage on Aswapati, in the line, “And the blind Void struggles to live and see”, the capitalisation of “Void” suggests the author is referring to the original Void from which the evolution first emerged. This was eloquently described in the opening lines of the poem. In Sri Aurobindo’s conceptualisation, this is the Inconscient, a state in which the Infinite Consciousness is withdrawn, is involved, as he often says, though it is still present as a potentiality and a force that seems to work mechanically because the Inconscient itself is not aware of it. Nevertheless, because the infinite consciousness is there in potentiality, it eventually and very gradually emerges in the course of the evolution, but it is a slow, struggling emergence, first into life and then eventually into mental self-awareness. The Inconscient’s blindness, its dull unconsciousness, weighs heavily on the struggle to survive and grow, to expand the scope and enjoyment of life, to emerge into the light of self-awareness in a slow, difficult and violent evolution.

After eons, the stage of humanity is reached which has a developing mental self-awareness, and Aswapati is the spearpoint of its upward thrust, “A thinker and toiler in the ideal’s air”. This also describes Sri Aurobindo so well. But we must note that Sri Aurobindo often used the term “ideal” in a higher sense than mere mental ideals, which perhaps are lower reflections of this higher level of consciousness. Canto Seven in Book Two describes Aswapati’s journey through the heavens of the ideal, which has various sides with different qualities and many levels, and which “climbs towards some far unseen epiphany” (279). It appears from the descriptions there to be in the plane of the overmind. But the image depicted in the line here brings to mind Sri Aurobindo poring over his Sanskrit texts, translations and manuscripts while writing *The Secret of the Veda*, or putting to pen and revising and expanding the vast, detailed account of his vision of reality in *The Life Divine*, or perhaps most poignantly, reworking

and revising *Savitri* itself, making “corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which some cosmic beauty will emerge!” (CWSA 27: 269), and using its writing “as a means of ascension” of his consciousness (CWSA 27: 271).

At the summit of Aswapati’s ascent of consciousness, as is described much later in Book Three, he comes face to face with the Divine Mother who is the original Consciousness and Force which has created and manifested all, and implores her to descend into the world, to incarnate in a living form, and to redeem the world with her omnipotent Power. In the final line of this part of the passage we are given a tantalising hint and preview of Aswapati’s climactic achievement in which he “Brought down to earth’s dumb need her radiant power”. Here too, the Divine Mother is not directly mentioned, but instead is referred to with the ambiguous pronoun, “her”, which the reader would naturally associate with Savitri, the incarnation of the Divine Mother, who was introduced in the previous two cantos and is referenced (with a pronoun) in the first line of the present passage.

Let us continue with the next portion of the passage pertaining to Aswapati:

His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality.
A pointing beam on earth’s uncertain roads,
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;
His human self like a translucent cloak
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world.
Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time
And paying here God’s debt to earth and man
A greater sonship was his divine right. (22)

Here we are given clear indications of Aswapati’s Avatarhood, and interesting depictions of its nature and role. We can better understand Sri Aurobindo in their light. We are told that his spirit has descended from larger spheres of existence that are immortal. “A colonist from immortality”, he has come to claim earth as part of his empire, to

establish immortality on earth. “A pointing beam”, he has come to light the Way forward for humanity. “His birth held up a symbol and a sign”, but of what? We might put it like this: the birth of the Avatar in the world shows first that there is a Divine Being; secondly, that the Divine Being can take the form of a human life and body in the Avatar; and thirdly, that it is possible to divinise this human life and body and that is the intended goal of human development. Sri Aurobindo in a letter puts it this way: “The Divine is there in the human, and the human fulfilling and exceeding its highest aspirations and tendencies becomes the Divine” (CWSA 28: 473). We might answer the question even more succinctly by saying that the Avatar is a symbol and sign of things to come.

The next two lines express the two sides of Avatarhood, the human and the Divine. The human side is the outer self, which is like a translucent cloak. That it is like a cloak suggests it is something that is worn and can be removed without affecting the self within. It is mortal, like other human bodies, but it is translucent, it allows the light from the inner self to shine through. It is not transparent, from the outside we cannot see the inner being within, but something of its radiance comes through and illuminates the outer life and the unseeing world around. Inside sits the All-Wise and Divine Being who holds all knowledge and wisdom and who is leading the blind world, particularly through the person of the Avatar and his teaching and example, but also independently of the Avatar through other means. Sri Aurobindo seems to be a perfect example of this in that his human self indeed allowed the inner light to shine through, and was a particularly effective instrument in his clarity and depth of thought and his effectiveness as a writer and poet, transmitting his inner and higher knowledge and force to the world.

The last three lines further confirm Aswapati’s Avatarhood, expressing the cosmic and eternal dimensions of his inner being, and his role as a representative of God, paying God’s debt to earth and men. Why does God owe this debt? Presumably he is the Creator and Master of the world. But what has he created here? Arguably, it is a world of ignorance, strife, pain, suffering and death, and it is mankind who, most self-aware among living things, most poignantly suffers here. Some religions would like to shift the blame from God to mankind,

but for Sri Aurobindo such a shift does not stand logical scrutiny. The animals and perhaps even the plants also suffer, even if less intensely and persistently due to their more limited self-awareness, and mankind is constrained by our human nature's limitations in knowledge, emotion, feeling, strength, will-power and abilities, so suffering is inevitable. Sri Aurobindo indicates there are reasons for these things, that they are inevitable in a progressive evolution out of the inconscient to a divine life on earth, the magnificence of which may eventually justify them, but God should at the least help in this evolution and shorten the way and ease the difficulty. This is the Avatar's role and rationale. He partakes of the Divine Wisdom and Power within and with them clears the path ahead. That is his "sonship", he is the son of God here on earth. But he also partakes of human suffering in his outer nature in order to heal it and show the way out of it to others. This latter, of course, is poignantly expressed in the epitaph written by the Mother on Sri Aurobindo's samadhi.

Continuing with the passage we read:

Although consenting to mortal ignorance,
His knowledge shared the Light ineffable.
A strength of the original Permanence
Entangled in the moment its flow,
He kept the vision of the Vasts behind:
A Power was in him from the Unknowable.
An archivist of the symbols of the Beyond,
A treasurer of superhuman dreams,
He bore the stamp of mighty memories
And shed their grandiose ray on human life. (22)

The first six lines reveal the relation between the divine and human sides of the Avatar. The Avatar is the Divine but he consents to descend into and express himself in a human body. He has the ineffable knowledge within, but his outer life and mind do not necessarily share in its effulgence. With time and growth and spiritual development, however, the gap between the two diminishes. As Sri Aurobindo discussed in his writing of *Savitri*, he used it as a means of the ascension of his consciousness, as it expanded he revised the poem accordingly so that it would reflect the higher inspiration.

This in effect was a work of opening the channel between the inner and higher being and the outer being, between the ineffable Light above and the outer instrument which received the inspiration and luminously expressed it and transcribed it onto paper. As with the Light, the Avatar may experience a divine strength within that comes from the eternal and infinite oneness of Being, but on the surface of his being which experiences the succession of moments of Time he may be limited and need to work out his aims and plans with effort, delay and persistence. Feeling supported by the eternal and infinite within, he enters into the tangle of the limited and conflicting forces of the world in Time in order to support the forces of progress and to forge ahead to greater and higher achievements of the evolutionary advance. As with his inner knowledge, with his growth of consciousness and development of his instruments of mind, life and body, he learns to channel more effectively the inner Power into his outer work and action.

These possibilities also exist within us. Sri Aurobindo's comment bears repeating, "The Divine is there in the human, and the human fulfilling and exceeding its highest aspirations and tendencies becomes the Divine" (CWSA 28: 473). The divine Knowledge and the divine Power exist also in our own inner being, and like the Avatar we must learn to open up the channels so that they can flow into our outer consciousness and life. An important element in this opening is faith: faith that the Divine is within us, faith that the Divine can open these channels within us, faith that anything is possible when we open to the Divine, faith in our higher destiny, faith in our ability to overcome the obstacles in our nature that block our progress. Another important element in this opening is turning within and above towards the Divine, rather than outwards and struggling with the outer forces of the world with our presently very limited physical, vital and mental resources. We must make a shift in our poise from the outer mind to the inner and higher divine parts of our being from which the knowledge and strength flow that can overcome all obstructions and opposing forces. As Sri Aurobindo says here, "He kept the vision of the Vasts behind". His consciousness remained rooted in the vastness of the inner Divine, and in that inner poise he could wield the Power of the Unknowable.

The later four lines seem to refer to the higher reaches of the spiritual mind intervening between the “Light ineffable” and our ordinary mind. In that higher intuitive mind can be found “the symbols of the Beyond” that can express the rays of light that derive from the Sun of Truth above. Of these symbols, Aswapati, but also Sri Aurobindo, was an “archivist”. He had learnt these symbols and had access to a collection of them to utilise in transmitting the knowledge of the Beyond to human beings. There is an interesting passage that comes later in the description of Aswapati’s yoga in which he opens a locked archive of this higher knowledge. I will quote just a portion of it:

All that the Gods have learned is there self-known.
There in a hidden chamber closed and mute
Are kept the record graphs of the cosmic scribe,
And there the tables of the sacred Law,
There is the Book of Being’s index page;
The text and glossary of the Vedic truth
Are there; the rhythms and metres of the stars
Significant of the movements of our fate:
The symbol powers of number and of form,
And the secret code of the history of the world
And Nature’s correspondence with the soul
Are written in the mystic heart of Life. (74)

We see in this portion of the passage some of what is hidden in this crypt of symbolic knowledge: the history of the world, and the movements of our fate, our future. It also holds the code of the correspondence, the relation, between the soul and nature, for nature is an expression of the inner soul, and what we are within gets expressed in the outer events and circumstances of our lives. This is the secret behind astrology, for we find that certain of its symbols convey our individual human nature, for example, our intellectual acumen, but also outer events and circumstances in our life, such as our education level, or our type of work. In later portions of the passage we discover something else interesting about the symbols, an extension of the same logic, that they reveal the formulas of the strange miracle by which higher truths are translated into figures of the lower nature, and by a reverse miracle, the lower nature transforms again into the higher. Here the dualities, what he describes as “Its

law of the opposition of the gods, / Its list of inseparable contraries” (75) play an important role. Indeed all the world is a symbol of the Divine. And it is why, again, that it is possible for the Divine to become human in the Avatar, and for the human by exceeding himself to become Divine.

In the final part of the passage on Aswapati, Sri Aurobindo says,

His days were a long growth to the Supreme.
A skyward being nourishing its roots
On sustenance from occult spiritual founts
Climbed through white rays to meet an unseen Sun.
His soul lived as eternity’s delegate,
His mind was like a fire assailing heaven,
His will a hunter in the trails of light.
An ocean impulse lifted every breath;
Each action left the footprints of a god,
Each moment was a beat of puissant wings. (22-23)

The further we evolve, both collectively and individually, the more rapid becomes the progress, and Aswapati, the forerunner of the evolutionary ascent, is approaching the summits on which there is the supramental transformation from man to superman, the divine man. Now each day is “a long growth to the Supreme” bringing fresh and remarkable progress. It is fascinating to read about this type of growth in Sri Aurobindo’s yogic diary called *Record of Yoga* in which he was marking his progress along different lines of advance of his Sapta Chatusthayas, his yogic discipline consisting of seven groups of four elements, during his early years in Pondicherry. We find sudden and remarkable advances, as well as setbacks and obstructions, but overall there was rapid and startling progress in the development of various occult and spiritual powers such as being able to know with clarity and certitude future events and to shape future events solely by his will without taking any physical action.

Normally, we “nourish our roots” on sustenance from living matter, from plants and animals, as our life is largely material. Those who are more intellectually minded also nourish themselves on written material and now increasingly on videos and voice recordings. But Aswapati is predominantly spiritual, so he nourishes himself from

“occult spiritual founts”, hidden sources of spiritual sustenance. Of course, we too can learn to turn within and rely on divine wellsprings of peace, wideness, love, divine strength and the essential delight that is inherent in existence.

Sri Aurobindo once fasted for 23 days to see how far one could live without food. He was able to maintain robust energy, drawing vital energy occultly from the universal vital forces, but he found that the physical body atrophied. Afterwards he always discouraged people from fasting for extended periods, and warned that it often leads to a morbid condition of imaginations and delusions and a weakened nervous system due to an inrush of vital energy which the nerves cannot assimilate or coordinate. Instead, he suggested moderation, equanimity, and discouragement of desire and greed regarding food.

But here Sri Aurobindo is not speaking of food or vital force, but of drawing on the occult spiritual forces which nourish Aswapati’s Godward aspiration. When he writes that he “climbed through white rays to meet an unseen Sun”, it illustrates Aswapati’s ascent through the planes of the higher consciousness leading towards the Supermind, represented by the Sun. In that ascent one may see rays of light. Speaking of inner experiences, Sri Aurobindo explains that “Light or rays of light are always light of the higher consciousness working in the being to illumine or to purify or to awaken the consciousness or attune it to the Truth” (CWSA 30: 118). He explains that “It [*Light*] is the power that enlightens whatever it falls upon—the result may be vision, memory, knowledge, right will, right impulse etc.” (ibid.). He also elaborates, “Light is a general term. Light is not knowledge but the illumination that comes from above and liberates the being from obscurity and darkness. But this Light assumes different forms such as the white light of the Mother, the pale blue light of Sri Aurobindo, the golden light of the Truth, the psychic light (pink and rose) etc.” (ibid.: 119).

The next three lines further depict Aswapati’s nature. He is “eternity’s delegate”, suggesting again his Avatarhood, that he is someone who represents the Divine, the Eternal, here on earth. And perhaps in his role as delegate, “his mind was like a fire assailing heaven”. Fire here suggests a climbing, ascending intensity, and perhaps also a mind

burning with the flames of Agni, the subtle fire of spiritual aspiration. It is “assailing heaven”, leaping upwards towards the domain of the Divine, engulfing it, uniting with it, merging into it. That is his role here as eternity’s delegate, to reunite the lower nature, which has become separated in its consciousness from the one Divine, with its Source. His will is fully engaged in this ascent, it is “a hunter in the trails of light”. We have already seen the image of “climbing through white rays to an unseen Sun”, and here it is suggested that his will is striving, pursuing its way through these rays or “trails of light” upwards towards the Sun.

The final three lines emphasise the constancy and pervasiveness of Aswapati’s aspiration for the Divine. Each breath, each inhalation and exhalation was imbued with an oceanic, wide and powerful aspiration. There is a powerful passage in *The Synthesis of Yoga* which speaks of the entirety of the self-offering that is needed in the Yoga: “Even in those things in which Nature is herself very plainly the worker and we only the witnesses of her working and its containers and supporters, there should be the same constant memory and insistent consciousness of a work and of its divine Master. Our very inspiration and respiration, our very heartbeats can and must be made conscious in us as the living rhythm of the universal sacrifice” (CWSA 23: 111). For Aswapati, “each action left the footprints of a god”. Each action, with its power, significance, greatness and perfection, showed the signs of the divine Actor behind it. When we look at Sri Aurobindo’s actions, we see this also. Look at the magnificence of *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*, his other major works, his translations and interpretations of the ancient scriptures, his poetry, essays and correspondence. Look at the penetrating insight into all types of human endeavour and difficulty. Look at the power and unswerving determination to find the solution to humanity’s ignorance and suffering – to seek and attain and bring down into earth consciousness the omniscient and omnipotent power of the Supermind. And look too at his humour, his solicitude, his compassion, love and warmth. For Aswapati, and for Sri Aurobindo, it was not that they attained moments of greatness, but “each moment was a beat of puissant wings”. The power of the Divine was present constantly in his actions, and it was always winging higher and farther to new and greater vistas.

News of *Savitri Bhavan*

April – September 2022

All the events that happened during this period were in commemoration of Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary

April 4: To celebrate the coming of Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry on 4 April 1910, senior Aurovilians Mr. Varadharajan and Syamala arranged a small event with the staff of Savitri Bhavan and the Savitri Hostel. Everyone read the small booklet on the biography of Sri Aurobindo prepared by Mr. Varadharajan and Syamala and then sweets were distributed by Shraddhavan to the participants. Unfortunately, this was Shraddhavan's last participation in our events.

April 4: *Savitri Marg Darshan* – A one-hour presentation was prepared by Arnab Bishnu Chowdhury of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry and presented in Sangam Hall of Savitri Bhavan. The presentation was a meditative video of eminent *Savitri* seekers reading selected passages from *Savitri* with original music, painting and photography.

July 17: The Aurobindonian family from various Sri Aurobindo Centres of Tamil Nadu visited Savitri Bhavan and an orientation session was held in Sangam Hall.

July 22-August 10: An exhibition titled "Blessings – A Unique Vision of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo" was held. Rare photographic images by Henri Cartier-Bresson and others were displayed with a lot of love and with the details of the names of Ashramites who were in the photographs. The photographs were gathered by Willemine, a French volunteer.



Dhanalakshmi addressing the visitors from Sri Aurobindo Centres
in Tamil Nadu



Blessings - Exhibition of Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographs



Centrepiece of *Divine Flowers* exhibition

August 15-17: The Divine Flowers team organized a flower exhibition on the theme *Collaboration* as a part of celebration of Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary, in the Square Hall of Savitri Bhavan. Mr. Narad has inaugurated the Exhibition. Talks were also arranged on the theme. The first talk was given by Mr. Narad was titled "*Sri Aurobindo and My Connection with Him and the Flowers*". The second talk was given by Dr. Alok Pandey titled *Sri Aurobindo: The Divine Example*. The third talk was given by Ch Nirakar (from Odisha) on *Collaboration*.

August 25-29: An exhibition by Purnam, a Centre for Integrality was held on *Savitri Art* in the Square Hall of Savitri Bhavan. Over the past year, 12 budding artists across India and the world collectively meditated and created paintings inspired by Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. 150 paintings were offered to Auroville in light of Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary. A community sharing was also held on 27th August 2022.



Artists of *Savitri Art* exhibition sharing their experience and insights

August 23: The concluding session of Savitri Study Camp sponsored by the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry and given by Dr. Alok Pandey was held in Sangam Hall. The earlier sessions were held at the Society's Beach Office. His talk was called *The End of Death*. This was the last Study Camp of this cycle which commenced in the fall of 2007, immediately after the passing of Prof. Mangesh Nadkarni.

September 3-24: An exhibition of paintings inspired by Sri Aurobindo's poetry by Jyoti Khare called *Thy Golden Light* was held in the Square Hall. Its inauguration on 3rd September was held with a musical rendition of Sri Aurobindo's poems by Shakti Balu and singers.



Inauguration of *Thy Golden Light* exhibition by Jyoti Khare.
A group of singers rendered selected poems of Sri Aurobindo
set to music by Shakti Balu

Publications:

A small booklet on the First Major Spiritual Experience of Sri Aurobindo was published in July. This booklet is based on the talk given by Shraddhavan on 7 January 2008.

The English of Savitri, Volume II was published on 1 August. This volume covers the sentence-by-sentence explanation of Books Four and Five of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*.

An audio book on *Essays on the Gita* narrated by Mr. Ravi Shankar was completed and uploaded on the Savitri Bhavan website: savitribhavan.org.in

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.

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 how to help the dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality.

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Purpose “SAVITRI BHAVAN”

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Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother