

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 55

*INVOCATION is a biannual publication of SAVITRI BHAVAN
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*This publication has been funded by SAIER
(Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Designed and Printed by Prisma, Auroville

April 2023

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(About 24 April 1920)

The anniversary of my return to Pondicherry,
which was the tangible sign of the sure Victory
over the adverse forces.

The Mother



The End of Death

Dr. Alok Pandey

Before we come to today's subject, I would like to spend a moment in the memory of our dearest Shradhdhavan. They who have served the Mother, and with whom we are linked through wonderful ties of the Mother's love, never depart. They are always with us. We carry them, they carry us, and we are all together in Her wonderful lap. I remember this line from *Savitri*:

... Our parting was the dream;
We are together, we live ... [717]

That is the truth with which we need to live. The word 'death' obviously has no meaning or little meaning with those who have been so fortunate and privileged to serve the Divine Mother in such a wonderful and exceptional way. The fact that I was associated with Shradhdhavan during the last few weeks before her departure I see as a very symbolic turn of events: Her leaving of the physical body in the Ashram atmosphere and in her parting joining the two, the Ashram and Auroville. This was, as far as I know, one of her wishes: that all these different spaces of the Mother should come together. So I am sure she is here, she is listening and she is with all of us.

Coming to the subject, it comes from another line of *Savitri*:
Even there shall come as a high crown of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance. [708]

This quest for immortality is inbuilt within human beings because, deep within, we are conscious of something in us which is immortal. That is why when Yudhishtir was asked "*Kim ashcharyam?*" (What is the most surprising thing?), he says, "We see every day people die, yet we believe that we are immortal." This is not an illusionist's

statement, though that is how it has been interpreted: that we should remember that death is the end point. But certainly it is not. In the Indian tradition, when someone leaves the body, we do not use the phrase ‘*mar gaya*’ (the person died), but we use the phrase ‘*sharir pura ho gaya*’ (the physical body has lived its span of time), and when we carry the body to the cremation ground, we chant not ‘*mrthyu sathya hai*’ (death is the truth); we say ‘*Ram Nam sathya hai*’ (the name of the Divine is the eternal truth).

This is the truth that death hides. Death is a mask: it hides the eternal truth that ‘there is no death.’ This is the paradox. Yet death comes; it is so real. But still there is something in us which wants and seeks immortality. And this seeking has taken various forms. The most common form through which nature tries to perpetuate immortality is continuity through progeny. This is why we use the word ‘*Santhaan*,’ extension of consciousness. That is the most elementary way. In the animal creation, we see that is how there is a perpetuation: “Even if I won’t, something of me will continue”. This is one way that nature tries to be immortal, but it is the most inferior way.

Then, as we evolve, there is another way that humanity adopts. We try to immortalise a moment’s work. There are great creations like Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, Vyasa’s *Mahabharata*, and the works of Virgil, Kalidas, and Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Blake. These are great works of literature and, of course, there are other art forms such as wonderful sculptures and paintings. We try to immortalise human beings through their work. In the early stages, it is through progeny that we try to become immortal, through which nature enables us to remain. And then, in the next stage, it is through works that are done through the intelligence, using the body and mind to create immortality with transient things. There is a very beautiful line of Sri Aurobindo which says, “That is what we are here for: to build immortality with mortal things.” We use paper and pen, everything which is transient, and yet the creation is immortal. *Savitri*, of course, is one such creation. It is more than an immortal creation because it shows us the pathways to immortality.

Then, at a third level, man seeks within himself: “Is there within me something which survives death?” And in this approach man

has turned inward, upward, and he has discovered that deep within there is something which does not die. '*Antah sharir jyotirmayee Shubhra*'. There is something or someone within us before whom all faults and failures and errors just disappear. There is that capacity within us, and that we can discover. We have in different cultures different ways of seeking, and accordingly different names have been given to that 'something'. It does not matter by what name we call it, but there is something which survives death: this is the third way to find immortality.

Then there is a fourth way of seeking immortality. We have discovered that there is the possibility of immortalizing the cells within us. Is there a way that this immortality of the cells can also be transferred, manifested, in this instrumental personality? There are several levels at which we see the operation of death. And slowly it fails as we become more and more conscious, as we grow in consciousness.

Now, there are two subjects which I have seen that most engage human beings, that people are most attracted to. When my first book entitled *Death, Dying and Beyond* came out, people said, "You know, so many people have liked your book, so many are buying it". I said, "It is not because of the author, it is because of the subject". You speak about death or write about death, it will have an immortal appeal. Everybody wants to know. And the other subject which has a universal appeal is love. These two subjects are most celebrated, not only in poetry, but in human thought, in everything and everywhere. And in *Savitri* we have these two, which are as if posited one against the other; it is very interesting. If you look at Yama, the name 'Yama' means 'restrainer'; he restrains. How does he restrain? He imposes limits on everything: our sight cannot see, our ears cannot hear, we cannot feel beyond a certain point. We cannot think beyond a point. It is as if we hit a magic wall and come back. It restrains us on every side. It does a good work at one level, because it restrains not only our godlike impulses, but also our titanic states, our dark states. All these restraints make us move within a certain narrow lane. That is how death operates. So Yama is the restrainer. And that is how he becomes the guardian of dharma in the Ignorance.

What does love do? Love releases. How does it release? It releases us from the prison of the ego. The very first movement of love is to give – even at the most elementary level of the family, one gives – and therefore by giving one comes out of the ego. Love releases us. At a larger level, love for something greater – an ideal, the country, the world, humanity and, ultimately, God – releases us from the prison of the ego.

So, we have this secret: death restrains and therefore keeps us perpetually in bondage, whereas love releases us. And what is the highest point to which love can release? It releases us into union with the very Source from where we have come. Love is that mighty power that has come from the Divine, to lift this creation back from the Inconscient towards the Divine. But, in between, we have the entire journey of creation and the journey of man. To reach this high crown of union with the Divine there is a whole background, and the entire *Savitri* is about that background. Yes, immortality is the promise, and it is going to be, but there is a process to it. It is not something that will happen like magic. Anything in time and space has a process. During this process, the victory of love is certain, because love is a power coming from the Divine and death is the shadow of the Divine. These two opponents are wrestling with each other. Death is a mask that the Divine has worn to spur human beings.

I am reminded of a situation in the Gita. Arjuna asks a very simple question: “Tell me, should I fight or should I not fight?” And Sri Krishna takes him through all the eighteen chapters. Bewildered and confused, initially Arjuna asks, “Tell me one thing. You are saying *jnana* [knowledge] is superior to *karma* [action], but then why are you asking me to fight?” Sri Krishna replies, “Yes, but you cannot do *karma* without *jnana*. If *jnana* is not there, and you do *karma*, it will bind you.” Arjuna asks, “Then tell me something. What is the real secret?” Then Sri Krishna brings in *bhakti* (love) as the highest crown.

People often ask, “In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo speaks about “the end of Death”, but we still see people dying. Why?” Yes, Sri Aurobindo did promise, and it is going to be so. But in his letters he has said, “it is the last crowning movement”; before that, there is a whole journey to be undertaken. In the very next few lines that follow the one about

the end of Death, we see the conditions – it is the only place where we see these conditions – but through setting these conditions, Sri Aurobindo also assures they shall be met. I will just read those lines:

But first high Truth must set her feet on earth
And man aspire to the Eternal's light
And all his members feel the Spirit's touch
And all his life obey an inner Force. [708]

In a way, his entire yoga is given in these few lines. We will see how this aspiration is born after a long journey. There is a whole journey in Ignorance in which we ask for everything except the one saving grace; so it takes a long time. The first condition is we must be freed from Ignorance. And the first step of freedom from Ignorance is not to identify ourselves with the mind – thoughts, structures, opinions – or with our temporary fluttering emotions – passions, desires, cravings – or with the body.

This is the first step and that itself takes long. It is beautifully described in *Savitri*, in Canto Three of Book One: The Book of Beginnings.

This bodily appearance is not all;
The form deceives, the person is a mask;
Hid deep in man celestial powers can dwell.
His fragile ship conveys through the sea of years
An incognito of the Imperishable. [23]

He is the only fellow who has no name. But he keeps assuming different names and forms and we do not recognise him.

A spirit that is a flame of God abides,
A fiery portion of the Wonderful,
Artist of his own beauty and delight,
Immortal in our mortal poverty. [23]

What a beautiful description! Without this, all our riches are still a poverty. But with this, even in rags, I am a god, I am Divine. There is a beautiful Urdu couplet by one of the great poets. He says, “My divine Friend, I have seen him everywhere, sometimes I have seen him like a king, sometimes I have seen him as a beggar.” This is the truth of the immortal soul without which all our life is a poverty.

Why is it a poverty? Because nothing is sure. The only thing which is like a surety, a guarantee, is the immortal soul.

This is the first step towards the ultimate conquest of death. Sometimes one encounters these things in a very interesting way. One person whom I met quite some time back said something very interesting. When I met him I was a bit curious because of certain behaviours and fears he had. I asked him out of curiosity, “What made you come to Sri Aurobindo’s yoga?” He said, “Because I want to be immortal. And this is the only yoga which assures immortality. Is it good?” So I asked, “Why do you want to be immortal?”, and he said, “Because I am very afraid of death”. I said, “This is a paradox.” I reminded him of what the Mother said, that if you are afraid of death, you have not fulfilled the first condition. The first thing we have to do before we can even become a candidate for immortality is not to be afraid of death; to discover that death is a mask. It is, in a way, the biggest hoax. It may sound very strange, but it is merely gossip, a rumour. Before the Corona virus and afterwards also this hoax has continued – that death is real. That is the biggest hoax, though Corona came very close. But you might ask, “We see people die, don’t we?”

Sri Krishna has explained in the *Gita*, either which way you look at it, from a material point of view or from a spiritual point of view, what really death is. We all know Sri Aurobindo describes death very beautifully in several poems. One of his poems called “The Fear of Death” ends so beautifully with two of my favourite lines, which I will quote. After describing the fear of death, he says:

Death is but changing of our robes to wait

In wedding garments at the Eternal’s gate. [CWSA 2: 219]

So what is the big deal about? What is the fuss about? The Mother says, people make so much fuss about death. The first thing necessary is to be fearless of death, know that death is not real. If we can take a leap of faith, that would be wonderful. Sri Krishna has said so, Sri Aurobindo has said so, every mystic has said so. Of course, ultimately this faith must translate into knowledge, the discovery of the divine soul which is within. Fearlessness based on faith leading to the discovery of the soul within are the first steps. And then the next step is to allow the soul to govern. That is what I am going to read

now, and that too is very beautifully described in *Savitri*. Savitri has come with the idea of changing this earthly life into the life divine. She discovers the first steps and then Sri Aurobindo says:

But for such vast spiritual change to be,
Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil
And step into common nature's crowded rooms
And stand uncovered in that nature's front
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life. [486-487]

And then he describes a beautiful and necessary condition to discover the soul.

Obedient to a high command she sat:
Time, life and death were passing incidents [487]

Many things will come and go in life, but we should remain steadfast towards this discovery. Life is a play of various things and combinations. How we react to it is up to us. We may take it as pleasant or painful, that is a different story. Always there are many scenes that pass. But if we can remain steadfast towards this discovery, obedient to the high command, '*Time, life and death*' become '*passing incidents*'. Then we end up discovering this beautiful, immortal soul within, of which we have been unaware. In the Katha Upanishad it is described as '*Angushtamathra purusha*', that which is no bigger than the size of a thumb. This is the first immortality that we have to discover, but this is the easier part. What follows later is much more difficult, because this creation is still held in the grip of death.

So what is death? Sri Aurobindo beautifully describes it in several places, but very particularly in three places. One is when Aswapati encounters death. He plunges into the zone of darkness and death to see what it is that does not allow us to go beyond a certain point, to see what that great restrainer is. There is this restraint on us just like on a bird which wants to fly far, even to the heavens, but cannot. Something restrains it, pulls it back. It is this inertia of our base, this darkness, this unconsciousness, which denies our flight. To discover that he goes into the depths of the darkness. In Book Two, Cantos Seven and Eight, '*Descent into Night*' and '*The World of Falsehood*',

what he discovers about death is very interesting. He saw in death and in destruction “creation’s hasty pace”. There we get the first secret of death.

...Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,
In destruction felt creation’s hasty pace,
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain
And hell as a short cut to heaven’s gates. [231]

When life is rough and we are stumbling, death is taking us through a shortcut. Of course, we can say, “Lord, I am okay with the slightly longer path”. But it is so beautifully put here that it is a shortcut. Death intervenes precisely because this little psychic being has to grow into the fullness of the Divine, and for that it needs a variety of experiences. It is not possible in a single human body. Anyway, after some time in one body human beings start wondering, “how will I progress further?” In the Mahabharata, Ashwathama’s immortality is a curse; he cannot even show himself to anyone. It is death that helps us gain a wide variety of experiences through a number of lives.

Passenger from life to life, from scale to scale,
Changing his imaged self from form to form,
He regards the icon growing by his gaze
And in the worm foresees the coming god. [23]

Here we come to a second beautiful interesting idea. There are two things which we see happening in creation: One is evolution of forms, and the second is evolution of something deep within us. Now, biology picks up the outer part: that is the more recent Darwinian theory of evolution, of the evolution of forms. But this is something not entirely Darwinian; of course, Darwin gave it a certain form. It was well-known in Tantra that there are 84 lakhs species through which the human soul transits. They even mapped out the entire range of species: what those species are and the forms through which it is evolving. So very clearly Tantra shows there is a significance of these forms. As we change from one form to another, the soul grows: it is like a seed, it must grow into the fullness of the Divine.

So, there is an evolution of forms, and as the soul grows, it needs better and better forms to express itself. If you want to have a nuclear

reaction, you cannot do it in the *chulah* (kitchen stove). But the *chulah* will also hold some fire; the cooker or the cooking fuel will hold some fire. And this fire which comes out of the *jada thathva*, inert matter, has concealed within it the solar fire. However, to manifest solar fire more fully, you need solar panels. Similarly, the evolution of forms is to help in the evolution of the soul within. It grows from step to step. In the Vedantic idea of evolution the soul grows until a point where it becomes independent of name and form; it recovers itself. It comes to know that “I am not this body, I am not this mind, I am not this life.” After that, according to the traditional view of Vedanta, it merges into the unknowable. This is what we have heard from all the authentic voices, but obviously, it leaves a big question mark.

There are two questions, in fact. This first is why should there be this whole drama of life and evolution which then abruptly and suddenly ends? And the second is what about the chain of *karma* which the soul was going through? What happens to that?

Here Sri Aurobindo brings in a very interesting thing, that in its origin, Nature and Soul, God and the World, are not two, but one. There is only one origin. This is where he speaks about the *Ishwara* and his *Shakti*. *Shakti* goes into creation and starts creating, plunges into darkness and builds this beautiful creation on the basis of harmony. (With man the disharmony begins, but otherwise the entire creation vibrates in harmony.) It builds little atoms which are abodes of the *Ishwara*. In a miniature nucleus the *Ishwara* comes in and inhabits the atom. It builds electrons; it enters into the electron. Behind every particle there is this divine element. And then it expands the material universe into galaxies, systems of stars and constellations all beautifully, harmoniously floating in space. Then come plants and other living forms. And in each of them, it builds a little dwelling place for the spark of the Divine to inhabit and grow through it. It is a beautiful play where Soul and Nature, the Divine and the *Shakti*, are playing in miniature forms. He becomes the little soul and she this inferior nature.

Quite naturally, because the soul is connected with the Divine, it first recovers itself. But what about nature? It is here that Sri Aurobindo says that the recovery of the soul, the realisation that I am not just a

recovery of the soul and dissolution in *Nirvana* is the highest goal. But it cannot be the highest goal. Mother says it very humorously: If God wanted only *Nirvana*, there would have been nothing else but *Nirvana*. The whole idea is to recover that fullness, where every being becomes conscious *Ishwara* and every *Prakriti*, what we call as individual *prakriti*, becomes *Shakti*, the divine supernature. That is the original plan.

After this step of discovering the soul, Sri Aurobindo opens the door to the next level. It is like in any computer game, you cannot go to the next level till you have cleared the one before. Once we clear this level, then the next level of challenge opens to us, and the next level is that the soul must recover its supramental infinity. We must break into the infinity and eternity of God. Sri Aurobindo describes this whole journey. The passage which I was reading continues:

At last the traveller in the paths of Time
Arrives on the frontiers of eternity.
In the transient symbol of humanity draped,
He feels his substance of undying self
And loses his kinship to mortality. [23]

Once one has discovered his soul, one knows that one is no more mortal, but ‘that which always is’. You know, ‘I’ is something which we hear all the time. But if we can say ‘I am’ irrespective of whether I live or die, then we have taken the real step. And then what happens? He describes that this does not stay, or stop, there.

A beam of the Eternal smites his heart,
His thought stretches into infinitude;
All in him turns to spirit vastnesses.
His soul breaks out to join the Oversoul,
His life is oceaned by that superlife.
He has drunk from the breasts of the Mother of the worlds;
A topless Supernature fills his frame:
She adopts his spirit’s everlasting ground
As the security of her changing world
And shapes the figure of her unborn might. [23-24]

This is the whole journey. Why does it take long? Because the greater the building we want to raise, the deeper must be the foundation. It takes really long just to dig the foundation. And if one must go further, the further one must go into the depths. You cannot build skyscrapers on the shallow grounds of vital desires and wishful thinking. The grounds have to be dug really deep, so deep that for things to come up even to a certain level it takes a long time.

But once this ground is solid, and it holds us, why does this great-seeming adversary, death, come? Actually, he has come paradoxically. We can see that in the next description of death. First Aswapati plunges there and then he sees why it is there. Here also Sri Aurobindo has mentioned that it is to hasten the process of creation. He is there because, paradoxically, death persists towards immortality. It is a strange paradox. People often say that in *Sathya Yug* human beings used to have a life-span of 10,000 years. And right up to *Dwapar yug*, of which we have documented records, people living up to 150 years was not uncommon. But in *Kali yug*, the life-span becomes lesser and lesser, but see the magic: from *Kali yug* we leap towards *Sathya yug*. And because in *Kali yug* the lifespan is so short, the process of yoga is also very simple; this is very beautifully captured in one of the couplets by a mystic, which says: ‘no need of any *tapa* or yoga, only the name is enough.’ Here in this yoga, I would say that is the name of the Mother, ‘Maa’.

Mother speaks about this as the one single process in this yoga. When a disciple asked persistently, “Mother, nobody tells any process, nobody tells any method, tell us one method at least”, she says, “Hasn’t Sri Aurobindo told you to open to the Mother?” The disciple was not satisfied: “No, no Mother, but still we want a method. I must do something. Opening to the Mother is like I am doing nothing; she is doing everything.” Human ego wants to do something. She persisted: “Mother, tell me one process” and the Mother replies: “Well, if you want a method, it is *Japa*, calling her name.” Very clearly she says: “Calling the name, that great name which is the foundation of eternity, is the method. Death cannot stand before it, because the *name* is the vibration of eternity. The *Name* means That.” This is a very interesting aspect of the *name*; there are different scriptures

which have spoken about it. Sri Aurobindo speaks of it that when the passage of death comes, when we pass through hell, then the great name helps; and it is mentioned in *Savitri*: “A prayer upon his lips and the great Name” [210].

So, what is this Name? The Name is the first stir of creation; it starts from there. But then how do we capture that? We cannot. However, there were, and still are, great people who have identified themselves with That, and their names get added to That. So, “Krishna Krishna Krishna”, it has the same power to release us from bondage. Why? Because, he has realised that original name. Similarly, “Ram Ram Ram.” And, of course, the Mother made it very simple for us. Sri Aurobindo made it very simple: “Ma Ma Ma Ma”. Even cows know how to take it; the calf takes it naturally. But human beings want something very complicated, because we think yoga has to be very complicated. Unless you can have seminars on *The Life Divine* and give big lectures and conferences on the Supramental, you feel that it cannot be ‘something’. But, in fact, it is as simple as repeating the divine name. Sri Aurobindo insists on this in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. If you look at the goal of this yoga it appears almost impossible. But if you look at the process of the yoga, it is the simplest of all, easiest of all. Of course, Rishabhchandra, who wrote *Sri Aurobindo His Life Unique*, had a very interesting take on this. He once said to the Mother, and one would completely agree, “Mother if people came here and saw us, met us, they would never want to stay here. We are all products in the making, beings of transition, we are neither here nor there. We are not humans through and through, and neither are we superhuman; we are caught in between. If people come and meet us, they would never want to stay here. But if they come and see you, they would never want to go away from here.”

This is the first step. If we hold on to this foundation of eternity, then we discover that even death is a mask and a means; it is a grace. This is the faith we must cultivate: what we thought of as dark and dreadful is nothing but a grace. We see this beautifully described in *Savitri*: when Savitri undertakes the yoga, it speaks of darkness as a magic of self-hidden light.

All here is a mystery of contraries:

Darkness a magic of self-hidden Light,

[600]

Every line of Sri Aurobindo's has that magic of self-hidden Light. So, when death comes, what should we do? What should we say? We should simply say, "Oh Light, throw away this mask". In all likelihood, if you have thrown away that mask while in the body, death will not come as that strange fellow sitting on a two-horned bullock. I think he has upgraded himself. He does not come on bullock any more; he probably uses a Mercedes or something. Everything is being upgraded, so we do not know. Then why should we imagine death in that old antique way? Symbols change.

Darkness a magic of self-hidden Light,
Suffering some secret rapture's tragic mask
And death an instrument of perpetual life. [600]

What a reminder! Suffering means that he is preparing us for a greater delight, and death is an instrument of perpetual life!

Although Death walks beside us on Life's road,
A dim bystander at the body's start
And a last judgment on man's futile works,
Other is the riddle of its ambiguous face: [600]

This is why in a different tradition it is shown as the Sphinx. If you want to cross the desert, the Sphinx says, "You must answer only one question". The person says "I have done my PhD in the a world-renowned university. Ask me any question, what will you ask?" It is seemingly, apparently, a very foolish question: "Who is that creature who walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three at night?" Even a child will say, "It is we, human beings". But if you do not answer correctly, the Sphinx will slay you; if you do answer correctly, it will let you pass. But the way Oedipus answers, it is different. He does not say it like the others. He says, "I am the answer." There is a poem called "A Vision of Science" where Sri Aurobindo brings out this story about the riddle of the Sphinx. In the larger context of the poem, it is religion which is passing from the scene and telling science:

Thou thinkest term and end for thee are not;

But though thy pride is great, thou hast forgot
The Sphinx that waits for man beside the way.

All questions thou mayst answer, but one day
Her question shall await thee. That reply,
As all we must; for they, who cannot, die.
She slays them and their mangled bodies lie
Upon the highways of eternity.
Therefore, if thou wouldst live, know first this one thing,
Who thou art in this dungeon labouring.” [CWSA 2: 205]

For this Sphinx, no visiting card works. When Death comes you may list out all your achievements: “Sir, you know, I am a super graduate (if there is a degree like that). Sir, at every conference they call me. Sir, see my list of achievements. See how many talks I have given on death and immortality.” But only one question is asked: “Have you realised That?”

The Mother described a vision she had on 3 February 1958 of a supramental boat. On that boat some human beings were going to the supramental life; some were fit and some were unfit. She says that the strange thing is that the criteria for going were completely different from what we think. She said the artificiality, the insincerity, the complete lack of truth of our mental values made her laugh uncontrollably at times during the next few days. All that they were doing there was scanning the people, like we have on airports, where you have to stand in line with your passport and then go through the scan. On that boat also they just scanned the body and they would see where it had a luminous orange light and where there were patches of grey, and they would accept or they would send away people based on that. She recognised some of the people whom they took: a couple of them were from the Ashram, some from outside and some from elsewhere. She said that all the things we value so much in earthly life, ordinary human life, were of no value. Then the disciples asked her what are the things we value here which have no value there and what is it that the supramental creation values. She said that the supramental creation values wideness, plasticity and equanimity. What it does not value is all those moral injunctions that people carry in their heads, ideas of ascetic purity, like taking your bath at the same hour every morning etc. Sometimes people ask, “When should I read *Savitri*, before bath or after bath?” to which I answer, “*Savitri* is the royal bath.” And they would ask, “Which direction

should we face, east or west?” And I would say, “Whichever side you face, there the light of *Savitri* will dawn.”

Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
A grey defeat pregnant with victory, [600]

Ultimately, the Lord, the Divine Love, is going to be victorious. There can be no doubt about it. And then he says, death is

A whip to lash us towards our deathless state. [601]

That is what it does. It reminds us always that life is short. Just imagine, suddenly, we are told life is 300 years. What will we do for 300 years? But now evolution is fast-forwarded for human beings. At the age of 50, 60 or 70 diseases start coming. So, let us realise the soul. Time is short. Let us sit in concentration for three days; we can realise Divine. That is what Sri Ramakrishna has said, and the Mother agrees. When somebody asked the Mother, she said something even greater: that this is for an average person, not for somebody all the time in intense study. This is the beauty. We remember how in three days Sri Aurobindo realised the state of nirvana. It is not such a difficult thing. It is just that we have to set our heart to it. We do not value it; that is the whole problem. Death comes to remind us that we have forgotten something. You may say, “Sir, I have done everything. I have got married, I have got children.” Then it reminds, “But you have forgotten something.” You continue, “My grandchild is in America, he going to return to India, and I have decided that he will have a big multi-storied hospital.” Again, it says, “You have forgotten something”. “Sir, I have seen the world”. Again the reminder, “You have forgotten something”. Then suddenly the doctor comes. Doctors act both ways: They are agents of God and also the opposite. Sometimes, they put into us so much fear that this will happen, or that will happen. I do not want to say that they become agents of death, but they may come and tell us that only a short time is left. If there is only a short time left, what do I do? At least now I must utter constantly the name of the Divine, to realise, to see everything clearly; then I see that death is a mask that has been worn by the Light, by the Divine, to spur us. That mask is not really needed. In one place in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo says, “Pain is the hammer of the

Gods to break / A dead resistance in the mortal's heart. Because the material in us is so crude. If we evolve, and develop, that material softens, and then His ways will also become gentle". So that is how the divine spurs us, and we have to go through this whole journey. Death is "A whip to lash us towards our deathless state" [601]. When we are in utter darkness it comes as the whiplash. But as we grow more and more, turn towards the Divine, then that whip becomes a snare; it becomes charming, bonding you with the Divine. It is the same thing but only taking a different form.

The unconscious world is the spirit's self-made room,
Eternal Night shadow of eternal Day.
Night is not our beginning nor our end;
She is the dark Mother in whose womb we have hid
Safe from too swift a waking to world-pain.
We came to her from a supernal Light,
By Light we live and to the Light we go. [601]

This is the truth that Savitri wants us to remember. When we begin to live by this truth, see every appearance as a mask and behind it the same One smiling, Sri Aurobindo's supramental yoga begins. It starts from a very high take-off point. What is that take-off point? Previous *yogas* could reach *nirvana*. But there is something still greater. In the Isha Upanishad, which is the foundation of *The Life Divine*, we have the verses [6-7]:

yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmany evānupaśyati
sarvabhūteṣu catmānam tato na vijugupsate
yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmaivābhūd vijānata
tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śokaḥ ekatvam anupaśyataḥ

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?
[CWSA 17: 7]

We must see the One everywhere, in everything, then begins the real game. Until then, it is only a shadow game. Then there is nothing to be worried about or afraid of.

But first the high Truth must set her feet on earth. This high Truth is, of course, the Supramental. The soul only on completing this upward evolution and entering into the supramental infinities can see the Divine everywhere and in everything. Sri Aurobindo had this experience in Alipore jail. We know it was a wonderful experience from what we have heard about it. Everybody had their own take on this experience, but when the Mother was asked, she said, “He had the experience of Supramental oneness.” So the disciples asked, “Supramental experience?” because people have this idea that the Supramental came much later for Sri Aurobindo. But She said, “Yes, it is the experience of the Supramental oneness.” Though he used the word ‘Narayana’ at one point, it is the experience of the Supramental oneness. Only in the Supermind is this mask completely removed.

Now let us connect this with the story of Yama. How was Yama born? Out of the meeting of Surya, the sun god, and Chaya. Sanghia is his original spouse. Sanghia is about becoming conscious. But then through Chaya, he begets a child, Yama, who is cast out. (These stories are told in many different ways.) And Yama becomes the guardian of the law in the mortal worlds, because we are not yet ready for the law of Surya. ‘*Satya Dharmaya dhrishtaye*’. When the soul evolves first to seeing the Divine everywhere, the next step is that we become conscious of the Law of Truth which is moved by the divine Will, no longer by its own pleasure and pain and seeking. When it is moved by the divine Will, because of *tapas*, because of surrender, because of faith, because of this Agni soaring higher and higher and reclaiming its Supramental home, then nature too begins to tune and dance according to that Law of Truth.

This is the game where material nature is upgraded. Right now it is upgraded to express the mental finites, but it can be upgraded to express the Supramental consciousness, Supramental love, Supramental delight, Supramental knowledge, Supramental power. Right now it is not yet there, and the soul cannot grow into fullness unless the nature is also upgraded. This is the paradox: If soul grows to a point and wants to enter into That, nature will not sustain its journey. It has to leave the nature and go. (That was the problem with

the old *yogas*; they abandoned the effort.) The reason why they are tied together is that as the soul grows, it also asks nature to follow; they need to go together.

The Mother gives a very nice example. Soul and nature are like those old-time husbands and wives: the husband walks in front and the wife follows behind. In earlier times wives remained at home. It was not only in India, but everywhere. They were meant to be at home and the husbands were walking, going places, coming back. Earlier, when people came to Pondicherry, to the Ashram, when they were asked, “Why have you come alone?” they would say, “She is there at home. She has to look after the home.” Now this is not the case, but this used to be the way of things. Then slowly it changed. Then they came together, but she was still a step behind. Now she leads, and the man follows her steps. This is the whole journey. They are tied together, soul and nature. If you abandon one, it will not attain its fullness; one cannot even do that. That is what these magical lines say. The two are One, nature and soul both need to be taken to their ultimate heights, which the Supermind alone can do. Sri Aurobindo says,

As long as Nature lasts, he too is there,
For this is sure that he and she are one;
Even when he sleeps, he keeps her on his breast:
Whoever leaves her, he will not depart
To repose without her in the Unknowable.
There is a truth to know, a work to do;
Her play is real; a Mystery he fulfils:
There is a plan in the Mother’s deep world-whim,
A purpose in her vast and random game.

[72]

She, the Divine Mother, brings down the great realisation, because we have missed out on nature. She too must be upgraded. See, that is why the transformation is needed. Transformation literally means that this ignorant lower nature is upgraded to a higher Supernature. Unless one can do that, one may have the best of realisations, but will not be able to express it in outer nature. It is like the computer: Unless you support the latest hardware by upgrading the software, you cannot use it. There are capacities in the soul that cannot express themselves

through nature as it stands today. Unless we transform it, the fullness of the divine life cannot be lived upon earth. Transformation is not a freak; it is a logical consequence in the inevitable process of evolution. Here Sri Aurobindo reveals:

This ever she meant since the first dawn of life,
This constant will she covered with her sport, [72]

It is so nice to look at this world as a sport. Sometimes you fall, sometimes you are shown a red card, sometimes a green card, sometimes a yellow card, sometimes you win a goal, sometimes you are injured, sometimes you rejoice. But at the end of the day it is a wonderful sport through which we grow.

To evoke a Person in the impersonal Void,
With the Truth Light strike earth's massive roots of trance,
Wake a dumb self in the inconscient depths
And raise a lost Power from its python sleep
That the eyes of the Timeless might look out from Time
And the world manifest the unveiled Divine. [72-73]

So, here we come back to where we started: “But first high Truth must set her feet on earth”. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo was engaged in: Bringing down the supramental consciousness to touch this physical and transform it. But this is a collective process; it is not one being suddenly growing into the Supramental. To facilitate it he took the plunge towards the darkest base. And for the first time, we saw Supermind touching matter and staying there for 111 hours, visible even to the naked eye. He did predict that:

God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done. [55]

This was the first step, and then, when the Mother physically withdrew – what we call withdrawal from the outer world – she transmuted the physical. This is going to be ultimately the supramental change. But in the process, where we stand today and during the journey, there are many intermediate steps, stages where our nature will begin to release hidden powers. There will be a new kind of mind, which we already see in children today; a new heart; new orientation towards

life; a new kind of passion heaving human life towards things which we could not have imagined; and even the body will develop new capacities. Maybe I personally – not maybe, but for sure – do not have the capacity to heal. But the body itself has the capacity and it is so wonderful for all of us. Why is it that often the body can't heal itself? In animals we see healing capacity to prolong life. We see it in plants: how trees regenerate. We see salamanders, how they regenerate. It is just that we are being killed by the agencies of death and their companies. (I am not talking about pharma companies. They are not the only ones.) They will not allow us to be empowered.

In fact, we treat our ailments more and more as if we were not living bodies, but dead bodies, which have to be manipulated from outside. This is what needs to shift: it is a process, there will be many steps and stages. Maybe it is a 1000 years project, but that does not matter. And death will try to deny it, to cast doubt, to make it seem impossible. But those who stay with faith and will are those who cross over. This is the journey. “First high Truth must set her feet on earth”. And the beauty is that Sri Aurobindo uses the word ‘her’: ‘first high Truth must set *her* feet on earth’. Why? Because this is not Truth in its static aspect. It is not ‘*Surya yada*’; it is ‘Savitri’ the power, the splendour of the *Shakti* which has to set her feet. The divine Shakti must begin to move us.

And man aspire to the Eternal's light
And all his members feel the Spirit's touch
And all his life obey an inner Force. [708]

This is the condition: instead of our own self-will or somebody else's will, we must more and more tune ourselves to the divine Will – in our thoughts, in our heart and feelings, in our life impulses, in our very body. And eventually, as a high crown of all:

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

This is the journey Sri Aurobindo has given us, promised us. It is not merely a prophesy; it is a promise. It is the Lord's promise which

is sure. In fact, it is the only promise which is for certain. Nothing eventually can stand between that promise and the human soul that has received it.

With that promise I would close on this 150th year of Sri Aurobindo's birth. This special year is one more milestone on the way towards the great goal that he has set before us, which he alone can accomplish, and is already on the way of being accomplished. As the Mother said, "Sri Aurobindo is the Future advancing towards its realisation" [CWM 13: 5].

The Infinite Adventure

Sri Aurobindo

On the waters of a nameless Infinite
 My skiff is launched; I have left the human shore.
 All fades behind me and I see before
The unknown abyss and one pale pointing light.
An unseen Hand controls my rudder.
 Night Walls up the sea in a black corridor, —
 An unconscious Hunger's lion plaint and roar
Or the ocean sleep of a dead Eremite.

I feel the greatness of the Power
 I seek Surround me; below me are its giant deeps,
 Beyond, the invisible height no soul has trod.
I shall be merged in the Lonely and Unique
 And wake into a sudden blaze of God,
 The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse

Reflections on Passages in *Savitri*: Savitri and the Mother

Larry Seidlitz

This is the second in a series of planned articles on “Reflections on Passages in *Savitri*”. In the previous issue of *Invocation*, the first article of the series was titled “Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo”, and reflected on how a passage of 38 lines beginning from the start of Book I, Canto 3 pertaining to King Aswapati, seemed to well-characterize Sri Aurobindo himself. The present article reflects on how a passage of exactly the same number of 38 lines, appearing just three pages earlier on pages 19-20, pertaining to Savitri, seems to well-characterize the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is interesting that both passages, which stand out from the surrounding text in directly describing the main protagonists of the epic in a highly elevated style and substance, separated by just three pages, have exactly the same number of lines. Perhaps it may be another one of those fascinating symmetries that sometimes occur in *Savitri*, some which have been pointed out by commentators (e.g., Lohman, 2000). Like in the previous article, I will quote the passage in segments and reflect on each segment in turn. It begins:

In her the superhuman cast its seed.
Inapt to fold its mighty wings of dream
Her spirit refused to hug the common soil,
Or, finding all life’s golden meanings robbed,
Compound with earth, struck from the starry list,
Or quench with black despair the God-given light.
Accustomed to the eternal and the true,
Her being conscious of its divine founts
Asked not from mortal frailty pain’s relief,
Patched not with failure bargain or compromise.

[19]

The first line is dramatic and serves to demarcate the passage from the previous text, which either directly or indirectly pertained to Savitri but intermittently describes mankind, the circumstances of earthly life, fate, and related issues. We often find these powerful one-line sentences marking a transition to a new movement or thought in the poem. Here the focus is shifted directly and emphatically onto Savitri herself and almost announces her as an Avatar. The word “superhuman” here is interesting, in contrast to, for example, “the Divine” or “the Divine Mother”. We see in Sri Aurobindo’s last prose writings about the Superman that he envisioned the coming of an intermediate being before the coming of the supramental being which would be human in its birth but would have a supramental consciousness. And we see in some of the Mother’s conversations after 1 January 1969 reported in *Mother’s Agenda* that she had realised this superman consciousness, and was, in effect, the first human being to do so.

The remainder of the passage emphasizes the idea that Savitri is different and greater than ordinary human beings, and illustrates this contrast with various images depicting how humans “hug the common soil” whereas she refused to do this, nor would she abandon or compromise her “God-given light”. It seems to be a critical commentary on our common human tendencies, and puts forward a better model to emulate. And it seems particularly pertinent to spiritual aspirants of the Integral Yoga, who have the higher ideal, but who are so weighed down by their human nature that they make compromises between their ideals and their earthly attachments.

Two lines that also stand out as being expressive of Savitri’s divinity, her Avatarhood, are the lines “Accustomed to the eternal and the true, / Her being conscious of its divine founts”. In the earlier essay on Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo, I concentrated at some length on the nature of Avatarhood and the clear signs of Aswapati’s Avatarhood in the selected passage. In the present passage this issue is not so prominent, but a few of the lines, such as these two, suggest it. One of the most illuminating sentences on Avatarhood in Sri Aurobindo’s *Letters on Yoga* is the following: “An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and

life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence” [*Letters on Yoga I*: 485]. We see in these lines that she is conscious of the presence of the Divine within her and has grown accustomed to it, suggesting the experience is long-term and perhaps one of an identification with it.

An interesting line that we may highlight for its applicability to the Mother is the line “Asked not from mortal frailty pain’s relief”. Those who have read *Mother’s Agenda* will understand the terrible suffering that the Mother went through in the course of her transformation. What is perhaps less well understood was its utility. The following passage from *Notes on the Way* helps illuminate this aspect:

It is true, the body must have much goodwill—mine happens to have goodwill. And it is not a mental goodwill, it is truly a bodily goodwill. It accepts all inconveniences... But it is the attitude that is important, not the consequences (I am sure that the inconveniences are not indispensable); it is the attitude that is important. We must be like this (*gesture of open hands*). In fact I have found that in the majority of cases surrender to the Divine does not necessarily mean trust in the Divine—because you surrender to the Divine, you say “Even if you make me suffer, I surrender myself”, but it is an absolute lack of trust! Yes, it is really amusing, surrender *does not imply* trust; trust is something else, it is ... a kind of knowledge—an “unshakable” knowledge which nothing can disturb—that it is *we* who change into difficulties, sufferings and miseries what, in the Divine Consciousness, is ... perfect Peace. It is *we* who bring about this little transformation....

Indeed it is the consciousness that must change, even the consciousness of the cells, you understand?... That is a radical change...

If you like, one could say that at every minute one has the feeling that one may live or one may die (*gesture of a slight tilt to one side or the other*) or one may live eternally. At every minute it is like that. And the difference (between the two sides) is so imperceptible that one cannot say: do this and you will be on this side, do that and you will be on the other

side. This is not possible. It is a *way of being* that is almost
indescribable. [CWM 11: 282-283]

The Mother makes a crucial distinction here between surrender and trust, and suggests that both are needed. Surrender means acceptance of whatever comes, whether it is bliss or suffering. But trust is something more, a knowledge that it is we who take what comes from the Divine and change it into something else which may be suffering, weakness, death, etc. – that these things do not exist in the Divine. We might say trust means acceptance of only that which truly comes from the Divine. This, however, is vastly different from seeking relief from suffering; it means entering a state in which bodily suffering or any other type of suffering does not exist. It is a change in the consciousness, even in the consciousness of the cells of the body. The experience of suffering is indicative that one is not in the true consciousness, and thus its utility is in pointing that out so one can adjust the consciousness to the true attitude.

The final line is somewhat puzzling: “Patched not with failure bargain or compromise”. It would be more easily understandable if he had said “Patched not failure with bargain or compromise”, suggesting she would not hide or cover over a failure with a bargain or compromise. But the way it is put indicates that she would not patch a bargain or compromise with failure. Perhaps it implies that normally people make compromises between their ideals and limitations and in this way they are unsuccessfully reconciled, they are patched with failure. These kinds of bargains or compromises lead not to successful integration and transformation of the limitations, but to failure. This type of bargain or compromise she refused to make.

Now let us continue with the passage in *Savitri*:

A work she had to do, a word to speak:
Writing the unfinished story of her soul
In thoughts and actions graved in Nature’s book,
She accepted not to close the luminous page,
Cancel her commerce with eternity,
Or set a signature of weak assent
To the brute balance of the world’s exchange.

In this part of the passage we are told that Savitri has an important work to carry out. This work relates to the unfinished story of her soul, which suggests it is a labor that has been ongoing through life-times. This story is being engraved in Nature's book, which suggests that it is long work involving the unfolding of Nature in its evolutionary progression. It is a work that cuts deep into nature, her thoughts and actions must alter or direct its future course. To carry out this work she must keep up her commerce with eternity, her connection and exchange with the eternal. It suggests she must remain conscious of her eternal soul, and perhaps even that she must not concede to death. The word "commerce" especially connotes an exchange of materials or energy. Her work involves drawing energy from the eternal and bringing it into mortal life; this exchange she refuses to cancel. And she must not give her consent to the "brute balance of the world's exchange", suggesting the present brute status of the world's exchange with the eternal, which involves death, disintegration, and rebirth in new forms.

All of this applies to the Mother as well, as she herself has explained. As evidence of this, we may quote as example this prayer from Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*, written on 26 June 1914:

Hail to Thee, O Lord, Master of the world. Give us the power to do the work without being attached to it and to develop the capacities of individual manifestation without living in the illusion of personality. Strengthen our vision of reality; make firm our perception of unity; deliver us from all ignorance, all darkness.

We do not ask for the perfection of the instrument, knowing that in the world of relativities all perfection is relative; this instrument, fashioned for action in this world, must, in order to be able to act, belong to this world; but the consciousness that animates it should be identified with Thine, it should be the universal and eternal consciousness animating the varied multitude of bodies.

O Lord, grant that we may rise above the ordinary forms of manifestation so that Thou mayst find the tools necessary for Thy new manifestation.

Do not let us lose sight of the goal; grant that we may always be united with Thy force, the force which the earth does not yet know and which Thou hast given us the mission to reveal to it.

In a deep meditation, all the states of manifestation consecrate themselves to Thy manifestation. [CWM 1: 186]

Regarding the writing of the unfinished story of her soul, and my proposition that this suggests a work that has been ongoing through many life times, it may be interesting to recall this written exchange between a disciple and Sri Aurobindo:

It is said that you and the Mother have been on earth since its creation. But what have you been doing for so many millions of years in disguise? I say “disguise” because it is only now that you are showing yourselves to the world in your real nature.

Carrying on the evolution.

I fail to understand what you mean by “Carrying on the evolution.” Could you explain this more fully?

That would mean writing the whole of human history. I can only say that as there are special descents to carry on the evolution to a farther stage, so also something of the Divine is always there to help through each stage itself in one direction or another. [CWSA 32: 88]

Now let us continue with the passage:

A force in her that toiled since earth was made,
Accomplishing in life the great world-plan,
Pursuing after death immortal aims,
Repugned to admit frustration’s barren role
Forfeit the meaning of her birth in Time,
Obey the government of the casual fact
Or yield her high destiny up to passing Chance.

In some respects, this sentence reiterates the ideas expressed in the previous sentence, and the earlier commentary is also applicable here. But one striking line – “Pursuing after death immortal aims” – elicits the memory of a critical incident in the Mother’s life. In particular, on the night of 2-3 April 1962 the Mother suffered a total

cardiac arrest. As part of a longer conversation with Satprem the next morning, and reported by him from memory and later read out to her for confirmation, she said:

I woke up at two and noticed that the heart had been affected by the attack of this group that is wanting to take my life away from this body, because they know that as long as I am in a body upon earth their purpose cannot succeed. Their first attack was many years ago in vision and action. It happened during the night and I spoke of it to no one. I noted the date, and if I can come out of this crisis, I will find it and give it out. They would have liked me dead years ago. It is they who are responsible for these attacks on my life. Until now I am alive because the Lord wants me to be alive, otherwise I would have gone long ago.

I am no more in my body. I have left the Lord to take care of it, if it is to have the Supramental or not. I know, and I have also said, that now is the last fight. If the purpose for which this body is alive is to be fulfilled, that is to say, the first steps towards the Supramental transformation, then it will continue today. It is the Lord's decision. I am not even asking what He has decided. If the body is incapable of bearing the fight, if it has to be dissolved, then humanity will pass through a critical time. What the Asuric Force that has succeeded in taking the appearance of Sri Aurobindo will create is a new religion or thought, perhaps cruel and merciless, in the name of the Supramental Realisation. But everybody must know that it is not true, it is not Sri Aurobindo's teaching, not the truth of his teaching. The truth of Sri Aurobindo is a truth of love and light and mercy. He is good and great and compassionate and divine.... *Et c'est Lui qui aura la victoire finale....*

[*Mother's Agenda 3: 77*]

The attack on her body had already started two weeks earlier in mid-March and her physical condition had already become grave and life-threatening before the cardiac arrest. When the above conversation was read out to her she added: "The fight is within the body. It can't go on. They must be defeated or else this body is defeated.... All depends on what the Lord decides...." She continued the fight

with the Asuric Force attacking her until the night of 12-13 April, when she had a decisive victorious experience which she described in remarkable words. Immediately thereafter she returned to her personal bodily consciousness and resumed the work of transforming her bodily consciousness.

The last lines of the *Savitri* passage quoted above stir another reflection. Satprem lamented in his commentary in *Mother's Agenda* about the end of Mother's life, that misunderstanding and poor judgment on the part of those looking after the Mother contributed to her death. The lines here suggest that the fate of the Mother's Avataric mission could not be thwarted by such actions, whatever errors may or may not have been committed. The lines suggest that she would complete the work she had to do, which is described in the quote from 3 April 1962 as taking "the first steps towards the Supramental transformation". In the remaining eleven years of the Mother's earthly life, many great strides were taken in that transformation which are explained in *Mother's Agenda* and *Notes on the Way*.

In her own self she found her high recourse;

She matched with the iron law her sovereign right:
Her single will opposed the cosmic rule.
To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose.
At the Unseen's knock upon her hidden gates
Her strength made greater by the lightning's touch
Awoke from slumber in her heart's recess.
It bore the stroke of That which kills and saves.

Sri Aurobindo left his body in 1950 and the Mother had to carry on their work of taking "the first steps towards the Supramental transformation without his physical presence or aid for another 23 years. Of course, he remained in a subtle physical region close to earth and in frequent communication with the Mother and continued the work from the inner planes. But his physical departure was nevertheless of great consequence to the Mother. Speaking about this on 4 December 1962, she said:

And with Sri Aurobindo, there was such peaceful certitude,
there were no more problems, no more difficulties: the future

was opening up, luminous and peaceful and certain. Nothing, nothing, no words can describe what a collapse it was for the body when Sri Aurobindo left.

It's only because Sri Aurobindo's conscious will entered into it – left one body and entered the other.... I was standing facing his body, you know, and I materially felt the friction as his will entered into me (his knowledge and his will): “You will accomplish my Work.” He said to this body: “You will accomplish my Work.” It's the one thing that kept me alive.

[*Mother's Agenda* 3: 298]

And later in another conversation regarding Sri Aurobindo's passing, on 28 March 1964, she added:

Sri Aurobindo told me very clearly (because, of course, he saw, he knew), he said to me, “Only your body can withstand THAT, has the power to withstand” [*Mother's Agenda* 5: 63]

Single line sentences in *Savitri* stand out and are always important. Here there two that illustrate this rule: “To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose” and “It bore the stroke of That which kills and saves”, the former referring to Savitri and the latter referring to her strength which was “made greater by the lightning's touch”. Sri Aurobindo says that lightning represents “the dynamic force of the higher consciousness acting at intervals to enlighten the rest of the being” [*Letters on Yoga II*: 149]. The first line directly asserts Savitri's role: to stay or stop the wheels of Doom. Doom suggests a fate of inevitable death or destruction, and “wheels” here especially highlight the mechanical and circular and unending natural process of life followed by death followed by rebirth. Savitri has come to halt or stop this process. She has come to confront and conquer death. To accomplish this, she has gained a strength that could bear the stroke of That which kills and saves. It reminds us of the quote above in which Sri Aurobindo told the Mother “only your body can withstand THAT, has the power to withstand...” By “THAT” we may presume he referred to the supramental consciousness and force in the body and its work of physical transformation. Of course, Savitri confronting and conquering death is the main theme of *Savitri* and encompasses much of the last part of the poem, just as it was the Mother's main

work that encompassed much of the latter part of her earthly life and which is recorded so extensively in *Mother's Agenda*.

The notion of “That which kills and saves” is crucial both in the story of Savitri and in the Mother’s life in their finding the key to transformation and the conquering of death. This juxtaposition of the terms “transformation” and “conquering of death” is important here, for it is not so much the destruction of death but its transformation, and that transformation is possible because both life and death come from “That”, from the Divine. In the poem we see that when Savitri conquers death, his body is “eaten by light”, and then later, he reappears to Savitri in the guise of a wonderful god who grants her the boon of Satyavan’s return to life: “Transfigured was the formidable shape.... Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face” [679]. We see signs of this also in the Mother’s comments. We see a hint of it in a quote already given earlier when the Mother was on the brink of death: “If the purpose for which this body is alive is to be fulfilled, that is to say, the first steps towards the Supramental transformation, then it will continue today. It is the Lord’s decision. I am not even asking what He has decided.” [*Mother's Agenda* 3: 77]. But we find it expressed in other ways too. For example on 30 March 1966 she said: “What the human beings call “life” and “death,” the continuation of this present organization or its cessation, it was absolutely a question of choice (something like a choice – there are some who say “the Divine’s Will” or “the Supreme’s Will”; it is a way of saying, but it is ... it is something that chooses). And there was at the same time the exact ... it was more than a feeling, it was a lived knowledge of what is the individual and why the individual and how He can continue to be the individual or stop to be the individual...” [*Mother's Agenda* 7: 46]

The Mother was learning in the cells of her body to be surrendered like this to the Divine, and when the cells were surrendered fully, then things were fine, but if there was some resistance, then there could be suffering, or perhaps even death. On March 1972, she said:

The body knows this is necessary for the supramental body to be formed: it must be ENTIRELY under the Influence of the Divine. No compromises, no half measures, no “It

will come later.” ... It’s like a constant feeling of hovering between life and death, and the minute you take the right attitude – the minute the PART CONCERNED takes the right attitude – all is well. All is well, quite naturally and easily. Really extraordinary. But it’s also terrible because it means perpetual danger. I don’t know, perhaps a hundred times a day, a sensation like: life or ... dissolution (I mean a sensation in the cells). And if they become tense as is their wont, it gets awful. But they’re learning to ... (*Mother opens her hands in a gesture of surrender*). Then things are fine.

It’s as if the body were being practically obliged to learn eternity. [*Mother’s Agenda* 12: 44].

Now let’s read the last part of the passage:

Across the awful march no eye can see,
Barring its dreadful route no will can change,
She faced the engines of the universe;
A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels:
Its giant workings paused in front of a mind,
Its stark conventions met the flame of a soul. [20]

The first line here is intriguing; it is not immediately clear what is meant by this “awful march no eye can see”. We find that Sri Aurobindo uses this image and word “march” several times in the poem. There is one brief passage that comes late in the poem which seems to reveal what may be meant here. While Savitri is searching for her soul, she encounters several beings, one of whom is described as “A voice of the sense-shackled human mind” [516]. It is this being who in his long speech utters the following:

I can foresee the acts of Matter’s force,
But not the march of the destiny of man:
He is driven upon paths he did not choose,
He falls trampled underneath the rolling wheels. [519]

This seems to describe the “awful march”; it is “the march of the destiny of man”, and here too this sense-shackled mind cannot foresee it. Further, in this march, man seems to be driven upon paths he did not choose, and moreover “he falls trampled underneath the rolling

wheels". We may also suggest that much of *Savitri* was written during the second world war, when soldiers were marching into battle at the command of their superiors and often to their deaths. This image of soldiers marching to their deaths also may have been in the poet's mind when writing these passages. There is another passage referring to a march which brings out this aspect more fully:

There is a clamour of battle, a tramp, a march:
A cry arises like a moaning sea,
A desperate laughter under the blows of death,
A doom of blood and sweat and toil and tears.
Men die that man may live and God be born. [444]

The last line is especially powerful and gives what we could call a reason or even a justification for the terrible ordeal mankind undergoes in its march of destiny.

We may mention one other interesting occurrence of the word "march" in the poem, and it brings home its more personal significance in terms of the story of Savitri's ordeal. It comes as she wakes up in the morning on "the day that Satyavan must die".

Awake she endured the moments' serried march
And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,
And heard the ignorant cry of living things.
Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene
Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate.
Immobile in herself, she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die. [10]

Here the march refers to the passing of the moments of time, those heavy foreboding moments which Savitri understands are among Satyavan's last. Here too "Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate". This juxtaposition of Time and Fate is interesting; of course time is the gradual, moment by moment unfolding of fate. Perhaps to change fate one must transcend time and stand in the Timeless.

In the passage we are analyzing, Savitri stands "across the awful march" and bars its "dreadful route no will can change". Savitri is going to change the course of human destiny. "She faced the engines of the universe". This latter line brings in a different but related image

to that of “the awful march”, and it hearkens back to the earlier line of the passage already discussed: “To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose”. Here we get an image of the universe as a mechanical engine, its gears turning round and round, unconsciously. It follows the same circular movement: life, death, life, death, forever. The word “universe” gives us a sense of the cosmic dimensions of the problem, the immensity of the challenge that Savitri faces. And then come the last three lines, illustrating Savitri’s intervention:

A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels:
Its giant workings paused in front of a mind,
Its stark conventions met the flame of a soul. [20]

We see Savitri confronting fate with her heart, mind and soul. Her heart has a deep and intense love for Satyavan, who represents the soul of man “descended into the grip of death and ignorance” [*Savitri*: Author’s note]. Her mind was one that we see later in the poem was silent: “A silent spirit pervaded silent Space” [544]. And we see later that this “flame of a soul” was discovered deep within herself: “A house was there all made of flame and light / And crossing a wall of doorless living fire / There suddenly she met her secret soul” [525-526]. It is with an integral realisation of the Divine that Savitri confronts the “driving wheels” of fate, of karma and death and rebirth. Of course, Mother brought also to this confrontation with death the spiritually awakened cells of her body. As Sri Aurobindo says, “Almighty powers are shut in Nature’s cells” [370].

This remarkable passage powerfully describes both Savitri’s and the Mother’s character and mission in life. It is difficult for us to fathom the enormity of the challenge they faced, to confront and conquer death itself, but Sri Aurobindo here conveys it to us in moving and inspiring lines. It is one of many mantric passages in the poem, imbued with the light and power of the highest reaches of consciousness, and deserves to be read again and again to absorb its subtle suggestions and its transforming effects.

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The Ilion Mystery – Part 1

Claude de Warren

When one approaches Sri Aurobindo's poem *Ilion*, one may be captivated by the poem's epic breath, by its particular musicality, or by some mysterious inner resonance. Indeed, the subject of the poem is the last day of the Trojan War sung almost 3000 years ago by the Greek poet Homer in the *Iliad*. Although one may be more captivated by the adventures of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, the various attempts to end a conflict given the psychology of the characters and the interventions of outside forces can keep one on the edge of one's seat. Or, if the reader is a poetry enthusiast, he may be surprised by a musicality and rhythm unfamiliar to English poetry, that of ancient Greek poetry. Or he may sense that this poem is not only about a war of the past, relatively modest and usual after all, but also about the uncertain present time, especially since Sri Aurobindo makes many unexpected references to it.

But a multitude of questions arises that confront the reader.

- Why did Sri Aurobindo compose a poem of nearly 5000 lines in dactylic hexameters, a versification also known as quantitative metre and used by ancient Greek poets such as Homer?
- Why did he leave it unfinished, as he himself stated in a note when the first extract of 371 lines from *Ilion* was published in 1942, devoting most of his time to *Savitri* and his correspondence with his disciples?
- Why did he choose as the theme of the poem the last day of the Trojan War, sung in the *Iliad* by Homer?

- Why did he devote so much time and energy to this poem when he knew that no one would understand its meaning for a long time?
- And above all, why did he never give the slightest indication of its deeper meaning?

After 30 years of study devoted to the interpretation of Greek mythology in relation to the writings of Sri Aurobindo, I am willing to share some answers in this and the following article.

We must first recall Sri Aurobindo's relationship with European culture and his Greco-Latin roots. Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. Ghose, wanted his sons to be raised as perfect Englishmen. At home, only English speaking was allowed, and Sri Aurobindo had to relearn his native language on his return to India. Dr. Ghose also wanted high positions for them. To this end, he sent his sons to England for their studies when Sri Aurobindo was just seven years old. Sri Aurobindo first received his education which included Latin from the couple to whom his father had entrusted them. Then, in 1884, at the age of 12, Sri Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul's School in London. The headmaster was so pleased with his mastery of Latin that he took it upon himself to teach him Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes of the school.

Afterwards, Sri Aurobindo joined King's College in Cambridge. In June 1890, when he was not even 18, he took the Indian Civil Service qualifying examination and scored record marks in Greek. Thus Sri Aurobindo had developed early on a perfect command of the so-called Classics which traditionally refers to Classical Greek and Roman literature and their related original languages, Ancient Greek and Latin. Sri Aurobindo could read Greek in the original and even composed poetry in Greek, poetry being a subject of special interest to him since a young age.

But could this passion for poetry alone justify writing a poem of nearly 5000 lines in dactylic hexameters? It is certain that Sri Aurobindo admired the rhythm of the ancient Greek and Latin poets. He himself said: "The rhythm that was so great, so beautiful or, at the lowest, so strong or so happy in the ancient tongues, the hexameter

of Homer and Virgil...” (CWSA 26: 322). But he had found that all attempts to transpose the ancient rhythms to the English language had failed. Thus, in his essay *On Quantitative Metre*, we read:

A definitive verdict seems to have been pronounced by the critical mind on the long-continued attempt to introduce quantitative metres into English poetry. It is evident that the attempt has failed, and it can even be affirmed that it was predestined to failure; quantitative metre is something alien to the rhythm of the language... Accentual metre is normal in English poetry, stress metres are possible, but quantitative metres can only be constructed by a *tour de force*.

(CWSA 26: 317)

A poet trying to naturalise in English the power of the ancient hexameter or to achieve a new form of its greatness or beauty natural to the English tongue must have absorbed its rhythm into his very blood, made it a part of himself, then only could he bring it out from within him as a self-expression of his own being, realised and authentic. If he relies, not on this inner inspiration, but solely on his technical ability for the purpose, there will be a failure; yet this is all that has been done.

(CWSA 26: 321)

Sri Aurobindo took up the challenge, achieving this *tour de force*. He mentioned that it was one of his Cambridge contemporaries, H.N. Ferrar, who had first given the clue to the hexameter in English by reading out a line from Arthur Hugh Clough. Sri Aurobindo was thus the first to successfully adapt this very ancient Greek quantitative metre to the English language. But was it necessary for him to write a poem of nearly 5,000 lines to demonstrate this? The ten or so short poems at the end of his essay would probably have been sufficient.

We must then examine the purpose of writing this poem when Sri Aurobindo knew full well that no one would understand its meaning for a long time. In fact, no study on the meaning of *Ilion* has been published since Sri Aurobindo left his body over seventy years ago. Those who have studied Sri Aurobindo's works to a minimum will no doubt agree that he never wrote anything without a reason and that all his writings were the result of inner experiences. Sri Aurobindo

himself stated that: “I am supposed to be a philosopher, but I never studied philosophy – everything I wrote came from Yogic experience, knowledge, and inspiration. So too my greater power over poetry and perfect expression was acquired in these last days not by reading and seeing how other people wrote, but from the heightening of my consciousness and the greater inspiration that came from the heightening” [Nirodbaran, noted on 11 September 1934]. There is no reason why *Ilion* should be an exception. Indeed, it seems absurd that Sri Aurobindo should have expended so much energy merely to replace an ancient lost epic poem dealing with the deeds of the heroes of a war that may have taken place over three thousand years ago. This lost poem followed immediately after the *Iliad* in the suite of epic poems about the Trojan War, a suite that the academics call “The Trojan Cycle”. Of the eight poems in this cycle – *The Cypria*, *The Iliad*, *The Aethiopis*, *The Little Iliad*, *The Sack of Troy or Iliou Persis*, *The Nostoi (The Returns)*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Telegony* – only two have survived, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, attributed to Homer.

The subject of the *Iliad* concerns the last days of the last year of a war that lasted ten years. With *Ilion*, Sri Aurobindo began to compose a poem that recounted the events following those described in the *Iliad*. He took up the theme of the *Aethiopis* composed by Arctinus of Miletus in the eighth century BC. According to the surviving summaries of the *Aethiopis*, the poem opened shortly after the death of the Trojan hero Hector with the arrival of the Amazon warrior Penthesilea who had come to support the Trojans. She had a moment of glory in battle, but Achilles killed her. The poem *Posthomerica* of Quintus of Smyrna, dated 3rd century AD, also begins with the arrival of Penthesilea. Sri Aurobindo however does not relate the death of this Amazon queen because he completed only eight songs out of the probable twelve or even twenty-four that were to constitute the poem *Ilion* according to tradition.

Let us look at the history of the composition of the poem. According to Sri Aurobindo himself, *Ilion*, whose title was then “*The Fall of Troy: An Epic*”, was “commenced in Jail, 1909, resumed and completed in Pondicherry, April and May 1910” [CWSA 2: 707], so a few years before he started *Savitri*. The first known manuscript of *Savitri* is dated 1916.

It is not known whether, lacking the means to write in prison, he “entrusted it to his memory” as he said he had done with other poems. Sri Aurobindo did indeed have an extraordinary memory, as many accounts attest.

We need to emphasise an event that occurred during his internment, as he himself tells us: “A moment’s illumination in Alipore jail opened my vision and since then I have understood with the intuitive perception and vision” [CWSA 35: 264]. It is therefore logical to consider that this moment opened the doors to an understanding of the profound meaning of Greek mythology, of which he already knew all the themes in depth. Having solved the problem of versification and the problem of the hidden meaning of Greek myths, he was able to continue the work of the ancient Greeks who, as we shall see later, translated into stories the spiritual path up to the yoga in the depths of the vital.

Between 1910 and 1917, Sri Aurobindo transformed these early verses into an epic poem comprising several books, while giving priority to the monthly magazine *Arya*. In the ‘Notes’ of the volume of his *Complete Works* titled *Collected Poems*, we read:

During the twenties and thirties, Sri Aurobindo worked on *Ilion* from time to time. Even up to 1935, he complained, not without humour, that he could not spare even an hour a day from his correspondence: ‘In three years, *Savitri*, *Ilion* and I don’t know how many more would be rewritten, completed, finished to perfection’” [CWSA 2: 708]. He in fact never found time to complete *Ilion*, but in 1942 he revised the beginning of the first book that was to serve as an illustration of the quantitative hexameter in “*On Quantitative Metre*” an essay that was published in *Collected Poems and Plays* in 1942 and also in a separate booklet issued the same year. This revised passage of 371 lines was the only portion of *Ilion* to appear in print during his lifetime. The full text was transcribed from his manuscripts and published in 1957. A new edition, corrected against the manuscripts and with the addition of the opening of the fragmentary ninth book, was brought out in 1989. [CWSA 2: 708]

Although Sri Aurobindo had intuited the deep meaning of Greek mythology, but he explained absolutely nothing about *Ilion*. If he had

to explain the deeper meaning of *Ilion* or even suggest that it had a hidden deeper meaning, he would have had to reveal the symbolic content of the whole Greek mythology, which would have taken him far too long. Refusing to give any explanation about *Ilion*, Sri Aurobindo knew that it would probably be decades before this poem would be understood. However, Sri Aurobindo never completely abandoned *Ilion*, a sign that he considered the poem to be of great interest to future humanity.

Lacking this intuitive understanding of the symbolism of Greek mythology, and without any explanation by Sri Aurobindo, the author of this article took over thirty years to discover the hidden meaning of this mythology, gradually uncovering the coding keys. The full interpretation was published in French in three volumes under the title “Mythologie Grecque, Yoga de l’Occident” (Greek Mythology, Yoga of the West). It is available in its entirety on the website greekmyths-interpretation.com where it is updated regularly.

The symbolism underlying this episode near the end of the Trojan War covered only a specific moment in the spiritual path related to the great reversal of Yoga from the heights of the Spirit to Yoga in the body. Sri Aurobindo could not, therefore, include the totality of his infinitely wider vision and experience. That is probably one of the reasons why he turned his full attention to his poem *Savitri*. Moreover, the original legend of Savitri and the Indian mythology were relatively more known and accessible.

Greek mythology as a pictorial description of the spiritual journey

Before turning to *Ilion*, we need to understand the context in which the poem is set, and in particular, the position and symbolism of the Trojan War in the spiritual journey. It is not the intention here to give an exhaustive interpretation of the meaning of the Greek mythology, which, as has been said, can be found on the website greekmyths-interpretation.com, but only what is essential to approach the poem *Ilion*.

Greek mythology is built around genealogical lineages. The evolution of animal consciousness is described in the lineage of Pontos. The evolution of human consciousness is described in the lineage of

Ouranos and his children, the Titans. The Titans do not have the meaning that Sri Aurobindo gives them, namely, powers of darkness working for division. In Greek mythology, they are the powers of creation arising from the infinite Consciousness symbolised by the starry sky, Ouranos. The children of the Titans represent the powers and processes that govern the world of forms, including gods and deities of all kinds. They may also begin the evolutionary lineages.

Among these evolutionary lineages of Titans, two are of particular importance because almost all the myths are in their progeny. The first lineage is that of the Titan Japet, whose name evokes the idea of a link or bridge. It corresponds to the process of ascending the seven planes of mental consciousness as described by Sri Aurobindo, from the physical mind to the overmind. This Titan has three children: Atlas, Prometheus, and Epimetheus. Atlas, condemned by Zeus to carry the sky on his shoulders, is the symbol of the force that separates spirit from matter but must also connect them. Although Atlas is not a Titan, the ancients gave him this title because he is a truly gigantic force. Atlas cannot be released from his burden until the adventurer of consciousness – and humanity after him – has ascended the seven planes to the overmind and completed the corresponding purification/liberation. The seven planes of mental consciousness are represented by the seven Pleiades, the children of Atlas, and in their progeny are the corresponding realisations. Prometheus symbolises that which in the spiritual seeker puts his quest first. In his progeny are the myths that describe the experiences, obstacles, challenges and mistakes of the seeker in this ascent. Epimetheus symbolises the part of the seeker that remains on the surface of things, that acts in reaction to the external world.

The second major lineage is that of the Titan Oceanos which corresponds to the evolutionary process of purification/liberation. In his descendants are the currents of consciousness/energy that participate in this evolutionary process as well as the great heroes who symbolise the victories that must be won and the steps towards equanimity. Thus, for example, Perseus achieves the victory over fear symbolised by the Gorgon; Heracles achieves the victory over desire and ego; Achilles achieves the purification of the depths of the vital.

Other lineages from the Titans concern the gods (Kronos), the principles of evolution (Crios), the psychic being (Koios) and the supramental (Hyperion, whose son is Helios, the sun, the symbol of supramental light or supramental consciousness).

Some other lineages that the ancients did not clearly connect to the Titans or the gods describe: 1. What directs the spiritual quest in its beginnings: the lineage of the kings of Athens; 2. The lineage of aspiration in the descendants of Tantalus; 3. The lineage of the four great monsters or Asuras.

The ancients tried to establish bridges between the two major lineages in order to determine which progressions in the ascension of the planes of consciousness are necessary for which realisations in the process of purification/liberation and vice versa. To this end, they mention visits or friendships between heroes in the two lineages respectively. But this can only be in the early stages of the path, as very soon the correspondences become impossible to establish as the spiritual teachings and individual paths are so different.

The elders did, however, agree on a limited number of abilities that were indispensable for certain stages of the path, with each master reserving the possibility of adding others. Thus, all authors have a common list of a dozen names of heroes for the conquest of the Golden Fleece, each name representing a quality. But some authors give a list of more than fifty names.

Homer is the only one to have given a list of the abilities and accomplishments required for the great yoga reversal represented by the Trojan War and the proportion of their achievement.

Spiritual Progression up to the Trojan War

It seems clear, then, that no single pattern of progression valid for all can be established in the processes of ascension and liberation. Indeed, not only does each seeker follow his or her own path, in a particular way, but also many realisations are very progressive, such as the overcoming of illusions, the victory over fear, desires, and the ego. Therefore, the myths describe either a final achievement or 'realisation' in a particular area, or a description of the experiences and obstacles that have to be overcome for a given phase of the path.

In the first category are: 1. The myth of Perseus illustrates the victory over fear. This hero is the great-grandfather of Heracles (Hercules), which indicates that the famous “labours” cannot be completed if the corresponding fears have not been overcome first; 2. The expansion of consciousness with the myth of Europa; 3. The twelve labours of Heracles, which begin with the victory over the ego and desires (the Lion of Nemea and the Lernaean Hydra) and end with the perception that the acquisition of Knowledge is an infinite process (the Golden Apples in the Garden of the Hesperides) and the discovery of that which prevents the transformation of the body into a divinised body (Cerberus, the dog that guards the entrance to the realm of Hades, of the bodily unconscious).

In the second category are the myths that illustrate the progressions that must be made in a given phase of the path. To help us order them, the ancients have left us a major clue: such and such a myth occurs so many generations before the Trojan War.

The beginnings of the path are illustrated by the myth of Jason’s conquest of the Golden Fleece with his Argonauts. It represents an expansion of consciousness equivalent to a development of sensitivity symbolised by the Golden Fleece of the ram. This myth continues through to the first great spiritual experience of enlightenment, psychic openness or a mixture of both. It includes in particular: 1. The prerequisites before embarking on the spiritual path, among them the building of a solid, well-embodied personality; 2. The description of a number of mistakes or dead ends that seem difficult to avoid for an ordinary seeker; 3. The encounter with the Master or the personal path; 4. The confrontation with death and karmic memories.

Then comes the delicate period that Sri Aurobindo calls “the crossing of the intermediate zone”. It warns of a possible fall resulting from a lack of humility. It is illustrated by the myth of the Minotaur locked in a labyrinth, an image of a seeker who builds, from his first experiences, a mental fortress in which he locks himself and often his disciples with him.

Then comes the very long period of purification of the centres of consciousness or Chakras symbolised by the two wars of Thebes led successively by Oedipus’ children and his grandchildren.

Finally, we come to the Trojan War. At this point, it is no longer an ordinary seeker but an adventurer of consciousness who has already achieved what Sri Aurobindo calls psychic transformation and largely spiritual transformation. In other words, this is the pinnacle of the spiritual experience of the ancient yogas, the highest individual realisation which is liberation in Spirit, the realisation of wisdom and holiness.

But some adventurers, such as Homer and Sri Aurobindo, did not want to settle for an individual realisation that left humanity unchanged, for what they sought was liberation for all humanity. This led them to understand that this required an ultimate liberation, the liberation of Nature, a step that Sri Aurobindo calls “supramental transformation”.

At this stage, the path is no longer clear. The only thing that seems certain is that it is no longer a question of perfecting the mental man but of something totally new which requires descending into the memories of evolution, into the body, into the realm of the corporeal unconscious, that of Hades (Pluto). But it takes a long time for the seeker to effect the reversal because everything clings to the past and the resistance to the New is enormous: as Satprem says, “the best of the old is the greatest obstacle to the New”. The best of the old is exemplified by the Trojan line, headed by the ‘divine’ Hector. And this best is convinced that the evolutionary truth represented by Helen is a continuation of the old with some improvements.

But Helen was not born a Trojan. She was abducted by the Trojan Alexander (also known as Paris). The Trojan War, which sees two coalitions of the same empire confront each other, is therefore the symbol of a great internal spiritual struggle. Both coalitions search for a while for compromises that would bring peace without major destruction. It takes the seeker 10 long symbolic years to realise that no improvement in the old structures and processes of Yoga can bring about the New and that they must be abandoned without a backward glance: the city of Troy, formerly called Ilion, must be razed to the ground and its inhabitants put to the sword.

This reversal is so difficult, so much so that everything in us clings to the old, that Sri Aurobindo found it necessary to devote a poem of nearly five thousand lines to it. The story takes place on the last day

of the war: it concerns the ultimate resistances to the overthrow, the most difficult to overcome, because it is a question of renouncing the highest masteries, symbolised by the Amazons, which give access to spiritual ecstasies.

But *Iliad* is not only for the adventurers of consciousness. Indeed, this poem can be approached from different angles. 1. From a purely poetic angle, in its musicality; 2. to discover the secret of the transposition of the Greek metre into English. For this, the reader should refer to the works of Sri Aurobindo *The Future poetry* and more particularly to *On Quantitative Hexameters*; 3. to replace, without any will of interpretation, the lost poem of Arctinus de Millet, *the Aethiopsis*, composed in the eighth century BCE or to develop that of Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomerica*, probably written in the 3rd century CE.; 4. for the adventurers of consciousness who are ready for the reversal of consciousness and must understand and integrate its meaning; 5. for the whole of humanity, which is experiencing not only the end of a civilisation but also a major reversal in energies. The last two angles will be addressed in the next issue (Part 2). A glimpse of the hidden meaning of *Iliad* is given in a documentary made by the Iliad-Auroville team, which can be seen on Youtube https://youtu.be/y-Us4F_RVUw

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Savitri Encyclopedia

Sebastien Nitzschke

This article wants to throw some light onto the background, aims, functionality, and structure of a project called “Savitri Encyclopedia”. Launched in 2017 as an online initiative by Savitri Bhavan, the undertaking - though still in its infancy - has been growing ever since. Interested people will get to know the intentions, how to cooperate, and which possibilities there are to support the project.

What is the aim of the “Savitri Encyclopedia”?

The Savitri Encyclopaedia has one major goal: it wants to offer to interested people a better understanding of Savitri which is considered to be Sri Aurobindo’s major work. For this, the project aims on making all available and important commentaries and sources of knowledge related to Savitri easily accessible. The Savitri Encyclopaedia is using present-day online structures that make it possible to link individual commentaries directly to the corresponding words, lines or paragraphs of the text. Thus, when reading certain passages of the text additional knowledge is instantaneously available with a mouse click. This way it becomes easier to study Savitri in detail, providing an unprecedented opportunity for deeper penetration and understanding of the work.

How does the “Savitri Encyclopedia” achieve this?

On its homepage <https://encyclopedia.savitribhavan.org/>, the Savitri Encyclopedia offers various tools and aids that facilitate deeper penetration into the text. In addition to the overview and background of the work, there are summaries of the specific books and cantos. This allows the interested reader to get a first overview of the content, composition and structure of the work. In the actual core of the project, the English online version of the text, three

significant functions are provided. First, difficult words are marked in colour. When touching the colour-coded words with the mouse cursor, a small window automatically appears with an explanation of the word in simple English and, if relevant, how it fits into the context of the passage. Second, clickable symbols leading to individual text sources have been incorporated, to be found at the end of the passage: for example from Sri Aurobindo's "Letters on Savitri" or Shradhbhavan's "English of Savitri". By activating the symbols, explanatory windows appear in turn, explaining the line or section, and giving detailed comments, deeper knowledge, and meaning. As a third help to boost understanding, a subdivision of the text into meaningful sections is planned for the future, which is then made comprehensible and accessible through short summaries and illustrations. By utilising these tools, it is possible for anyone, from the beginner to the academic researcher, to expand and deepen their knowledge of the work at their respective level of understanding. Finally, the Savitri Encyclopaedia also offers extensive links and book lists to complete and round off the possibilities of learning.

How to use the "Savitri Encyclopedia"?

Usage is intuitive and easy. Access can be found via the online link: <http://encyclopedia.savitribhavan.org/> Individual menus lead to elements of background, summaries, collections of links and, of course, the actual, extensively annotated text. Via the menu, the relevant book and canto can be selected. As already described, the original text of the book then appears and the study can be started by touching the marked words or by clicking on the symbols next to the individual lines. The encyclopedia also works on smartphones, but this might be difficult due to the small screen size. It is recommended to use it on a tablet, a desktop PC or a notebook.

How can I involve myself in the "Savitri Encyclopedia"?

The development of the Savitri Encyclopaedia is a never-ending project that is continuously dependent on the support of various kinds. At its core, it is managed by a small project team that coordinates the various tasks and incorporates the available knowledge piece by piece into the Savitri Encyclopaedia. Further editors, WordPress-knowledgeable or motivated Savitri-lovers are cordially invited to

contribute to the project. You can contact us via email to discuss possible tasks and to find a suitable place in the project structure. There is a form under “Contact us” on the homepage of the Encyclopedia.

Naturally, the Savitri Encyclopedia also needs financial support. Continuous funding is required to enable researchers and editors to work reliably on the project. If you feel that you would like to support the project financially, please use the donation options at the back of this magazine. For “Savitri Encyclopaedia” should be mentioned to direct the donation properly.

Conclusion

We hope that this article has given an insight into the project and the exciting possibilities of the Savitri Encyclopedia. We are grateful to receive feedback about your interest and maybe even offers of collaboration.

SAVITRI SHABDAMRUT - Volume 15

Gujarati translation by Shri Kirit Thakkar of Shraddhavan’s *The English of Savitri* talks on Sri Aurobindo’s epic *Savitri* covering Book 4, Book of Birth and Quest.

As usual the volume includes the original lines of *Savitri* along with Shri Pujalalji’s verse translation of them and translation in prose by Shri Kirit Thakkar, followed by the Gujarati translation of Shraddhavanji’s explanations.

360 pages, soft-bound, Price Rs 300.00 (postage in Gujarat Rs 30.00, outside Rs 50.00) Published by Yoga Yukta Prakashan, E 102, Chandranagaar Colony, Nr. Suvarna Laxmi Appts. Waghodia Road, Vadodara, 390019. Mobile: 9427540195. Email: kiryukta@yahoo.co.in

Also available from SAVITRI BHAVAN, SABDA and leading Sri Aurobindo Centers in Gujarat.

News from *Savitri Bhavan*

October 2022-February 2023

October:

6: Presentation: *Beyond: Poetry By Design* – Original art, visual interpretation and personal story. The presentation was given by Chetna. It refers to Sri Aurobindo's Poetry.



8: *Heartfull Meditation Workshop* with Avantika Nirupama: This technique helps to understand Sri Aurobindo's dictum 'All Life is Yoga' and connect to his teachings in a deeper way.

November:

2: *Kabir – Fifteenth century Poet-Sage & Rebel singing of Divine Love, in the Light of Sri Aurobindo* by Prof. Sehdev Kumar.

December:

5: *Sri Aurobindo – A Life-sketch in Photographs*. A bilingual exhibition in English and Tamil.

7: Talk: *Peace Within: Peace Without – Revisiting Sri Aurobindo's Vision for Our Times* by Prof. Sehdev Kumar.

20: *Heartfull Meditation Workshop* with Avantika Nirupama: This technique helps to understand Sri Aurobindo's dictum 'All Life is Yoga' and connect to his teachings in a deeper way.

21: *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* – Recitation by Malcolm.

31: *Midnight Meditation* to give thanks for 2022 and to welcome 2023.

January 2023:

3: As part of a series of monthly presentations by Larry Seidlitz on '*Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in Savitri*': the first presentation was on '*The Brahman: The Absolute, The Omnipresent Reality, the Divine*'. This talk considers Sri Aurobindo's conception of the Brahman, which he translates with such terms as The Absolute and The Divine. It presents how Sri Aurobindo expresses his experience of the Brahman in both his prose works and in *Savitri* and how together they can stimulate in us a deeper understanding and more powerful experience. This video is available on YouTube.



3: *Heartfull Meditation Workshop* with Avantika Nirupama: This technique helps to understand Sri Aurobindo's dictum 'All Life is Yoga' and connect to his teachings in a deeper way.

9: *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* – Recitation by Malcolm.

18-1st Feb: Exhibition – '*Eyes That See*' – A photo exhibition. Immersive eyes and gazes captured by around 15 Auroville photographers. Poems, interactions and an invitation to 'SEE'.

23: G20 Delegates visited Savitri Bhavan.



23: *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* – Recitation by Malcolm.

27: *Remembering Shradhdhavan Through Her Poems* – Gordon Korstange: Flute and Recital. Gordon met Shradhdhavan in 1971 when he first came to Auroville to teach at the Aspiration school. He and his wife Jeanne continued their association with Shradhdhavan for the following 50 years. In this program, Gordon read some of Shradhdhavan's poems, illuminating them with his flute, and spoke about their long friendship.



February:

6: *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* – Recitation by Malcolm.

7: Second of a series of monthly presentations by Larry Seidlitz on '*Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in Savitri*'. This talk was on '*The Involution and Evolution of the Spirit*' and gave a view of Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution, which differs from the scientific theory in important ways, especially in its envisioning of a prior involution of the Spirit into matter, which then gradually re-emerges and transforms the matter in which it develops. By considering key passages in both his prose works and in *Savitri*, we see how Sri Aurobindo's vision gives us a deeper understanding and appreciation of the significance of life and its difficulties and higher possibilities. This video is available on YouTube.

7, 14, 21 and 28: *Heartfull Meditation Workshop* with Avantika Nirupama: This technique helps to understand Sri Aurobindo's dictum 'All Life is Yoga' and connect to his teachings in a deeper way.

17: Presentation: *Life-Less Plastics – From Awareness to Action* by Madie.



- 20: *Flower Offerings at Savitri Bhavan* – a photographic exhibition.
- 20: *Sri Aurobindo's Poetry* – Recitation by Malcolm.
- 24: Workshop on Flower Mandalas



Sangam Hall Appeal

Dear reader of *Invocation* and friend of Savitri Bhavan

Since its inauguration 6 years ago the Sangam Hall of Savitri Bhavan has been in operation. In its circular shape resembling an amphitheater, it has been much lauded for its special atmosphere and is therefore very much in use for functions ranging from the Savitri Reading Circle to the OM Choir and the meetings of working groups of Auroville.

With the Blessings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the generous support of many friends and well-wishers, we had been grateful to finance and complete its construction. Since that time finishing work has been going on, mainly in order to complete and optimize the audio-visual conditions within the hall.

That is why, in this blessed 150th birthday year of Sri Aurobindo, we are sending to all our friends and well-wishers a fresh appeal for support towards the audio-visual equipment. Our consultant recommends as follows:

HDMI equipment	Rs.	1,30,000.-
Shure Headset microphone	Rs.	90,000. -
XLR equipment	Rs.	93,000. -
Camera, directional microphone	Rs.	1,68,000.-
Installation charges	Rs.	26,000. -
Grand Total	(GST 18% included) Rs.	5,07,000.-

Any amount received in support of this project, small or big, will be received with gratitude and appreciation. Will you share it with other *Savitri* lovers and well-wishers? Will you help? We look forward to your generous response.



Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother

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 help the dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality.

If you live in India

100% exemption is available for offerings from Indian taxpayers under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT act.

By Cheque or DD: they should be made payable to **Auroville Unity Fund** and sent to the following address: Savitri Bhavan, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, Phone +91 (0)413 262 2922.

By Bank Transfer: they should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund **Acc. No.** 10237876031 (80G or Ordinary Receipt) or Auroville Unity Fund **Acc. No.** 31612623238 (for 100% tax relief under SSR), **State Bank of India, Branch code** No. 0003160 **IFSC** code SBIN0003160 Auroville International Township. **Purpose:** “SAVITRI BHAVAN”. **Note: PAN Number is essential.** If you send an offering in this way, please inform Savitri Bhavan at the same time, so that a receipt can be sent as soon as possible.

When using the **QR code**, tax exemption receipt is **not** possible.

If you live Abroad

To send your offering by **SWIFT** Transfer, please use the following details: **Auroville Foundation, Acc. No.** 40106120526, **SWIFT code:** SBININBB104, **IFSC code:** SBIN0000691, **State Bank of India, Branch code:** 000691, New Delhi Main Branch, 11 Sansad Marg, New Delhi 110 001, **Purpose** “SAVITRI BHAVAN”.

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