

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 35

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

**SAVITRI BHAVAN
AUROVILLE 605101, TN
INDIA**

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

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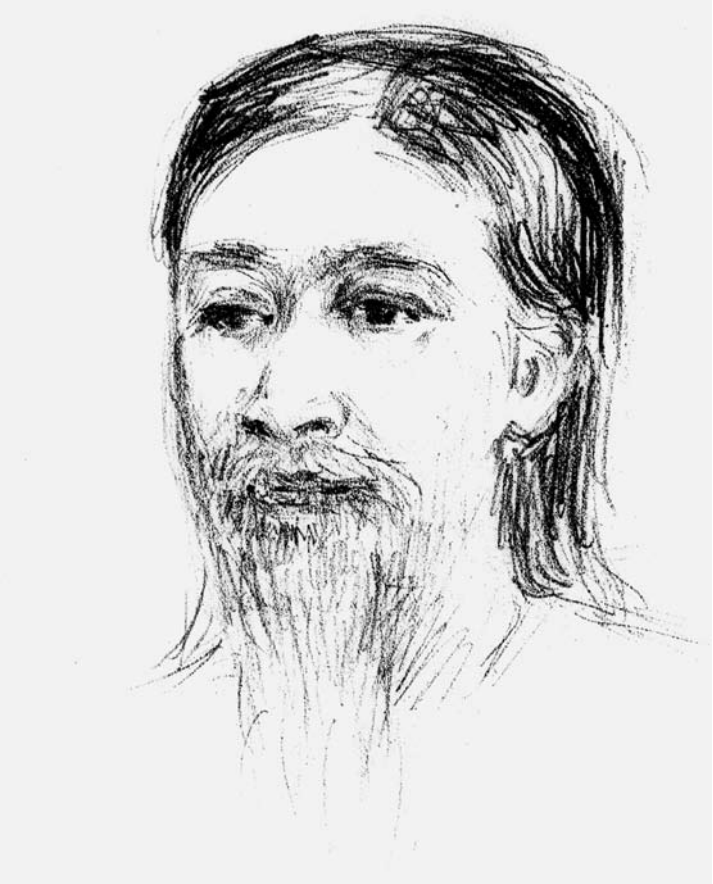
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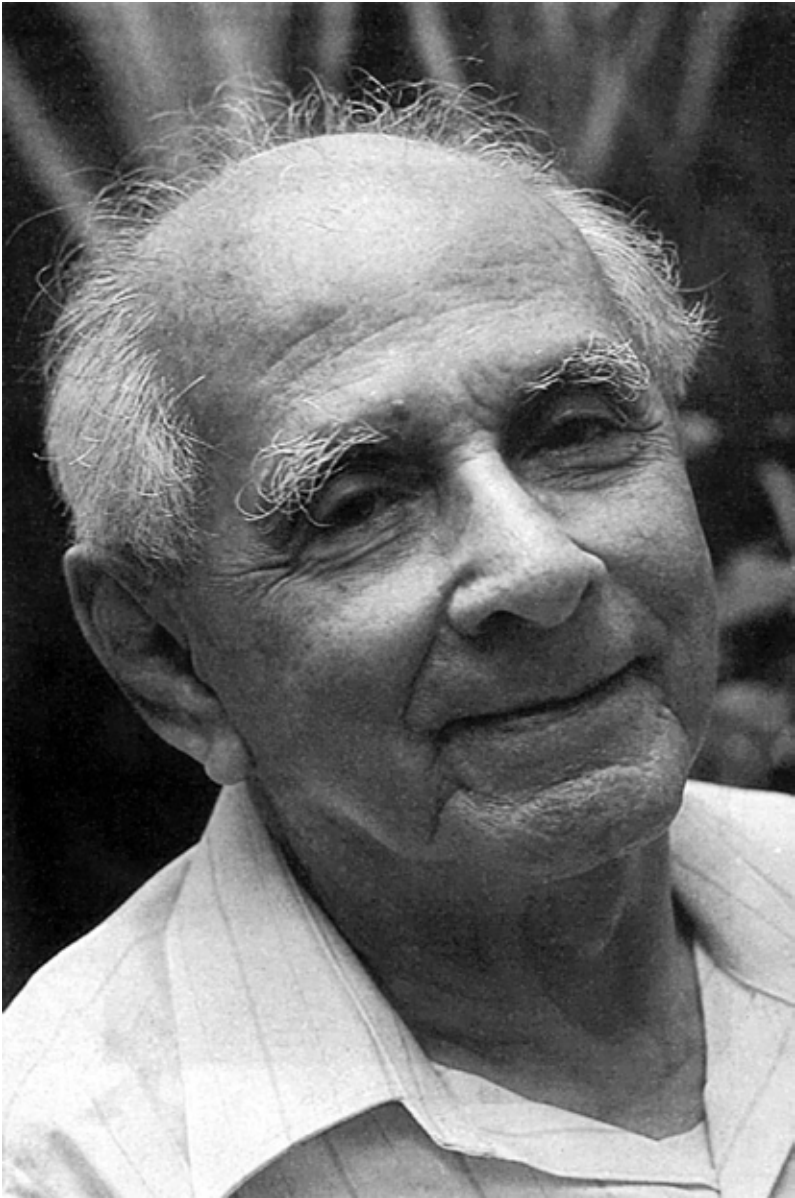


In a new act of the drama of the world



The united Two began a greater age.

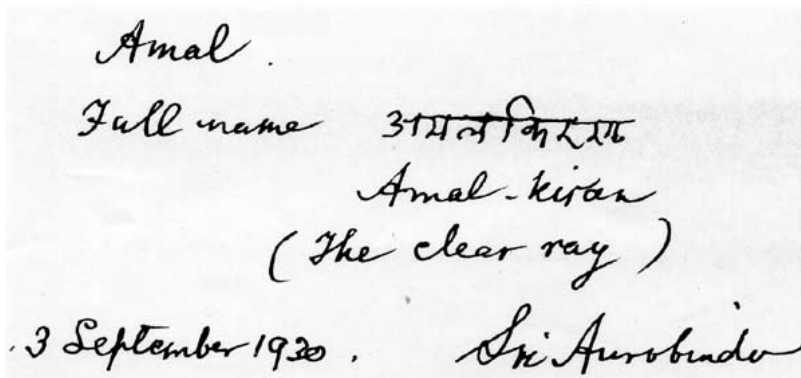
Savitri p. 411



Amal Kiran at 89 (1993) photo by Ireno Guerci

Amal Kiran and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*¹

The passing of K.D. Sethna on June 29th 2011 at the age of 106 means the loss of a last physical link with the early days of the Ashram, where he was known by the name that Sri Aurobindo gave him : Amal Kiran 'The clear ray'.



Born into a prosperous Bombay family on November 25, 1904, he became a brilliant student of Philosophy and English Literature and showed early on that he was a born poet. After he left his studies to join the Ashram at the age of 23 in 1927, his poetic gifts blossomed under the guidance and influence of Sri Aurobindo. His unique relationship with Sri Aurobindo's poetic masterwork *Savitri* extended over almost 70 years, from the time when, as a young man in his early 20s, he was blessed to receive a two-line quotation from the mighty work in progress, which thrilled his poet's soul and awoke a thirst for more, until in his late 80s he spent several years working along with his

¹ Amal Kiran's materials in this section are copyright of 'Clear Ray Trust' reproduced here with grateful acknowledgement to the Trustees.

contemporary and close friend Nirodbaran – Sri Aurobindo’s scribe for the later stages of the composition of *Savitri* – on scrutinising all the proposed revisions for the 1993 edition of Sri Aurobindo’s epic.

His correspondence with Sri Aurobindo about *Savitri* extended from 1931 to 1949. A selection of Sri Aurobindo’s letters on the poem was published in 1951 with an Editorial Note by Amal, and also appears at the end of several editions of the poem, under the title *Sri Aurobindo’s Letters on Savitri*. The fullest account of this correspondence and how it came about is given in the introductory note written by Amal in 1982 when he started publishing in *Mother India* the text which Sri Aurobindo shared with him in instalments from October 1936 to February 1938. This note is reproduced here on pages 8-22.

We are also reprinting in this issue some accounts by Amal about his relationship with the Mother during the preparation of the second volume of the first (1950-51) edition of *Savitri* and the first one-volume ‘University’ edition of 1954.

The 1954 edition was the basis for all the Mother’s *Savitri* work with Huta, which took place from 1961 to 1971. And in this work too, Amal was involved in a small way. On pages 31-32 we are reprinting Huta’s account of this involvement, and Amal’s own comment on their work together. From this time too may date the sketch by Amal reproduced on page 33.

Given the history of his involvement with the poem, it is not surprising that Amal was again asked to assist in the preparation of the 1972 ‘Birth Centenary Library’ edition.

Then in the 1980s a close comparison was made by a team at the Sri Aurobindo Archives of the original manuscripts and typescripts against the printed versions of all Sri Aurobindo’s writings – starting with *Savitri* – with a view to establishing a definitive ‘Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo’ before his works went out of copyright. A fairly large number of emendations were proposed for *Savitri*. Most of these were details of punctuation, but some were more significant and more contentious, and the necessity of altering the existing text in any way was hotly contested. Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran were asked to scrutinise every one of the proposed changes and to decide which should be carried out and which not. They were aided in this task by R. Y. Deshpande and Richard Hartz. Deshpande recorded each

working session, and the results of their labours, which extended over about 6 years, have been summarised in an interesting publication by the Archives. These scrupulous efforts did not succeed in dispelling all objections to the new ‘Revised’ edition of 1993, and both these distinguished sadhaks, on the threshold of their 90s, found themselves being accused of distorting Sri Aurobindo’s intentions.

Amal Kiran has been justly acknowledged as one of the greatest authorities on Sri Aurobindo’s poetic masterwork. Surprisingly, although he was a prolific author, with more than 50 published books on an astonishingly wide range of topics to his credit, he never dedicated an entire book to the poem with which he had such a special relationship. His writings on it have appeared over more than 50 years in various books and journals. Around his centenary (2004), the idea was conceived of compiling everything that he had written about *Savitri*. However it was only in November 2010 that a first volume could be published by the Clear Ray Trust, which holds the copyright to all Amal’s writings. A second volume is still in preparation, and will, we hope, become available in 2012. The first of these volumes¹ contains complete essays, while the second will present passages from personal letters or writings where *Savitri* is dealt with or referred to in passing. Together they will form a significant contribution to *Savitri* studies from one who had a uniquely close relationship with Sri Aurobindo’s mantric epic.

Shraddhavan

¹ See p. 30

Amal Kiran's Introduction to the Opening Sections of the 1936-37 Version of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

The story of how Sri Aurobindo disclosed in private to one of his disciples the growing wonder of his *Savitri* has already been recounted in different ways in three books: *Sri Aurobindo – the Poet, Light and Laughter, Our Light and Delight*. But parts of it are especially relevant now that the actual text of the disclosed version is being published¹.

Soon after I arrived in the Ashram on December 16, 1927 I started to hear snatches of information to the effect that a poetic masterpiece by Sri Aurobindo had been in progress for many years. But nobody could claim to have set eyes on the slowly developing epic. I was extremely eager to catch some scent of this creation which promised to become a veritable “thousand-petalled lotus” at the top of the human poetic endeavour. Once in 1931 and again in the two succeeding years I received in reply to my questions short general answers from the Master about his work on the poem and about the technique of its blank verse. But I remained in the dark as to its living reality.

Savitri first came to light for me – or rather to light me up – *incognito*. Having had from my school-days the urge to make verses I continued to jot down whatever seemed to pour into me by intermittent inspiration. Sri Aurobindo was as expert a literary guru as a spiritual one. Judicious criticism, balanced encouragement, illuminative analysis met every effort I made towards better and better composition. On one such occasion, to illustrate some point, he sent me with his helpful comments two lines of poetry describing, as he put it, “the Ray from the transcendent penetrating through the mind’s passive neutral reflection of the supreme quietude of the silent Brahman”. They ran:

¹ *The text of the first Book of Savitri as it stood in 1937, along with some brief introductory notes from Sri Aurobindo, was published in 3 instalments in Mother India from November 1982 to January 1983.*

Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.

I was struck by the profound word-reverberations that reinforced the mystical word-suggestions with a tremendous immediacy of spiritual fact. But there was no sign of the source of the lines: they were a “limitless Unknowable”. I could not help asking where they had come from. The reply was: “*Savitri*.”

I never forgot this initial brief impact of the closely guarded secret. Even before it, Sri Aurobindo had tried to make me aware of a certain element in poetry that hailed from what he called the Overhead planes, the hidden ranges of consciousness above the intellect, with their inherent light of knowledge and their natural experience of the infinite. He broadly distinguished four planes: Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind. The last-named has been, according to him, the highest reach of the dynamic side of man’s spirituality so far. The master dynamism of the Divine, the integral earth-transformative power which Sri Aurobindo designated Supermind or Gnosis or Truth-Consciousness and which was his own outstanding personal realisation, rendering his Yoga a unique hope for the world, has lain unmanifest and mostly unseized. Until certain radical conditions are completely fulfilled, it cannot find direct expression in life or literature. More and more Sri Aurobindo sought to help me not only to respond, in my appreciation of poetry, to the rising scale of the already captured Overhead note but also to bring some strain of it into my own verses. The quest of that note grew for me a dominant passion and most of all I prayed for the Overmind’s touch.

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

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

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity
or Wordsworth’s

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,

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

Sri Aurobindo wrote back in his characteristic vein:

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

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

"I think the favour I asked was expressed in perfectly clear language. If no English poet has produced the passage I want, then who has done so in English? God alone knows. But who is capable of doing it? All of us know. Well, then, why not be kind enough to grant this favour? If difficult metres could be illustrated on demand, is it impossible to illustrate in a satisfying measure something so natural as the Overmind? I am not asking for hundreds of lines – even eight will more than do – all pure gold to be treasured for ever. So please... Perhaps it is possible only on Sunday: I can wait answerless for twenty-four hours with a sweet *samatā*."

The answer came the very next morning:

"I have to say Good Heavens again. Because difficult metres can be illustrated on demand, which is a matter of metrical skill, how does it follow that one can produce poetry from any blessed plane on demand? It would be easier to furnish you with hundreds of lines already written out of which you could select for yourself anything overmindish if it exists (which I doubt) rather than produce 8 lines of warranted overmind manufacture to order. All I can do is to give you from time to time some lines from *Savitri* on condition you keep them to yourself for

the present. It may be a poor substitute for the Overmental, but if you like the sample, the opening lines, I can give you more hereafter – and occasionally better.”

And then after an “E.G.” there followed in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand sixteen lines of the very first section of *Savitri* as it stood then, dealing with the “Symbol Dawn.” Below the quotation were the words: “There! Promise fulfilled for a wonder.”

After a whole day’s absorption in the absolute nectar, I sent Sri Aurobindo a note:

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

The day of days was October 25, 1936. From then onwards for a time Sri Aurobindo kept sending passages which I typed and he touched up again or slightly expanded. About the next passage I remarked:

“It goes reverberating in depth upon depth of one’s being. What I admire is that the burden of infinite suggestion is carried with such a flexible ease. There is no attempt – as in the poetry of us lesser fry – to make things specially striking or strange or new, but a simple largeness of gesture which most naturally makes one surprising revelation after another of beauty and power.”

His comment was:

“Well, it is the difference of receiving from above and living in the ambience of the Above – whatever comes receives the breadth of largeness which belongs to that plane.”

The precious gift of passages continued for months. Although there were long interruptions at a later stage, it was only at the close of February 1938 that the series stopped. A visit by me to Bombay got prolonged into a stay for many years. In the meanwhile Sri Aurobindo met with an accident: he broke his right leg on the eve of the *darshan* of November 24, 1938. During his convalescence he turned to revising several of his writings. *The Life Divine* was taken up first and, some years later, *Savitri* got its chance. It underwent revision and expansion on a much grander scale than ever before. What he had already begun on the typescript much earlier is characterised in a couple of letters from him at the commencement of my Bombay-visit.

“I have been too occupied with other things to make much headway with the poem – except that I have spoilt your beautiful neat copy of the ‘Worlds’ under the oestrus of the restless urge for more and more perfection; but we are here for World-improvement, so I hope that it is excusable.”

“I have pulled up the third section to a higher consistency of level: the ‘Worlds’ have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!”

It would seem that the opening passages of the poem were not touched until long after the accident. I came to know of the radical change only in 1946 in connection with Nirodbaran’s reading out to Sri Aurobindo the typescript of my treatment of *Savitri* in the final chapter of *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, based on the 1936 version.¹ Sri Aurobindo sent me the following letter:

“You will see when you get the full typescript [of the first three books] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then... In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem...”

¹ *The essay referred to came out first in 1946 in the annual of the Sri Aurobindo Circle of Bombay and was later included in the book.*

On receiving “the new form” I saw that the Symbol-Dawn prelude of 16 lines had not only been slightly altered in phrase but also stood in a passage of 93 lines with its opening and its close considerably separated. At first I felt a regret at the alteration. Sri Aurobindo answered that I had been so accustomed to the old prelude that I could not sufficiently outgrow the *samskaras* to respond easily to the new. Even now a faint nostalgia lingers for the dawn’s direct breaking after the first few lines instead of its appearance being delayed by the lengthy evocation of the preceding night and the vision conjured up through it of the original Inconscience from which the material world evolved as well as of the unmanifest Unknown negatively reflected by that Inconscience. But I can appreciate well the awesome effect of lines like those four about the suggestion emanating from “the huge foreboding mind of Night” which has replaced her earlier “huge unslumbering spirit”:

Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world. [p. 1]

The third line here is indeed one of Sri Aurobindo’s tremendous single-pentameter Mantras comparable to the mightily tranquil

All can be done if the God-touch is there [p. 3]

or the deeply surprising

Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient [p. 48]

or the revelation-packed

Earth’s winged chimeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven [p. 52]

or the inward-alluring

Unweave the stars and into silence pass. [p. 696]

Excepting the last of these brief miracles, which occurs towards the end of the present *Savitri*, all have their places in contexts which Sri Aurobindo sent me in 1936: they are products of the great subsequent enlargement. But there is enough in the old draft to render it an amazing feat. For instance, it contains the description of the poem’s heroine, starting –

Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven
and ending

And moved in her as in his natural home

– a passage of 31 lines which was subsequently expanded to 51 but which even in its original form constitutes a rarity in all literature for its sustained spiritual height. I asked Sri Aurobindo:

Are not these lines which I regard as the *ne plus ultra* in world-poetry a snatch of the sheer Overmind?

He replied:

This passage is, I believe, what I might call the Overmind Intuition at work expressing itself in something like its own rhythm and language. It is difficult to say about one's own poetry, but I think I have succeeded here and in some passages later on in catching that difficult note; in separate or briefer passages (i.e. a few lines at a time) I think it comes in not unoften.

Considering Sri Aurobindo's remark in 1946 about his attitude ten years earlier –

At that time I hesitated to assign anything like Overmind touch or inspiration to passages in English or other poetry and did not presume to claim any of my own writings as belonging to this order

– and considering that several lines of other poets which he had hesitated about were later adjudged by him to be from the Overmind, it seems certain that this passage which he had ascribed to the Overmind Intuition, a plane he had defined as not Overmind itself but an intermediate level where intuition proper grows massive in substance and rhythm, would have been traced by him to the supreme source if he had been privately asked about it again.

Several lines of extreme originality are already in the 1936 version:

His wide eyes bodied viewless entities. [p. 44]

The Craftsman of the magic stuff of Self
Who labours at his high and difficult plan

In the wide workshop of the wonderful world,
Moulded in inward Time his rhythmic parts. [p. 25]

A figure in the ineffable Witness' shrine
Pacing the vast cathedral of his thoughts
Under its arches dim with infinity
Mid heavenward brooding of invisible wings. [p. 79]

One-pointed to the immaculate Delight,
Questing for God as for a splendid prey,
He mounted burning like a cone of fire. [p. 79-80]

There is also that coinage – along the lines of “infinitude” and “vastitude” – in the vivid passage which, except for one additional phrase towards the end, is found fully in the old draft:

To a few is given that godlike rare release.
One among many thousands never touched,
Engrossed in the external world's design,
Is driven by a pointing hand of light
Across his soul's unmapped immensitudes. [p. 80]

We have, however, to mark significant enrichments in many places in the later revision. Thus earlier we read how “hidden altitudes” keep for us as “our rapturous heritage”

The calm immunity of spirit space,
The golden plateaus of immortal Fire,
The moon-flame oceans of unfallen Bliss,
To which the indwelling Daemon points our flight.

In the final form we come across:

Our souls can visit in great lonely hours
Still regions of imperishable Light,
All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power,
And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss
And calm immensities of spirit Space. [p. 47]

Here and there a fascinating mystic touch has entered the text. The earlier draft had some members of the occult fauna: “the gold hawk”, “the enemy-Serpent” and “the white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss.” The new brought in many strange figures in place of psychological

simple postures. Thus what once was a straightforward exceeding of the mental consciousness –

For him the limiting firmament ceased above.
In a tense period of the sleepless urge
A gap was rent in the all-concealing vault

– had later not only the first line slightly modified but also the second turned completely into a flash of enigmatic symbolism with a half-lion half-eagle emerging from a Vedic vision:

In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day ... [p. 25]

At times the felicities of a passage are moved apart to make entirely different revelations. Originally there were the lines:

Caught in a voiceless white epiphany
The toiling thinker widened and grew still,
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart,
And with a silver cry of opening gates,
Breaking the intellect's hard and lustrous lid,
Across our mental sky he glimpsed above
The superconscious realms of motionless peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.

This combination of thrilled spirituality and occult vision directed towards a soul-fulfilling Beyond which is brought home on the breath of a Mantra whose music conveys most profoundly the sense of the supreme Ineffable – this many-faceted whole gets distributed into three equally inevitable moments at considerable intervals packed with extra matter of great spiritual and occult importance:

Awakened to new unearthly closenesses,
The touch replied to subtle infinities,
And with a silver cry of opening gates
Sight's lightnings leaped into the invisible. [p. 31]

His centre was no more in earthly mind,
A power of seeing silence filled his limbs:
Caught by a voiceless white epiphany
Into a vision that surpasses forms,

Into a living that surpasses life,
He neared the still consciousness sustaining all. [p. 32]

Thought lay down in a mighty voicelessness;
The toiling Thinker widened and grew still,
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart:
His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;
Mind screened no more the shoreless infinite.
Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscient realms of motionless peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone. [pp. 33-34]

At each step in the final version we have this kind of proliferation. Sri Aurobindo justified it in a letter to me answering some criticisms by a friend of mine who had a penchant for compositions like Milton's *Lycidas* or *Comus* and who reacted unfavourably to the gradual detailed unfoldment of the theme in the very first canto. Sri Aurobindo explained the reason for such an unfoldment as well as the general principle of the final version :

Its length is an indispensable condition for carrying out its purpose and everywhere there is this length, critics may say an 'unconscionable length' – I am quoting the description of the *Times Literary Supplement's* criticism of *The Life Divine* – in every part, in every passage, in almost every canto or section of a canto. It has been planned not on the scale of *Lycidas* or *Comus* or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor *Ramayana*; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation. One artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination or understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like, architectural is to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness: that is the method I have chosen to follow

in *Savitri*. But X has understood nothing of the significance or intention of the passages he is criticising, least of all, their inner sense – that is not his fault, but is partly due to the lack of the context and partly to his lack of equipment and you have there an unfair advantage over him which enables you to understand and see the poetic intention. He sees only an outward form of words and some kind of surface sense which is to him vacant and merely ornamental or rhetorical or something pretentious without any true meaning or true vision in it: inevitably he finds the whole thing false and empty, unjustifiably ambitious and pompous without deep meaning or, as he expresses it, pseudo and phoney. His objection of *longueur* would be perfectly just if the description of the night and the dawn had been simply of physical night and physical dawn; but here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind it the ‘day’ of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement. So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem. It will, of course, seem much too long to a reader who does not understand what is written or, understanding, takes no interest in the subject; but that is unavoidable.”

The amount of elaboration done on the older draft can be gauged from two letters. One dated 1936 refers to the form existing in that year as compared to earlier attempts:

Savitri was originally written many years ago before the Mother came as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond (these two parts are still extant in the

scheme) each of four books – or rather Part II consisted of three books and an epilogue. Twelve books to an epic is a classical superstition, but the new *Savitri* may extend to ten books – if much is added in the final version it may be even twelve. The first book has been lengthening and lengthening out till it must be over 2000 lines, but I shall break up the original first four into five, I think – in fact I have already started doing so. These first five will be, as I conceive them now, the Book of Birth, the Book of Quest, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate, the Book of Death. As for the second Part, I have not touched it yet.”

The second letter is of 1948. We have quoted its first few lines already as well as some from its closing paragraph. Sri Aurobindo writes:

There are now three books in the first part. The first, the Book of Beginnings, comprises five cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed out but contains much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapathy and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos with many thousand lines. There is also a third sufficiently long book, the Book of the Divine Mother. In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is the third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten. So it will be a long time before *Savitri* is complete... I am trying of course to keep it at a very high level of inspiration, but in so large a plan covering most subjects of philosophical thought and vision and many aspects of spiritual experience there is bound to be much variation of tone: but that is, I think, necessary for the richness and completeness of the treatment.

Yes, the new *Savitri* is not only a Legend and a Symbol but also a Philosophy and, as we have quoted its author as saying, “profounder and vaster in its scope”, besides being poetically a more lavish luminousness. But the 1936 version, although less complex, is yet no mere narrative poem. It has epical proportions of its own and very markedly the same afflatus in essence as the later recension. Sri Aurobindo declared on November 3, 1936 about the work then in progress:

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

Again, like the final version it not only strikes the identical opening chord –

It was the hour before the Gods awake [p. 1]

– a semi-Vedic cosmic suggestion found only in the last of the nearly dozen recastings that preceded that of 1936: the 1936 draft also depicts for the first time at some length the climbing of planes, which, as Sri Aurobindo says in a letter of November 1 of that year, “was only a brief interlude of a few lines formerly”. Furthermore, it has had the unique luck of being the one version from which Sri Aurobindo read extracts to the Mother.

This observation rests on what Huta has recorded in the article entitled *Spiritual and Occult Truths* and published in *Mother India*, February 21, 1978. The Mother disclosed to her in 1961

how she had achieved in her tender age the highest occult truths,
how she had realised all the visions set forth in *Savitri*.

Here indeed is a marvellous flash of psychic autobiography. Huta continues the report based on the Mother’s words:

Actually, she had experienced the poem’s fundamental revelations before she arrived in Pondicherry and before Sri Aurobindo read out *Savitri* to her early in the morning day after day at a certain period of the Ashram. She also said to

me that she had never told Sri Aurobindo all that she had seen beforehand.

What could have been “a certain period”? The years when *Savitri* underwent ample revisions and extensions were after the accident to the poet’s right leg at almost the end of 1938. Now the poet was surrounded by a small number of attendants, to one of whom – Nirodbaran – he accorded a privilege whose gloriousness I most envy, for after some time he commenced dictating his re-creation of the poem to him. From the end of 1938 to December 5, 1950 when Sri Aurobindo departed from his body there was no occasion in the midst of his constant attendants to read *Savitri* to the Mother. The period in question is almost certainly the years when he copied, chiselling as he went on, from his manuscript the passages he sent to me every morning in large envelopes. Before enclosing them, usually with the Mother’s “Amal” inscribed on the covers, he must have read out the verse to her prior to breaking up their joint sessions of correspondence with the sadhakas late at night and through the small hours of the morning. The year and a half from nearly October’s end in 1936 to the close of February 1938 must have contained that period of shining surprise not only to the Grace-inundated disciple to whom *Savitri* was sent but also on a far deeper plane to the Mother for the wonderful language in which the Master unveiled his high visions and to the Master himself because the Mother had anticipated them in mystic silence thirty years in advance.

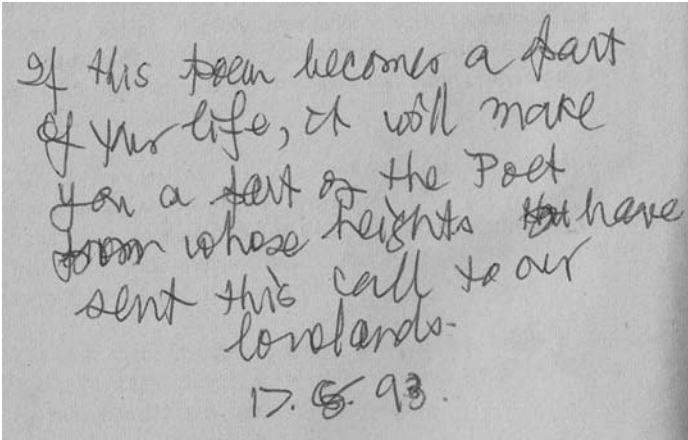
Postscript

Several times I have said: “in private.” But a small qualification is needed. The circumstances were such that to keep *Savitri* a total secret was very difficult. In those days Nolini was Sri Aurobindo’s postman to the sadhakas or – shall we say? – the messenger Mercury from the Olympian Jupiter of Pondicherry. He used to distribute the Master’s daily replies: we would wait eagerly for him around 7 a.m. Seeing the large envelopes, he guessed that some special correspondence was going on between Sri Aurobindo and me. Not out of curiosity but literary interest, occasionally when he handed me my “post” he slightly lifted his eyebrows and lingered for a few seconds. I looked very innocent, took the envelope and waited for him to depart before

opening it. It happened like that four or five times. Then I felt a little nervous, so I wrote to Sri Aurobindo my impression that Nolini would soon get it into his head to inquire. “What should I do?” I asked. Sri Aurobindo very blandly replied: “Let us hope he will not get it into his head” (14.5.1937). But the silent inquisition of the lifted eyebrows for a moment or two did not cease. Then I wrote in desperation to Sri Aurobindo that I was sure the question would come and I must know whether to take Nolini into the secret or not. Sri Aurobindo answered: “Yes.” So this secret was shared between Nolini and me for ten years – that is, until 1946, when I wrote a book on Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. The third section of this book, like the other sections, came out first in the annual of the *Sri Aurobindo Circle* of Bombay. It was thus that excerpts from *Savitri* were divulged to the world – with Sri Aurobindo’s approval. Afterwards the Ashram published whole cantos in various journals and in a number of fascicles and then the entire epic in two volumes.

(*Mother India*, November 1982, pp. 703-13.
The last sentence is a handwritten addition by Amal)

Written by Amal in his copy of *Savitri*:



*If this poem becomes a part of your life,
it will make you a part of the Poet
whose heights have sent this call to our lowlands.
17.8.93*

From a personal letter

Savitri has been for all of us a beautiful series of stepping-stones from our common human moods to a mind-state of glorious vision and a heart-state of intense aspiration. When puzzled over some problem of inner or outer life, we have followed the Mother's advice to concentrate on the Divine for a moment and then open *Savitri* wherever we are instinctively led to do so and read the passage which our eyes first light upon. My own mode of consulting this massive magnificent oracle is to conjure up the face of Sri Aurobindo and appeal for his guidance through this poem with which I have the most intimate link because I happen to be the disciple to whom it was first revealed in secret in its version of 1936. Morning after morning, hand-written passages used to come to me. I would type them out and make my response in the form of appreciative comments, critical questions, requests for elucidation. Even when *Savitri* became public property originally by being quoted in my essay "A New Age of Spiritual Inspiration" in the annual "*Sri Aurobindo Bombay Circle*" of 1946, edited by my friend and fellow-sadhak Kishor Gandhi – even when certain parts of the poem came out in fascicles from the Ashram Press, new matter was sent to me beforehand. One of the last letters about the poem said:

You will see when you get the full typescript [of the first three books] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length... In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem..."

It is this "new form" that has become for us a guide-book in times of indecision. What is even more important is that it is a magnet to draw for us further spiritual experience.

(13.9.1994; *Life-Poetry-Yoga* III, pp. 320-25)

With the Mother

It was April 10, 1954. The day proved one of the most decisive in my inner life. I took to the Mother some suggestions with regard to *Savitri*. I had written them down. The Mother looked strange and said: "I can answer without even reading your note. I won't allow you to change even a comma in *Savitri*."

I knew she was striking out at something which in the past had led me to make some "editorial" adjustments in three letters of Sri Aurobindo in *Mother India*. There had been three related questions about the Mother, to each of which he had simply answered "Yes". I put the questions together, followed by only one "Yes". I realised afterwards that a needed affirmative emphasis had been watered down by a misguided sense of economical elegance. Later, when the second volume of the first edition of *Savitri* was under preparation, a sadhak had stressed to the Mother the danger of sending the proofs to me. The Mother seems even to have passed an order against sending them. But Prithwisingh and Nirod made urgent representations to her, saying that it would be a great mistake not to let me see the proofs, for I had made very appropriate suggestions in the past, which had been found correct when the typed copy had been compared with the original manuscript. So the Mother cancelled her order but left, of course, the final decision in the hands of Nolini and Nirod. In fact, I, being in Bombay at that period, had no power over what the press would print since whatever I might propose would have to pass under their eyes. The press was not dealing directly with me.

When the proof-reading was finished, Nolini wrote to me thanking me for the important and valuable work I had done. Now, before the new single-volume edition of *Savitri* was started, I made another long list of suggestions, many of which came to be accepted. The proofs of the new edition were passing through my hands as I was in the Ashram at the time, and suggestions again were being made by me.

"Mother," I said, "I am not wanting you to sanction the changing of commas and such things. All I want is that in some sort of Publishers' Note we should say that certain passages in Parts II and III did not receive final revision: otherwise critics will think that they are what Sri Aurobindo intended them finally to be."

The Mother exclaimed: “Do you think there is anybody in the world who can judge Sri Aurobindo? And how do you know what Sri Aurobindo intended or did not intend? He may have wanted just what he has left behind. How can you say that he did not give the final revision? How can you judge?”

I said: “It is not only my own opinion. Nirod agrees with me, and I think Nolini also.”

The Mother replied “It is presumptuous for anyone to have such an opinion. Who can enter into Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness? It is a consciousness beyond everything and what it has decided how can any one know?”

“Mother, from the fact that Sri Aurobindo sometimes corrected his own things on our pointing out oversights we conclude that passages may be there which needed revision.”

At this, the Mother exploded like a veritable Mahakali: “Yes, I know. People used to pester him with letters, pointing out grammatical mistakes and other things. He used to make changes just for the sake of peace. He was very polite and did not let people see what a nuisance they were. But when he and I were together and alone and like this” – here she put her two palms together two or three times to show the intimacy – “he used to say: ‘What a bother, what a nuisance!’ And once he said: ‘But I had a purpose in putting the thing in this way. I wanted it like this.’ Sri Aurobindo made many concessions out of politeness and a wish to be left in peace. When a great being comes down here to work he wants peace and not botheration. Yes, he was very polite, and people took advantage of his compassion and misunderstood it and got all sorts of ideas. Sri Aurobindo was polite – but I have made it a point not to be polite. I am not polite at all. The other day Pavitra brought me somebody’s idea about Sri Aurobindo’s passing. Somebody said Sri Aurobindo had died because of this or that. I told Pavitra: ‘Let him think anything – I simply don’t care. The truth will remain what it is.’ ”

I raised the question: “Take the Epilogue to *Savitri*, Mother. It comes from an early version and is not equal to the rest of the poem. In some places it is almost like a sort of anticlimax as regards the plane of spiritual inspiration.”

At this moment Nirod walked in and said: “Sri Aurobindo asked me: ‘What remains now to be done in *Savitri*?’ I replied: ‘The Book

of Death and the Epilogue.’ He remarked: ‘We shall see about them later.’ ”

The Mother turned to Nirod and said: “That may be his way of saying that nothing more needed to be done. We can’t form any conclusions. At most you may write a Publishers’ Note to say: ‘We poor blind ignorant human beings think Sri Aurobindo did not intend certain things to be the final version. And we are giving our opinion for what it may be worth.’ ” ...

The Mother’s whole outburst made me wonder about my discussions through the years with Sri Aurobindo over *Savitri*, the innumerable comments I used to make and he used to welcome and consider patiently. Was he just being polite with me? It hurt very much to think that. It also seemed impossible, non-factual. But I tried to open my being to the Mother and to accept wholly what she had said. I thanked her for the new outlook she had given me, and bowed down to her. She smiled and blessed me. She had made in me a wide opening. I opened out into a sense of Sri Aurobindo’s vastness and divineness. Something in the physical mind seemed broken and to make room for the higher and wider Consciousness.

Later, the physical mind attempted a strong come-back and I passed through a whole afternoon of severe conflict. Should I accept the Mother’s statement without reservation? May it not be that Sri Aurobindo’s discussions with me on *Savitri* were an exception to his practice of being merely polite? But to insist on an exception and to refuse to accept the opposite showed only the resistance of ego, of *amour propre*, the intellect’s pride and vanity. I felt I must reject all these self-regarding attitudes and truly grant that Sri Aurobindo might have been nothing more than polite and compassionate in considering all my suggestions to him. Then my ego would be thrown out and my physical mind become clear and grow receptive to the vast divine Consciousness of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I chose to take without any question her words, however contrary they might appear to my own sense of factuality. Moreover, I said to myself: “Your heart will not go anywhere else in search of a Guru. All your hope and help are in this Ashram. Whatever the pain, submit. You have no alternative. But at the end you will surely find light and delight as the Mother’s gift through every move of hers.”

Now for the first time, even in my most outer awareness, I realised what she and Sri Aurobindo truly were. The whole poise of the physical being experienced a change. A new life began, and I knew then that a fundamental obstacle – intellectual self-esteem – had essentially disappeared.

What is of extreme interest to note is the sequel to the whole incident. Some time afterwards when I was putting together the letters which Sri Aurobindo had written to me on *Savitri* to serve as a supplement in the last part of the volume. I spoke to the Mother of an introductory note to them. She consented to listen to what I had a mind to write. In that note most of the points which I had previously put to her but which she had rejected came in again, amidst some other matters. She approved of all of them unconditionally. And when I proposed that this note might go as a footnote in small print she expressed her wish that it should go as a real introduction in its own right.

I learned how the state of mind in which we approach the Mother and the attitude we bring to any situation related to her determines the consequences. A second lesson was that the Mother's actions, no matter how bewildering, are directed always towards the flowering of our true soul.

(from 'Some Ways of the Mother's Working',
Our Light and Delight, 2003, pp. 18-24)

You have touched upon an extremely personal as well as delicate subject when you ask me what I have to say apropos of the Mother's having once referred to me in the *Agenda* with the French term *imbécile* for having written to Sri Aurobindo about *Savitri* in what is termed a questioning vein. You are also asking me whether I consider the Mother to have made a mistake in using that word.

I may begin by saying that the censure would be more drastic if the word were taken in its English sense. In colloquial French I believe it means something in-between silliness and stupidity. I see that the translator of the *Agenda* into English has gone one better and employed the label: "moron." A moron is an adult with an intelligence equal to that of an average child of 8-12. To be moronic is to have an in-born defect of mind. It can never be got rid of. Surely the Mother did not mean this? For else she could easily have employed

this label. But, even as regards the other term, would I say that she made a mistake?

The matter is rather complex for me. It has always appeared to me that the Divine, by the very fact of assuming a body, through the common human process must be prone at times to make mistakes, at least small ones. But I have also always held that *the Divine's mistakes are still divine*. They happen to probe in a baffling way layers of our selves which are secretly at odds with our conscious intentions. If we can probe in turn these seeming mistakes, they can provide us with short-cuts to outgrowing our hidden weaknesses, and prove actually a grace and not a mere punishment. So, in the fundamental assessment, they are no mistakes at all.

My "questioning vein" about *Savitri* was intended to serve as an objective filter to isolate what might be Sri Aurobindo's oversights, which can certainly accompany on some occasions the incarnate Divine's insights. In addition, I wanted to anticipate whatever criticism of the new poetry the literary world at large might make, so that the poet might not unnecessarily expose himself to it. Finally, knowing the kind of poetry *Savitri* was meant to be, I was anxious for the "Overhead" level to be kept as high as possible and was eager to draw Sri Aurobindo's attention to whatever might strike my critical tympanum, rightly or wrongly, as not quite gloriously Aurobindonian. I believe Sri Aurobindo understood all these motives and knew too my basic breath-bereaved admiration of his revelatory art and was aware of how I longed to kindle up my own work with the help of his solar splendour. Let me quote to you a passage from one of his letters:

I can perfectly understand your anxiety that all should be lifted to or towards at least the minimum Overhead level or so near as to be touched by its influence or at the very least a good substitute for it. I do not know whether that is always possible in so long a poem as *Savitri* dealing with so many various heights and degrees and so much varying substance of thought and feeling and descriptive matter and narrative. But that has been my general aim throughout and it is the reason why I have made so many successive drafts and continual alterations till I felt that I had got the thing intended by the higher inspiration in every line and passage. It is also why I keep myself open to

every suggestion from a sympathetic and understanding quarter and weigh it well, rejecting only after due consideration and accepting when I see it to be well founded.

There is also the fact, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful or discover a completely adequate ground – the fact that Sri Aurobindo, without my directly asking for the favour, chose me as the only disciple to see in absolute secrecy *Savitri* in the making. Morning after morning he used to send me in a sealed envelope passages of the poem in his own hand. I would type them out and put, in the margins, appreciative remarks or queries from a literary standpoint.

Obviously, in this there was nothing culpable on my part. But at times there must have been in me an urge, however faint, to find fault with *Savitri* in a few rare places in the light (or twilight) of my own aesthetic sense. I am positive the Mother's "imbécile" hit out at that lurking imp. The imp must have fed its own ego by remarks of Sri Aurobindo's like the one to Nirod on getting back the latest composed matter of *Savitri* which he had sent me during my visit to the Ashram in August 1947 after a long absence. He asked: "Is Amal satisfied?"

(7.5.1988; *Life-Poetry-Yoga* I, pp. 256-58)

I had worked almost single-handed for the Ashram to bring out the first one-volume edition of the complete *Savitri* along with the copious letters Sri Aurobindo had written to me apropos of his epic – the 1954 "University" publication. While preparing it I had several occasions to talk with the Mother on various points and she was quite aware of my labour of love. Still, it so happened that when the book was out she did not give me a copy. After a few days I drew her attention to the fact and declared what *Savitri* meant to me. I made the resounding statement: "I would give my heart's blood for *Savitri*." She at once asked Champaklal for a copy and, writing my name on it and signing, presented it to me.

Yes, I would give my heart's blood because it is as if it were itself given to me by *Savitri*! Ever since, apropos of a certain spiritual situation suggested by a poem of mine, Sri Aurobindo quoted two lines telling of a Ray from the Transcendent coming through the silent Brahman –

Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace

– ever since he quoted them and, in answer to my question where these profoundly reverberating lines had hailed from, wrote the single word “Savitri” – ever since that mystery-packed moment I have felt my very heart to be a rhythm of life wakened by the grace of the Power which could create such poetry and whose Ray from the Transcendent was the ultimate source of whatever little light was sought to be evoked in me by the Aurobindonian gift of my new name “Amal Kiran” meaning “The clear ray”.

(10.9.1991; *Life-Poetry-Yoga* III, pp. 108-09)

On
Sri Aurobindo's
S A V I T R I

Part One : Essays

AMAL KIRAN

(K.D. SETHNA)

Clear Ray Trust, Puducherry 2010

Rs. 380.- Available from SABDA and Savitri Bhavan

This is the first volume of a two-part compilation of all Amal Kiran's writings on *Savitri*, prepared at Savitri Bhavan. The second volume, of extracts from personal letters and other writings, is in preparation to appear in 2012.

Huta's account of her work with Amal

I used to read *Savitri* with Ambalal Purani according to the Mother's arrangement. We finished reading Book One. Meanwhile he went to the U.K. and United States. After he had returned from abroad, he fell ill. In 1965 he passed away.

So the Mother arranged for me to read *Savitri* with Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) in 1962.

Sri Aurobindo first introduced *Savitri* to Amal in private drafts, and wrote to him [almost] all the letters that are now published along with the epic.

Amal and I met for the first time in 1961, upstairs in the passage which connects the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's rooms. I casually asked him about a chess board, because just then the Mother and I were doing something on that theme. He drew one and made me understand it.

When we started our reading of *Savitri*, some people warned Amal against me and asked him to discontinue. Amal cut them short, saying, "The Mother has arranged our reading. Besides, I have seen and felt Huta's soul. I cannot back out."

Amal made me understand *Savitri* intellectually and aesthetically. As soon as he left my apartment after our study sessions, I used to write down what he had explained to me in detail. I have numerous cherished notebooks which are of great value to me.

It was 7th August 1965 when I finished reading the whole of *Savitri* with Amal. I could not check my tears of joy. He too was moved. We shook hands over the long harmonious collaboration and absorbing discussions.

That day in the afternoon I went to the Mother to inform her about it. She smiled, heaved a sigh of happiness, and said:

Ah, one big work is done.

Here are Amal's own words, published in the *Mother India* Monthly Review of Culture in May 1979, on page 276:

An appreciative treatment of *Savitri* in its poetic quality – an elucidation of its thought-content, its imagery-inspiration, its word-craft and its rhythm-impact: this [the Mother] did not consider as beyond another interpreter than herself. I can conclude thus because she fully approved Huta's proposal to her that I should go through the whole of the epic with Huta during the period when the Mother and she were doing the illustrations of the poem, the Mother making outline sketches or suggesting the general disposition of the required picture and Huta following her instructions, invoking Sri Aurobindo's spiritual help, keeping the Mother's presence constantly linked to both her heart and hand and producing the final finished painting.

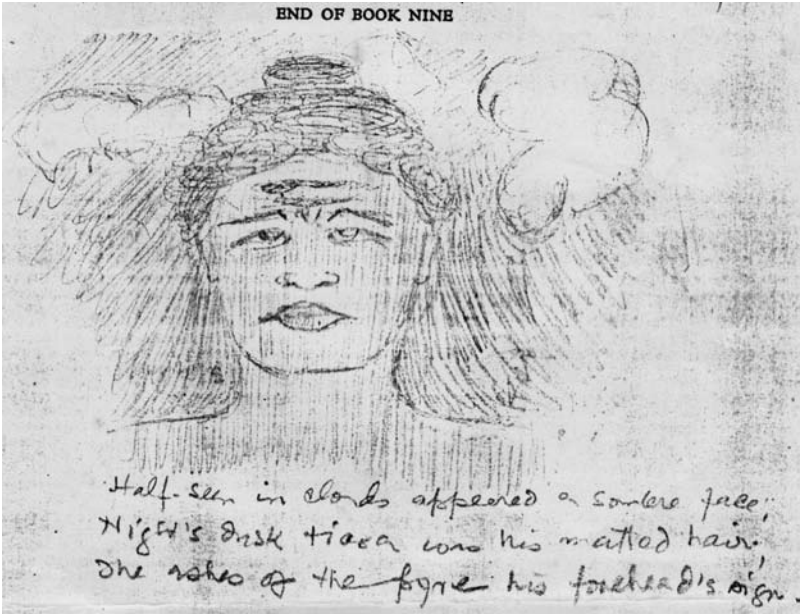
It was a long-drawn-out pleasure – my study-sessions with the young artist who proved to be a most eager and receptive pupil, indeed so receptive that on a few occasions, with my expository enthusiasm serving as a spur, she would come out with ideas that taught a thing or two to the teacher.

I never knew he would write such a thing about me. I always marvelled at his modesty, selflessness and goodwill.

Huta

(My Savitri Work with the Mother
In Perspectives on Savitri vol. 2, ed. R.Y. Deshpande, 2002)

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



A sketch made by Amal in his copy of the 1954 edition of Savitri, possibly during the time when he was reading with Huta, illustrating three lines from the end of Book Nine.

The English of Savitri (4)

Book One, Canto One, lines 139-185

by Shradhdhavan

(continued from issue no. 34)

Last time we completed the first section, which describes the Dawn on that very special day, the Dawn coming and bringing its magical message, and then going away again, getting replaced by ‘*the common light of earthly day*’. Then everybody wakes up – all the creatures ‘*of the soil and tree*’ and Man too. We looked at the symbolic picture of Man lifting up ‘*the burden of his fate*’. Then the next section begins :

And Savitri too awoke among these tribes
That hastened to join the brilliant Summoner’s chant
And, lured by the beauty of the apparent ways,
Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy.

Savitri too wakes up ‘*among these tribes*’ – these ‘*thousand peoples of the soil and tree*’. She is waking up in the forest of course, and when we wake up in the early morning in the forest all the animals and birds are making a noise. The birds are singing, the gibbons and monkeys are whooping, – we call it ‘the dawn chorus’. It is as if all the animals and birds, waking up, are welcoming the sun, ‘*the brilliant Summoner*’, praising him with their song, and all together making a great chant, a great hymn of praise. All the little beings are hurrying to join in. They are ‘lured’ – attracted by ‘*the beauty of the apparent ways*’ – the ways and things that we see, the possibilities that can be seen as the sun rises; and each of them joins in the chant, to acclaim ‘*their portion of ephemeral joy*’. ‘To acclaim’ means to say yes with a shout. When a new leader is presented to the people and they are asked ‘Do you accept him?’ everybody says ‘Yes!’ with a loud shout. So that is what is happening here. All of those tribes are saying yes to the small share of joy that the coming day is offering to each of them. That happiness is ‘ephemeral’ – it lasts only a moment or two;

it is there one minute and gone the next ... but these earthly creatures accept it gladly, singing out their joy in the early morning.

Akin to the eternity whence she came,
No part she took in this small happiness;
A mighty stranger in the human field,
The embodied Guest within made no response.

But Savitri does not share in this '*small happiness*', the joyful welcome to the new day that all the other forest creatures give. Here Sri Aurobindo gives us a first indication of who Savitri is in his view: very different from the traditional Savitri we read about in the Mahabharata, or the Savitri who is traditionally remembered in India, the '*sukanya*' whose devotion to her husband is able to save his life. Sri Aurobindo's Savitri has come from eternity with a mission. 'Akin' means 'closely related'. Savitri is closely related to the eternal world that she has come from, '*the eternity whence she came*' – 'whence' means 'from where'. She is not lured by the beauty of the apparent ways, she is not attracted by these ephemeral joys that are acclaimed by earth-creatures. She has within her '*a mighty stranger in the human field*', '*the embodied Guest within*': she has come into our human field, our human world, as an embodiment of the Love of the Supreme Divine Mother. That Guest makes no response to all that small happiness.

The call that wakes the leap of human mind,
Its chequered eager motion of pursuit,
Its fluttering-hued illusion of desire,
Visited her heart like a sweet alien note.

This is the way that we wake up: the mind leaps up and thinks 'Oh, what have I got to do? What will happen today?' And maybe it is difficult to get up unless we think that we want something, whatever it may be, some little desire – breakfast ... So that call wakes the leap of human mind, makes it leap into action and sets it off on its '*chequered eager motion of pursuit*'. That enthusiastic movement of chasing after something, Sri Aurobindo says, is 'chequered'. It means alternating black and white. You know a chess board, with its black and

white squares – that same board can be used for another game called ‘Chequers’ – or ‘Checkers’ in American English. Some English poets have used this word to refer to alternating light and shade – the effect of the sun through leaves on the ground beneath, for example. That is how Sri Aurobindo is using the word here : the alternation of light and dark in the mind’s eager motion of pursuit – the mind is always enthusiastically chasing after one thing or another that attracts it, as a child might chase after a butterfly – a beautifully coloured thing that flutters in front of it, luring it on : ‘*the fluttering-hued illusion of desire.*’ That is what desire does to us – it waves some brightly coloured misleading attraction in front of us, to keep us moving on. But Savitri is aware of all this touching her heart like some ‘*sweet alien note*’. There is something sweet about this movement because she has so much compassion and love for human beings, but it is alien to her – ‘alien’ means strange, something from another world. It does not wake up in her that same ‘*eager motion of pursuit*’ as it does in all the other creatures of the forest.

Time’s message of brief light was not for her.
In her there was the anguish of the gods
Imprisoned in our transient human mould,
The deathless conquered by the death of things.

Time carries us a message, a message of brief light – one day at a time, one life at a time. But this message is not meant for Savitri. She is carrying in her ‘*the anguish of the gods*’. ‘Anguish’ – intense suffering, the intense suffering of the divine beings who are imprisoned in the human mould, the divine souls who are aware of all the limitations, restrictions, unconsciousness of this human mould – the human body. They have accepted to become human here on earth to help us, but here in the body they feel their greatness imprisoned by its limitations and incapacities; they feel how short-lived, how ‘transient’ it is. The word ‘mould’ has a double suggestion. We use a mould for giving a shape to something shapeless : wax, for making a candle, metal for making a statue. But the word ‘mould’ also is used for soil, rich soil that is full of organic matter. Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* often refers to the body as ‘clay’ or ‘earth’. Here there is a similar idea: body is a mould for spirit, Sri Aurobindo tells us: life in a body made of matter

allows spirit to objectify and individualise itself, to take on a shape. But our human mould – our body and the stuff it is made of – is only ‘transient’, passing, short-lived. The gods are deathless, immortal, but as long as they are inhabiting a human body they are subject to the law of death, and Sri Aurobindo says that they experience anguish when they feel conquered by the death of things, the law of mortality which rules this material world and is the very opposite of their immortal nature.

A vaster Nature’s joy had once been hers,
But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue
Or stand upon this brittle earthly base.

This ‘*anguish of the gods*’ is not Savitri’s true nature. She has brought with her into the human world a joy, a bliss that belongs to the ‘*vaster Nature*’ of her heavenly home. But when she took on a human body that joy of the higher nature could not remain for a long time, it could not keep its ‘*gold heavenly hue*’ – the shining golden colour of the higher planes. It could not stand permanently on ‘*this brittle earthly base*’. ‘Brittle’ means that it breaks easily : Matter, our material basis, seems solid to us, but here on earth everything is changing, nothing is permanent, nothing can last long. The bliss that Savitri has brought with her would need a much more permanent foundation, a foundation of immortality which is not yet on earth.

A narrow movement on Time’s deep abyss,
Life’s fragile littleness denied the power,
The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss
She had brought with her into the human form,
The calm delight that weds one soul to all,
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy.

These lines have been illustrated by the Mother and Huta in the *Meditations on Savitri* series. The picture shows a first portrait of Savitri. She is holding something in her hand and looking at it lovingly. Somebody asked me what it is. In Mother’s sketch it looks like the earth but in the painting it is golden¹. I asked Huta, and she told me

¹ *Mother’s sketch was published with Huta’s permission in Invocation no. 7.*

that it is the golden earth – the earth as Savitri sees it in her vision, the way she wants it to become.

If we think of the huge gulfs of universal Time, ‘*Time’s deep abyssm*’ – an ‘abyssm’ is an unmeasurably deep gap or hole or chasm at the bottom of the ocean – Life has existed on earth for a very short time – only about 4 billion years, the scientists now think. It seems small and fragile compared to all the vastness of the universe. If matter is brittle and will break easily, life is even more easily damaged, like a flower-petal that may get bruised and spoiled even by any touch, or like a delicate glass that will break at any moment. The littleness and fragility of our life, Sri Aurobindo says, ‘denied’ all the wonderful things that Savitri has brought here with her from the higher planes. To ‘deny’ means to say ‘no’, to refuse : earth existence seems to insist that the power, the vastness, the consciousness, the bliss that are Savitri’s true nature cannot be real – or cannot be real here. Especially it cannot believe in that bliss, that calm delight that brings a sense of the oneness of all souls, the delight that because it is ‘calm’ – free of all vital excitement – is the key that can open ‘*the flaming doors of ecstasy*’. Ecstasy is the intensest degree of delight, delight so intense that it is like a fire, a flame – one has to be perfectly pure to feel that intensest form of bliss.

Earth’s grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears
Rejected the undying rapture’s boon:
Offered to the daughter of infinity
Her passion-flower of love and doom she gave.

‘Grain’ – this word has two meanings, and both of them are interesting here. It can mean a seed, or anything that is like a single seed; so it also gets applied to all the different cereals that we eat : rice, corn, wheat, barley – we call all these collectively ‘grain’. We can say of someone ‘He doesn’t have even a grain of common sense’ for example – not even a seed, or a small piece of good sense. But another meaning of the word seems to be connected with the verb ‘grow’: if you look at wood that has been cut and polished, you can see the lines of the tree’s growth, the way it has grown. This is also the grain. It is easier for carpenters to cut ‘along the grain’, more difficult to cut across or against the grain. So from this we say of anything that is difficult or

distasteful to us that it ‘goes against the grain’ – it does not feel right or natural. The grain of the tree also marks the way that the sap rises in the plant – the sap is like the life-blood of the plant, it rises from the root up the stem into the leaves, carrying its life-force. Here Sri Aurobindo says that Earth’s grain ‘needs the sap of pleasure and tears’ – the mixture of flavours – so it says ‘no’ to that boon which Savitri is bringing, the gift of ‘*undying rapture*’, immortal bliss. Instead the earth-nature offers to her, ‘*the daughter of infinity*’, her flower, her blossom, which carries love, but also doom – suffering and death. We have a flower, a very unusual flower, the flower of the Passion-Fruit vine: the fruits of some varieties of this vine are very delicious, and the flower has an intense and beautiful scent. Mother has given the name ‘Silence’ to this flower. In English the name ‘Passion Flower’ has been given to it because people have seen in the form of the flower reminders of the suffering and death of Christ. The long petals look like the crown of thorns he was made to wear, and the pistils at the centre look like the nails used to nail him on the Cross, and so on. ‘Passion’ means intensity of feeling – it can mean either intense suffering, or intense desire, or intense delight. So this flower which represents all these intense mixed feelings – Love and Doom – this is what the earth life offers to Savitri.

In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice.
A prodigal of her rich divinity,
Her self and all she was she had lent to men,
Hoping her greater being to implant
And in their body’s lives acclimatise
That heaven might native grow on mortal soil.

So Savitri’s coming to earth in a human form, Sri Aurobindo says, was a ‘*splendid sacrifice*’. She came, hoping to implant her greater being here, on earth. ‘Implant’ – nowadays this word is used in medicine: the doctors may insert an artificial organ or device into the body to help it function better. But originally the word is connected with planting, planting something in the ground. Savitri wanted to implant all the higher possibilities of the divine planes here, in earthly soil. He says that in doing this, she was ‘*a prodigal of her rich divinity*’ – a prodigal is someone who does not count the cost, who does not care how much

he spends or lends or gives away, so it is often used in a negative sense: a wastrel, an extravagant and foolish person who wastes his wealth. Savitri has lent all her rich divinity, her self, everything that she was, she has lent to men – in the hope that her greater being, her being which is greater than ordinary human nature, will take root in the lives of human bodies, and get acclimatised here. When we first came to Auroville, people started trying to introduce plants that were not native to this country or this climate at all. They had a hard time, most of the plants died, but after some time they got ‘acclimatised’, they got used to the conditions here, and now plants from all over the world grow nicely here. She was hoping to acclimatise all her own rich divinity as a normal part of human life, so that ‘*heaven might native grow on mortal soil*’ – so that the qualities of the higher planes could become part of earth life, as if they were natives, born here, belonging here.

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature’s change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal’s touch:
It fears the pure divine intolerance
Of that assault of ether and of fire;
It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,
Almost with hate repels the light it brings;
It trembles at its naked power of Truth
And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice.

That is what Savitri was hoping to do – but now, on this morning as she wakes up, the morning when she knows that Satyavan must die, that splendid sacrifice that she has made seems ‘*in vain*’ – as if it were useless, and has had no effect. And why is that? Because it is so difficult to persuade earth-nature to change. There is something in humanity that finds it difficult to bear the touch of higher things : ‘*Mortality*’ – things and beings that are subject to death – ‘*bears ill the eternal’s touch*’ – it is difficult for us to bear that touch which is so intense. There is something in us that fears that ‘*assault*’ – it is experienced as an attack – ‘*of ether and of fire*’. These words make us think of the five elements : earth, water, fire, air, and ether. We are earth-beings, under the domination of matter, the physicality of our bodies; water, which flows and gives life, seems more related to our

life-energies, our prana; air might correspond to the higher mind; ether is the most rarified of the elements, so pure that we cannot breath it; it may symbolise our spiritual existence; and fire is the most intense – we connect it with will and aspiration; it burns and purifies. Our earth-nature fears that ‘*divine intolerance*’ which will not allow anything impure or mixed. So when some divine messenger comes, offering ‘*sorrowless happiness*’ the earth-nature ‘*murmurs*’ – it complains and revolts. It repels – pushes away – ‘*almost with hate*’ the higher light that the divine touch brings. It cannot stand it, does not want it. It trembles with fear at that ‘*naked power of Truth*’ that will not allow any pretence or insincerity or hiding, that will expose all our littlenesses and shortcomings. Even though the divine Voice carries great sweetness, it is so powerful that our weak clay finds it terrifying. That is our mortality, the part of us that is ruled by Death. That makes Savitri’s work so difficult that it even seems to be in vain.

Inflicting on the heights the abyss’s law,
It sullies with its mire heaven’s messengers:
Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence
It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;
It meets the sons of God with death and pain.

In this sentence, the ‘It’ which comes again and again is ‘mortality’, the earth-nature that is convinced by Death and limitation. It insists that the higher levels of consciousness, the higher beings who come, must obey the law of the lower levels, ‘*the abyss’s law*’ – the unconsciousness, the darkness, the limitation and separation, the resistance to progress and love and truth. The word ‘abyss’ refers to a very deep dark place, a bottomless dark hole. ‘*It sullies with its mire heaven’s messengers*’ – ‘mire’ is sticky dirty mud – not just the clean mud that you may get in nature when the rain comes, but the sort of mud that is mixed with filth and debris in the streets of slums; to ‘sully’ means to make dirty, to stain: the lower nature throws mud and filth on those messengers who want to share the voice of the truth. It defends itself from the saviour hands of the divine Grace that would save it, lift it up into a higher state, by turning against them ‘*its thorns of fallen nature*’ – the lower nature that is distorted and perverted. When we read the word ‘thorns’ we think of Jesus again,

who was made to wear a crown of thorns; but today I was remembering something else: some of you may know the book '*Le Petit Prince*' – '*The Little Prince*', by the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It is a beautiful story about a sweet innocent little prince who has left his own planet and come to earth. On that planet he has a rose growing – he worries about his rose, that he has left her all alone and the only thing that she has to defend herself against any danger are her thorns. It is an image that sometimes comes – why does the rose, that most beautiful of flowers, have those painful thorns? It is as a defence. So here mortality has thorns which it uses to defend itself from change, even from '*the saviour hands*' of Divine Grace. When the Avatars come, the sons of God, the divine messengers, mortality meets them with death and pain.

A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,
Their sun-thoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds,
Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,
The cross their payment for the crown they gave,
Only they leave behind a splendid Name.

This is what happens to the messengers, the beings from the higher levels who come to help save the earth. They come like '*a glory of lightnings*' – a short passage of great flashing bright lights – they come, and they go: they '*traverse the earth scene*' – they pass across the stage of history, lighting everything up, and leaving again. And when they have passed their thoughts that were as bright as suns, that came from the supreme sun of Truth, fade, because they get darkened by the ignorant minds of human beings who could not assimilate them, could not understand them. The work that they have come to do seems to be betrayed – those who were supposed to carry it on fail, distort the message. The good news that they came to share gets distorted and used for evil – just the opposite of what they intended. Here again we cannot help thinking of Jesus Christ when Sri Aurobindo says '*The cross their payment for the crown they gave.*' They want to bring something wonderful to earth, a new and liberating power, but the payment that the earth-nature gives for their efforts is suffering and death. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have told us that the Cross is the

symbol of the resistance of the world of matter to the pouring down of the divine grace. ‘*Only they leave behind a splendid Name*’ – we remember their names with reverence, but we cannot live up to what they have taught us.

A fire has come and touched men’s hearts and gone;
A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.

These lines refer to God’s messengers – their coming is like a fire, touching people, inspiring them, and then going away ... but only a very few people have ‘*caught flame*’, have kindled with the divine fire and been able to rise to a greater life – otherwise the sun-thoughts brought by the divine ones are fading away, ‘*darkened by ignorant minds*’.

Too unlike the world she came to help and save,
Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast
And from its dim chasms welled a dire return,
A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall.

Now Sri Aurobindo returns to Savitri herself. He has given the explanation of why, at this point, as she wakes up on the day when Satyavan must die, the splendid sacrifice that she has made, hoping to help humanity to rise to a diviner, more heavenly life, seems to have been in vain. He says that there is too big a difference between Savitri and this world that she has come to help and save. It is as if all that greatness, the power and the bliss and the love and nobility that she has brought with her, is like a great weight pressing on the ignorant breast of our world; and when there is a weight pressing down, something may well up from below. Materially, it might be oil or water but here it is on a subtler level. From the dim chasms – the clefts and crevices of the ignorance – there comes up a terrible response: in return for the greatness she had hoped to implant in our world, she has to bear a share of the pain of this world – a share in its sorrow, its struggle, its fall and separation from the divine origin.

To live with grief, to confront death on her road,—
The mortal’s lot became the Immortal’s share.

This struggle and sorrow is the lot of mortal beings, the portion that we get dealt in the game of life : to live with grief, to face death – it comes to all of us in the course of our life-journey. This is the lot of the mortal, the being that is held in the grip of death and ignorance. This is what earth is offering to Savitri – the mortal’s lot becomes the share of the immortal being that she is in her soul.

Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,
Awaiting her ordeal’s hour abode,
Outcast from her inborn felicity,
Accepting life’s obscure terrestrial robe,
Hiding herself even from those she loved,
The godhead greater by a human fate.

A gin is a terrible kind of trap. It used to be used against human beings. The landlords with their big estates used to keep deer and pheasants that they would like to hunt for pleasure, while roundabout were living so many poor people. Men who needed food for their families would go and try to catch one of those birds, or even just a rabbit. To stop them the landlords would set these terrible traps which would catch them and break a leg, so that they wouldn’t be able to move. I think that this kind of trap was made illegal during that time when Sri Aurobindo was in England. He says that Savitri is like that: she is trapped in one of those terrible traps – the trap of earthly destiny which will not let her go. She is caught, she cannot escape, she can only wait – just like one of those poor poachers who can only wait until one of the game-keepers, the guards, comes and finds him, and then he will have to face trial and punishment, his ordeal will start. ‘Abode’ is the past tense of the verb ‘to abide’, meaning to live or to remain or to stay. An ordeal is a terrible test, some difficult, often painful, trial that you have to go through. She can only wait for that moment of trial and testing, which she knows is going to come – the challenge she will face when Death comes to take Satyavan away. This is the state that Savitri is in on that fateful morning. And because she is trapped, she is experiencing ‘*the anguish of the gods / Imprisoned in the transient human mould.*’ She is ‘cast out’ – exiled, excluded – from the felicity, the happiness which is her inborn right. She has accepted this dark robe, this covering, this disguise, by taking on a human body; and she

is hiding herself even from those she loves – she is not revealing her inner divinity or her mission to anybody. She is just there as a simple girl living in the forest. But really, Sri Aurobindo says, she is ‘*the godhead greater by a human fate*’. It may seem as if she is trapped, as if her sacrifice is in vain, but the fact that she has accepted the obscure robe of the earthly body and human life is making her even greater than she was before. Some years ago, in the very early days of Savitri Bhavan, Professor Arabinda Basu from the Ashram gave us a wonderful talk on the significance of this line. It was published in our *Invocation* issue no. 2, I believe. If you are interested you can take a look at it. For now, let us stop here for today.

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Expression of Mystical Elements through Images and Symbols in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

by Dr Martin K. A.¹

For the first time, Invocation is publishing an article on Savitri contributed by an academic of an Indian University. Dr. Martin Kolambrath contacted Savitri Bhavan in 2009 when he was preparing his Ph.D. thesis on Sri Aurobindo's epic. He visited Auroville for a few days, and we were happy to be able to assist him in his research. The thesis has now been accepted, and we are publishing this article based on it, as an example of the growing interest in Savitri amongst scholars in India, one which also gives a glimpse into earlier pioneering scholarly writings on the poem.



Introduction

The entire life of Sri Aurobindo can be counted as a preparation for the writing of his *magnum opus*, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (first one-volume edition in 1954). It is an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and the life divine. It retells the well-known legend of prince Satyavan and Savitri which is narrated in about 700 lines in the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata* (Cantos 291-297).

Sri Aurobindo makes a daring attempt to compose a mystical epic-poem in the twentieth century when most scholars and poets were of the opinion that it is unfeasible to write such gigantic works due to the fragmented state of the modern mind. But with the divine assistance he has been truly successful in this endeavour and the result is the

¹ Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, St. Thomas' College, Thrissur

celestial poem *Savitri*. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the biographer of Sri Aurobindo, writes about the reception of this work:

Savitri has been read as poetry, as poetised philosophy, as symbolistic and mystic poetry, as an example of the Overhead inspiration at work over prolonged jets of utterance. (*Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* p.690)

The entire epic is mystical in temperament. Its theme is the raising of the whole earth consciousness to a higher level of evolution. While replying to one of his critics in a letter of 1936, Sri Aurobindo testifies to this fact:

Do not forget that *Savitri* is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. (*Savitri* p. 754).

This paper is an attempt to focus on the expression of mystical elements in *Savitri* through images and symbols. Concerning the poem's technique Sri Aurobindo writes in 1946:

Rapid transitions from one image to another are a constant feature in *Savitri* as in most mystic poetry. ... The mystic Muse is more of an inspired Bacchante of the Dionysian wine than an orderly housewife. (*Savitri* p.735)

The primary objective of mystic poets is to express faithfully, using both logical and symbolic language, the visions they have received. Dr. Prema Nandakumar, an expert in Sri Aurobindo, writes,

To express the inexpressible these mystics and visionaries took recourse to symbols and similitudes that created a bridge towards understanding. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.127).

Symbolic language helps mystics and poets alike to articulate their visions and intensely felt experiences. *Savitri* is rich in images and symbols. Justifying the abundance and repetition of images and symbols in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter of 1946:

In mystic poetry ... repetition is not objectionable ... This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images

and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. (*Savitri* p.742)

While dealing with symbolic writings, readers should not become victims to literalism. Iyengar gives a warning to this effect when he points out that:

... the reader has to train himself to respond to the dynamics of mystic poetry so that he may be able to leap from the symbol to the truth behind it, keep steady pace with the cataract of images, and feel the thrill of each splash of revelation as it comes. (*Indian Writing in English* p.205)

Approaching *Savitri* one has to be aware of the two layers of time and action inherent in it. Iyengar writes:

There is thus ‘double-time’ in *Savitri*: although in the ‘legend’ the poem comprises the events of a single day in temporal terms, in the ‘symbol’ all time and all eternity are involved in the spiritual action. (*Indian Writing in English* p.192)

Concerning ‘double-action’ he observes that there are two planes operating in the poem: one is the material and the other the spiritual. He elaborates:

On the material plane the poem begins on the day Satyavan is fated to die, and the poem ends with ... the discomfiture of Yama the Lord of Death, and the return of Satyavan to life. (*Ibid.* p.192)

On the spiritual plane, he elucidates that the poem cuts

... into the middle of things, the fearful hour in human history when the Asuric creation ... threatens the world and all the great achievements of the race with total annihilation. (*Ibid.* p.192)

The sub-title of the poem itself is pregnant with layers of meaning. Nandakumar has tried to bring out the implications of it:

... when the epic was published at last with the sub-title ‘a legend and a symbol’, the ‘symbol’ seemed to dominate the ‘legend’ ... for the ‘legend’ fills the ‘symbol’ with rich substance, and the ‘symbol’ charges the ‘legend’ with ambrosial significance.” (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.7)

This mutual enhancement of legend and symbol testifies to the brilliance of Sri Aurobindo in moulding this mystical poem.

The Characters and their symbolism

After this brief introduction, let us now focus on the symbolism of the characters in *Savitri*. First of all, one has to bear in mind that most of the characters in this poem are symbolic in nature. At the same time it is not prudent to look at them as mere symbols. In reality, it is difficult to set the characters apart from their symbolic entity. Iyengar expresses it beautifully in *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history*:

Death, Love, Truth – Yama, Savitri, Satyavan – the symbols and the legendary characters simultaneously fill the expanse of the epic, and it is not easy, it is not wise, to separate the symbol from the legend. ... The characters, then, are at once symbol-powers and real human beings. They didn’t figure in the mythic past alone, but are also constituents of the current climate of striving and pressing towards the future. (p.664-665)

According to Nandakumar, Sri Aurobindo’s epic characters are:

... not merely concepts, equated with human histories, they are flesh and blood too with mind and soul dimensions. Indeed the symbolism functions in such a way that the characters take on extra life. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.123)

Aswapati is the human father of Savitri — the incarnation of the Divine Mother. In the original legend, he is the king of Madra who is issueless and enters into a severe penance to please the goddess Gayatri. But in Sri Aurobindo’s hands this character assumes various

levels of meanings. A.B. Purani notes them in *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Approach and a Study*:

The life of the childless king Aswapathy performing *tapasyā* in order to have a child has been entirely changed by the poet into a symbol of human soul descended on earth from divine heights trying to acquire knowledge of the Self and the world. (p.4)

He adds:

Aswapathy represents the aspiring human soul down the millenniums of evolution in his search for the truth of himself, of the world and of God. (p.4)

Therefore, he can be considered a forerunner of the mystics who always searched for the self, world and God.

Many scholars have agreed upon the symbolism of Aswapati in *Savitri*. Nandakumar brings forth the three dimensions of Aswapati in the following words:

On the personal plane, Aswapathy is an individual questing for self-knowledge. On a wider plane, he is King of Madra, the leader of his people; on a still wider plane, Aswapathy is the symbol of humanity, its representative, its forerunner towards a higher status. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.79)

The reader has to equip him/herself with this kind of a broad outlook in order to have a right understanding of the poem. Furthermore, Iyengar also calls Aswapati:

... the pioneer Traveller of the Worlds, the leader and path-finder of the race. (*Indian Writing in English* p.196)

Nolini Kanta Gupta too remarks that Aswapati:

... climbs to the summits and brings down upon earth the heavenly riches and the Divine Grace which fulfils, transmuting all debits into credits. (*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta Vol.1* p.21)

So he can be hailed as the courageous seeker who has paved the spiritual way for the rest of humankind.

Passing on to the character of Savitri, one also finds the use of symbolism. It is she who descends to the earth and rescues Satyavan, the representative of the human soul, from Death. Right from her childhood she shows a mystical lineage in her nature and actions:

Adept of truth, initiate of bliss,
A mystic acolyte trained in Nature's school,
Her hours were a ritual in a timeless fane. (Savitri p.360)

It is in Savitri's "flame" that Yama is finally defeated and consumed and transformed into light. Although the fight takes place exclusively between Savitri and Death, the whole universe and humanity are indirectly involved in it. The war between them is fought not solely for Savitri herself but for the entire humanity. Nandakumar writes:

... in *Savitri* we follow the action with panting hearts, with fear and hope, with despair and joy. We are involved in Savitri's struggle. She *must* win, if *we* are to live. She has to destroy Death, win the Eternal Life, return to the earth, and lead us into the Everlasting Day. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.101)

Critics have tried to compare the actions of Aswapati and Savitri and have demarcated their roles in the epic. Iyengar writes about it in *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history*:

It is also necessary to remember that, although Aswapathy's is superficially an exteriorised Yoga and Savitri's an interiorised Yoga, the spiritual realities affirmed or experienced by them are the same. ... Aswapathy is the Forerunner, Savitri is the avatar; and they are both necessary for the manifestation, and the dual act of redemption and new creation. (p.684-685)

Again, comparing Aswapati and Savitri Nandakumar writes:

Aswapathy understands the problem, Savitri first prepares herself for her task; and by fighting Death, she ends the ignorance and makes possible the Life Divine. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.79)

Iyengar also highlights the symbolic relevance of both their efforts. He writes,

... both Aswapathy and Savitri, in their aspiration and transforming spiritual action, strive, not for themselves alone but for all, for a general liberation, a universal realization and a splendid new creation. (*Indian Writing in English* p.200)

The character of Satyavan too attains a wide horizon in this poem. In the original legend, Satyavan is the son of Dyumatsena. But here he is considered the representative of the fallen soul which is under the influence of Death. However, he is a mystic and has travelled through such paths. He tells Savitri:

“I sat with the forest sages in their trance:
There poured awakening streams of diamond light,
I glimpsed the presence of the One in all.” (p.405)

And he recognizes in Savitri the World-Mother and expresses his hope:

“My Matter shall evade the Inconscient’s trance.
My body like my spirit shall be free.
It shall escape from Death and Ignorance.” (p.406)

Comparing the symbolism enshrined in the characters of Satyavan and Savitri, K.B. Sitaramayya and Swarna Gouri remark:

They play opposite roles, Satyavan’s is to rise and Savitri’s is to raise him, free him from the grip of Ignorance and Death. (*A Dual Power of God* p.5)

Images and symbols from Nature

Leaving the character symbolism, now the focus of discussion is shifted to the usage of images and symbols from nature. Images from nature are further divided into Light/Darkness Imagery, Imagery of the Elements, Botanical, Zoological, Inanimate and Cosmic Imagery. M. K. Naik, writing about the imagery in *Savitri*, cautions readers:

... those who pigeonhole the imagery of the poem as totally ‘romantic’ strangely ignore the great variety of images in ‘Savitri’, some of which are ‘modern’ in the best vein of

poetry in the age of technology: for instance, the universe is an ‘ocean of electric energy’ and ‘Dark beings’ come ‘televised from the gulfs of night’. (*A History of Indian English Literature* p.56)

Light/Darkness imagery covers a major portion of the poem. The whole epic can be summarized in Nandakumar’s words as:

... the revelation of receding Night and the imminent arrival of a greater Dawn. (*Sri Aurobindo: A Critical Introduction* p.103)

The opening lines of the poem talk about darkness resisting and opposing the coming of the day:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone ...
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge. (p.1)

In contrast, the last lines of the poem show us Night transformed, by the action of Savitri, into the nurse of the coming day:

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

The whole action of the poem takes place under different shades of light. The titles of some of the Cantos and Books testify to this fact: “The Symbol Dawn” (Book One, Canto 1), “The Descent into Night” (Book Two, Canto 7), “Towards the Black Void” (Book Nine, Canto 1), “The Journey in Eternal Night and the Voice of the Darkness” (Book Nine, Canto 2), “The Book of the Double Twilight” (Book Ten) and “The Book of Everlasting Day” (Book Eleven). In other words, the poem symbolically shows the gradual conquest of eternal Night and Darkness and the triumph of everlasting Day and Light.

Light imagery is used to denote many aspects of the poem. Nandakumar remarks,

Light and Bliss are the only two words possible to describe the Paradise envisioned by ... Sri Aurobindo. (*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.44)

On the contrary, darkness is used to characterise unconsciousness and falsehood and to personify Death. Analysing the light and darkness imagery in *Savitri*, Iyengar observes in *Indian Writing in English*:

Even as Satyavan with Savitri's help lives down the invasion of Night and Twilight and emerges into the clear light of Day, the human soul too (which is the spearhead of the evolutionary advance), led by the Supreme's gift of Grace, overcomes the limitations of the Ignorance and the obscurities and contradictions of mental life, and achieves the bliss of divine or superconscious life. (p.193)

Moving on to elemental imagery, let us concentrate now upon images of the five elements, namely, earth, wind, fire, water and air. The following lines which capture God's reply to Savitri shows the symbolic depiction of the earth:

“Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,
My garden of life to plant a seed divine. ...
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,
The body of earth a tabernacle of God.” (p.699)

During her early years Savitri expresses her aspiration. The poet writes:

She keeps her will that hopes to divinize clay. (p.354)

“Clay” here indicates the earthly human nature that aspires to become the divine. In another occasion while debating with Death, Savitri declares:

“I have transformed my ill-shaped brittle clay
Into the hardness of a stuated soul.” (p.588)

Here too “brittle clay” stands for the earthly nature of Savitri which has been transformed into something divine.

In the realm of botanical imagery, Sri Aurobindo has made use of the lotus symbol. According to the age-old Yoga system, the *Kundalini* (life-force) has to leave from the genitals of a person and rise up little by little through the navel, heart, throat and forehead and finally reach the topmost point of the skull. At this juncture a person is considered enlightened. Practising integral Yoga, Savitri has attained this position:

A Force descended trailing endless lights ...
It entered the mystic lotus in her head,
A thousand-petalled home of power and light. (p.573)

The same force then descends and clears all the decisive centres of the human body:

It stirred in the lotus of her throat of song ...
It glided into the lotus of her heart ...
It poured into her navel's lotus depth ...
Broke into the cave where coiled World-Energy sleeps
And smote the thousand-hooded serpent Force. (p.665)

The poet uses the lotus symbol to describe the experience of ecstasy:

As if the choric calyx of a flower ...
A lotus of light-petalled ecstasy
Took shape out of the tremulous heart of things. (p.679)

When the poet wants to highlight Savitri's realization of the Cosmic Spirit and Consciousness, he uses botanical imagery:

She was a subconscious life of tree and flower,
The outbreak of the honied buds of spring;
She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,
She was the red heart of the passion-flower,
The dream-white of the lotus in its pool. (p.557)

In the domain of cosmic imagery, it is the imagery of the sun which dominates over the other elements such as the moon, stars and other heavenly bodies in *Savitri*. Nandakumar observes:

When the central symbol is reserved for the *active* aspect of the Sun, the subsidiary symbols are also based upon the

nature of the Sun ... The Sun and its energy Fire — Surya and Agni — recur in the yoga of Aswapathy and Savitri.
(*Dante and Sri Aurobindo* p.134)

Other Imagery

Mystical visions are expressed with the help of images of quests, wars and destinations. Like Homer's Odysseus, Aswapati undertakes a journey, but one which is not external but internal:

A voyager upon uncharted routes
Adventuring across enormous realms,
He broke into another Space and Time. (p.91)

He is bound to travel through a world-stair. M. P. Pandit writes in this connection:

Representing humanity as he [Aswapati] does, he wants to explore what is beyond and, cutting the cord that ties him to the earth, steps beyond the earth-zone. (*Introducing Savitri* p.23)

He passes through the Kingdoms of Subtle Matter, Little Life, Greater Life, Little Mind, Greater Mind and Greater Knowledge. In between, he descends into Night and travels through the world of Falsehood.

The journey motif recurs in the poem. Sri Aurobindo portrays part of Savitri's inner journey as follows:

Then journeying forward through the self's wide hush
She came into a brilliant ordered Space ... (p.495)

Savitri then reaches "a quiet country of fixed mind" (p.498) where men are "anchored on fixed belief" and "stand on faith as on a rock" (p.499). But she declares:

"... I must pass leaving the ended search,
Truth's rounded outcome firm, immutable
And this harmonic building of world-fact,
This ordered knowledge of apparent things.
Here I can stay not, for I seek my soul." (p.499)

In her search, she seeks the help of higher agents:

O happy company of luminous gods,
Reveal, who know, the road that I must tread ...
To find the birthplace of the occult Fire
And the deep mansion of my secret soul. (p.501)

Savitri marries Satyavan and lives with him for a year. At the appointed hour Death approaches him in the forest and leads his soul away. Savitri follows Death and yet another journey begins. On the way Death advises her:

“Return to thy body’s shell, thy tie to earth ...
Hope not to win back to thee Satyavan.” (p.587)

But an adamant Savitri reveals to Death her strength:

“Now in the wrestling of the splendid gods
My spirit shall be obstinate and strong
Against the vast refusal of the world.” (p.588)

She again argues with Death:

“World-spirit, I was thy equal spirit born.
My will too is a law, my strength a god.
I am immortal in my mortality.” (p.589)

The imagery of struggle is a vital part of mystical poetry. The prominent struggle in this poem takes place between Savitri and Death for recovering Satyavan’s soul which represents humanity. Referring to this fatal struggle Iyengar remarks:

The day has dawned as other days to all except Savitri; only she knows the struggle ahead, the battle that must be fought and won before the following dawn. (*Indian Writing in English* p.193)

What makes this unique is that it is a woman who is engaged in a protracted battle and secondly it is not waged with any physical force. Iyengar elucidates:

Savitri’s is a similar ordeal, though, being the struggle of a woman and a wife with a power like Yama, it is more excruciatingly tense and vivid, and carries us to the supremest heights of Victory,— Victory over Death, and Love the

Victor, and Truth the fruit of Victory. ... In the ensuing trial of strength — a trial in which a variety of mind-forces and soul-forces are engaged — we have some of the features of the *Mahabharata* war. (*Indian Writing in English* p.201)

Architectural imagery consisting of descriptions of castles, mansions, dwelling places and so on are often found in mystical poems. For instance, in the following lines the author has made good use of architectural imagery:

A whole mysterious world is locked within.
Unknown to himself he lives a hidden king
Behind rich tapestries in great secret rooms ...
In the secret adytum of his inmost soul ...
Beneath the threshold, behind shadowy gates
Or shut in vast cellars of unconscious sleep. (p.479)

To highlight the protagonist's inward travel such images are used in plenty:

As thus she passed in that mysterious place
Through room and room, through door and rock-hewn door,
She felt herself made one with all she saw. (p.525)

The author reports that she entered a mystical cave:

Onward she passed seeking the soul's mystic cave.
At first she stepped into a night of God... (522).

Symbolic expressions and fire imagery are used to highlight Savitri's advance:

Then through a tunnel dug in the last rock
She came out where there shone a deathless sun.
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. (p.525-26)

On his part, Aswapati became capable of receiving visions when

He found the occult cave, the mystic door ...
And entered where the Wings of Glory brood
In the silent space where all is for ever known. (p.74)

Words denoting mystical architecture and used by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* have been explained in Rand Hicks' *A Savitri Dictionary*. These expressions include "In the secret adytum of his inmost soul" (p.479) where 'adytum' is 'the sacred, innermost part of a temple' (p.2); "alcove" (p.466) which is 'a recess in a room, or a shaded secluded retreat in a garden' (p.3); "nave" (p.412) which is 'the main body of a church, the aisle of which is flanked on each side by pillars' (p.42); "tabernacle" (p.475) meaning 'a moveable tent or hut; used as a temporary place of worship, a temple; or the temporary home of the soul' (p.65); and "labyrinth" (p.103) which is 'an intricate structure containing inter-communicating passages in confusing number and complexity, from which one cannot find exit without a guide' (p.36).

Abstract imagery finds an important place in mystical poetry. Sri Aurobindo has employed it frequently and *Savitri* is no exception. But in a general sense, mystics like Sri Aurobindo reject the idea of abstraction altogether. In letter of 1946 he argues:

To the mystic there is no such thing as abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To me, for instance, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and I can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to me an image but a fact.
(*Savitri* p.738)

But the limitations of language compel even mystics to use abstract images so that they can talk about their experiences which are largely ineffable. For this purpose they use personifications, allegories and figures of speech.

Death is one of the main personifications in *Savitri*. According to the Hindu belief, the god of death is known as Yama. In the original legend of Satyavan and Savitri also one finds death personified as god. Sri Aurobindo follows the same tradition and has pictured Death as a person. Savitri experiences Death's presence at the time of Satyavan's death:

Something stood there, unearthly, sombre, grand,
A limitless denial of all being
That wore the terror and wonder of a shape. (p.574)

Part Three of the epic is dominated with the looming presence of Death and the arguments between Death and Savitri. During a heated debate, she declares:

“O Death, who reasonest, I reason not
Reason that scans and breaks, but cannot build ...
I am, I love, I see, I act, I will.” (p.594)

At the end of the struggle, the defeated Death runs away:

His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.
At last he knew defeat inevitable
And left crumbling the shape that he had worn ...
Afar he fled shunning her dread touch
And refuge took in the retreating Night. (p.667)

Mystic language upholds the experience of love and considers God as the source of all kinds of love. Sri Aurobindo has highlighted it in this poem. Savitri speaks to Death about true love:

“My love is not a hunger of the heart,
My love is not a craving of the flesh;
It came to me from God, to God returns.” (p.612)

Again, she convinces Death about the strength of love:

“My will is greater than thy law, O Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:
Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme.
Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.” (p.633)

To conclude, *Savitri* is a poem with a mystical bearing. It proclaims that human beings can attain the divine through constant and continuous search. Aswapati is the forerunner of the human race in that he has proved that it is possible for a human being to aspire for the divine. He has reached higher planes with the help of Yoga and

has gained endless knowledge and wisdom. As a result of his tapasya, he is granted a daughter, Savitri, who is an emanation of the Supreme Divine Mother, the creative and transforming power. Savitri fulfils the quest which Aswapati initiated, and brings the promise of the intervention of a new Light, a new transforming power, the possibility of a divine life 'for Earth and Men'.

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Sri Aurobindo's Descent into Death

By Georges van Vrekhem

From September 2010 to February 2011, noted Aurovilian author and speaker Georges van Vrekhem gave a series of talks in Auroville, some at the Town Hall and some at Savitri Bhavan. Eleven essays based on these talks have now been gathered and published in book form with the title 'Preparing for the Miraculous'¹. Here is the written version of the talk given at our request in Savitri Bhavan on December 4th 2010, inaugurating the exhibition of photographs and documents assembled to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's passing.

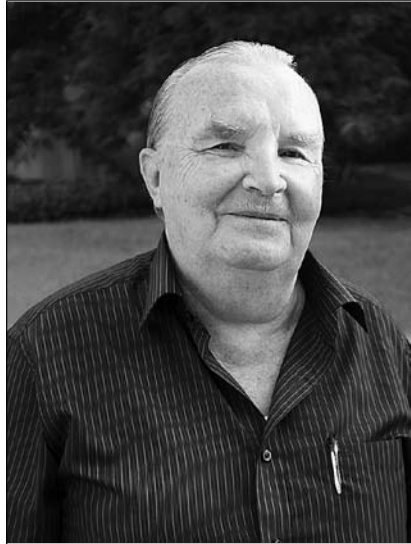
“The time is very serious”

In June 1946, less than a year after the unconditional surrender of Japan, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that a black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nuremberg [where in those days German top Nazis stood trial] have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human history. Other blacknesses threaten to overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended.” If one has the faintest notion of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's decisive interventions in the Second World War, the fiercest and most deadly of all wars, and of its significance in human history, one has to be moved by these words. (The phrase “where is Hitler now?” may well be the softest worded victory bulletin ever.) But then, now that the war *was* won, why the somber talk about other engulfing blacknesses which nobody else seemed to see? Yet the threat apparently increased, for in April of the following year Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible.”²

1 For more details see p. 76.

2 Sri Aurobindo: On Himself, pp.168 and 169.

At that point, when Sri Aurobindo was seventy-five years old and after a lifetime of revolutionary avataric Yoga, something at the root of things was blocking the Work. Sri Aurobindo stated forcefully: “I have no intention of giving my sanction to a new edition of the old fiasco – a partial and transient spiritual opening within with no true and radical change in the external nature.”¹ The old fiasco was the effort of the previous Avatars to change human nature and make spiritual progress in the



material evolution possible. In his *Essays on the Gita* Sri Aurobindo had already written: “Not till the Time-Spirit in man is ready can the inner and ultimate prevail over the outer and immediate reality. Christ and Buddha have come and gone. But it is Rudra who still holds the world in the hollow of his hand. And meanwhile the fierce forward labour of mankind, tormented and oppressed by the Powers that are profiteers of egoistic force and their servants, cries for the sword of the Hero of the struggle and the word of the prophet.”

It is said that Sri Aurobindo never explicitly stated that he was an Avatar. To expect such a statement would demand that Sri Aurobindo broke with his inborn and spiritual discretion. The quotations in the previous paragraph, however, make it abundantly clear, as do many other passages in his writings and acts in his workings, that he considered his yogic effort to be that of an Avatar, and even the most decisive of all avataric missions. On the other hand, where does one ever find a sign of the slightest awareness that in 1947 the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, on which the future of humanity depended, was threatened with annulment?

Nirodbaran, in those days with Champaklal the closest assistant of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, wrote in his priceless *Twelve Years*

¹ *Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Yoga*, p.1306.

with Sri Aurobindo: “We observed a noticeable change in his mood. Our talks ... diminished. He was no longer expansive; humour, wit, sally, fun, all had shrivelled up and we were in front of a temple deity, impassive, aloof and indifferent. However much we tried to draw him out from his impregnable sanctum of silence, we were answered with a monosyllabic ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or at most a faint smile. ... One day taking courage in both hands, Dr. Satyendra asked: ‘Why are you so serious, Sir?’ Sri Aurobindo answered gravely: ‘The time is very serious.’ The answer left us mystified.”¹

The decision

Things must have grown “worse than worst,” for a drastic act became imperative. Of Sri Aurobindo’s decision to perform this act nobody knew at the time. It is only afterwards that some sayings and facts could be seen as indicative of what was to happen. So for instance the following words of the Mother spoken to Dr. Sanyal on the very morning of Sri Aurobindo’s passing: “About a year ago, while I was discussing things, I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. Sri Aurobindo spoke out in a very firm tone: ‘No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation, I might go. You will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation.’ ... After that – this took place early in 1950 – he gradually let himself fall ill. For he knew quite well that, should he say ‘I must go,’ I would not have obeyed him and *I* would have gone. For according to the way I felt, he was much more indispensable than I. But he saw the matter from the other side. And he knew that I had the power to leave my body at will. So he didn’t say a thing – he didn’t say a thing right to the very last minute.”²

Later the Mother would concede: “It is absolutely undeniable that my body has that capacity [of endurance] infinitely more than the body of Sri Aurobindo.” This reminds us of her former saying that she had consciously chosen her parents not only for their mental but also for their physical qualities. She also said later: “I told him that, as to me, it would be absolutely without regret and without difficulty that I would leave my body to go and join him ... And he answered:

1 *Nirodbaran*: Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, pp. 263-64.

2 *Prabhat Sanyal*: A Call from Pondicherry, in *Mother India*, December 1991.

‘Your body is indispensable for the Work. Without your body the Work cannot be done.’ This is something that was said in 1949, which means a little more than a year before he left.”¹

Then there is the amazing avowal of the Mother that she does not seem to have known that Sri Aurobindo, step by invisible step, let death approach. She has confirmed this more than once herself. For instance: “You see, he had decided to go. But he didn’t want me to know that he was doing it deliberately. He knew that if for a single moment I knew he was doing it deliberately, I would have reacted with such violence that he would not have been able to leave. And he did this: he bore it all as if it was some unconsciousness, an ordinary illness, simply to keep me from knowing – and he left at the very moment he had to leave.” Sri Aurobindo had created a blind spot, as it were, in the perception of her who was the Mother of the worlds and had access to all knowledge everywhere if she so desired! Once she said: “I did not believe till the last moment that Sri Aurobindo was going to leave his body.” And K.D. Sethna commented: “This is correct. On December 3th [Sri Aurobindo passed away on the 5th] the Mother told me that Sri Aurobindo would soon read my articles. Later, when I asked her why she had let me go to Bombay on December 3th, she said that Sri Aurobindo’s going had not been decided yet.”²

Initially, except for some minor symptoms of kidney trouble, there were no signs of serious health problems whatever. Besides, Sri Aurobindo continued his (outwardly) daily routine as if nothing was the matter. He still wanted to write on modern poetry and a search was on to provide him with volumes of such poetry to read. (He appreciated Mallarmé, Whitman, Yeats and Eliot.) He also dictated, at the Mother’s request, the important series of articles published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*.

In these articles he expounded the state of affairs at that time of his Work, of his Yoga of Transformation, explaining the realization of the “Mind of Light,” and the necessity of a range of intermediary beings between the present human and the future supramental species. These transitional species or subspecies in the making he gave no name, calling them in general “a new humanity.” The Mother, however,

1 Kireet Joshi: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, p.103.

2 K.D. Sethna: The Passing of Sri Aurobindo, p. 5.

did give them a name in French, “*surhommes*,” literally meaning “overmen.” She said: “This was certainly what he expected of us: what he conceived of as the overman, who must be the intermediate being between humanity as it is and the supramental being created in the supramental way ... It is quite obvious that intermediary beings are necessary, and that it is these intermediary beings who must find the means to create beings of the Supermind. And there is no doubt that, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this, he was convinced that this is what we have to do.”¹

Somewhere in October, solicited from many sides, Sri Aurobindo said to Nirodbaran: “My main work is being delayed.” For, as Nirodbaran wrote: “Many interruptions came in the way. The preliminary work of reading old versions, selections, etc. [of Sri Aurobindo’s own writings being prepared for publication], took up much time before we actually could start [i.e. continue working on *Savitri*].” Still the urgency in Sri Aurobindo’s remark startled Nirodbaran, as he had never seen Sri Aurobindo hurry for anything. “When the last revision was made and the Cantos were wound up, I said: ‘It is finished now.’ An impersonal smile of satisfaction greeted me, and he said: ‘Ah, is it finished?’ How well I remember that flicker of a smile which all of us craved for so long! ‘What is left now?’ was his next query. ‘The Book of Death and the Epilogue.’ ‘Oh, that? We shall see about that later on.’ That ‘later on’ never came and was not meant to come.”² For the subject matter of *Savitri* were the experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Death had not yet been experienced. And the Epilogue, the happy ending which in this case will be a life of fulfilment on Earth, lies somewhere in the future. Thus reached *Savitri*, in the words of Nirodbaran, its “incomplete completion.”

The “worse than worst” situation did not subside. The uraemic symptoms increased, for the moment of the great master act of the Avatar had come. After all the work Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had done, after all the burdens and the suffering, the black passages and the dawns of light, something had to be done which is unknown of in the history of humankind. As the Mother would say later: “For the Will of the Supreme to be expressed as it were in contradiction

1 *The Mother*: Questions and Answers 1957-58, p. 57.

2 *Nirodbaran*: Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, p. 266.

with the totality of the laws of the Manifestation, that happens just at the last moment – at the ultimate limit of possibility.”¹

The descent into death

Sri Aurobindo’s “death” was interpreted by most as the natural result of illness and/or advanced age.

In 1924 Sri Aurobindo had said that there were three causes that [then] could still bring about his death: 1. violent surprise or accident; 2. the action of old age; 3. his own choice, when finding it not possible to accomplish his [avataric] endeavour this time, i.e. establishing the supramental Consciousness on Earth, or if something would prove him that it was impossible. What happened in 1950, however, was a fourth possibility not foreseeable in 1924: that he would have to descend into death voluntarily, having in the meantime acquired the powers to do so, in order to make sure that his endeavour would not end in failure.

Who realized in December 1950 – and even now – that at that time, in that place on Earth, a mystery without precedence was enacted on which humanity’s future depended?

This “tactical” move was possible because the Avatar was present on Earth in his/her physical completeness, i.e. in a male/female body. If the Avatar had been present in only one body, the death of this body would have cancelled out any possibility of accomplishing the present mission successfully. (This illustrates how the planning and the completion of the mission of an Avatar is decided upon and pre-exists outside the dimensions, outside “the theatre” of the material world.)

Sri Aurobindo let himself gradually become more and more ill. In the last few days before his departure the Mother said: “He is losing interest in himself.” The faithful Nirodbaran, gathering his courage in both hands, ventured at last to ask him: “Are you not using your force to cure yourself?” “No!” came the stunning reply. ... Then, Nirodbaran writes, “We asked: ‘Why not? How is the disease going to be cured otherwise?’ ‘Can’t explain. You won’t understand,’ was the curt reply.” On this Nirodbaran reflects: “The big mystery as to his strange attitude and non-intervention still remains.”² None understood, then as now, that Sri Aurobindo descended voluntarily

1 Mother’s *Agenda 1961*, p. 289.

2 *Nirodbaran*: Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, p. 274.

into death to do something in the Inconscient which only the Avatar could execute, in order to prevent that his mission on Earth, in the short or the long term, would come to nothing.

According to the testimony of Nirodbaran, a medical doctor, Sri Aurobindo was never unconscious in the course of his “illness.” “It was during this period [on the very last day] that he would often come out of the trance and each time leaned forward, hugged and kissed Champaklal who was sitting by the side of his bed. Champaklal also hugged him in return. A wonderful sight it was, though so strangely unlike Sri Aurobindo who had rarely called us even by our names in these twelve years.”¹ The Avatar took leave of humanity in one of its purest representatives.

At 11 p.m. on the 4th of December the Mother helped Sri Aurobindo take a drink. At midnight she came again into his room. This time he opened his eyes and the two looked at each other in a steady gaze. “We were the silent spectators of that crucial scene,” writes Nirodbaran.

At 1 a.m. on the 5th of December the Mother came again. Her face was calm, there was no trace of emotion. Sri Aurobindo was indrawn. The Mother asked Dr. Sanyal in a quiet tone: “What do you think? May I retire for an hour? ... Call me when the time comes.” On this Nirodbaran reflects: “It may appear strange to our human mind that the Mother could leave Sri Aurobindo at this critical moment.” Yet, the Mother’s clarification is quite different: “As long as I was in the room he *could not* leave his body. I used all my power to prevent him from departing. So there was a terrible tension in him: the inner will to leave and then this kind of thing [i.e. the Mother] that was holding him there, like that, in his body – because I knew that he was alive ... He had to give a sign so that I would go into my room, supposedly to rest (which I didn’t do). And as soon as I had gone out of the room, he left.” He drew up his arms and put them on his chest, one overlapping the other. “Then they called me back immediately.”²

Soon afterwards the main personalities in the Ashram were informed and the Ashram photographers called before the endless queue would form to pay their last homage. Two of the photographers’ testimonies are worth comparing. The first one recalls: “I remember

1 *ibid.*, p. 275.

2 Mother’s Agenda, vol. II, p. 288.

clearly that Mother was sitting in the middle room beside Sri Aurobindo's, where the tiger skins and the Mother's paintings are displayed. She looked very dejected. She was stooping with a hand on her forehead, and did not notice me as I entered."

The second photographer, on the contrary, recalls: "When I entered Sri Aurobindo's abode through the door at the top of the staircase leading from the Meditation Hall, I instantly became petrified by the sight of the Mother sitting on a chair in the central room – the room in which her paintings adorn the walls and the tiger skins decorate the divan. She was seated between the two doors on the southern side of the narrow room with her eyes shut, lost in deep meditation. I have never seen her like that again. To me she looked like the personification of Mother Kali herself, so powerful was the appearance. I stood before her for some time."

The Mind of Light

On the last day before Sri Aurobindo left his body the Mother said: "Each time I enter the room, I see him pulling down the Supramental Light." And later: "All the supramental force he had accumulated in his body, he passed on to me and I received it."¹

In his memoir *A Call from Pondicherry*, Dr. Prabhat Sanyal wrote: "She stood there, near the feet of Sri Aurobindo, her hair had been undressed and was flowing about her shoulders."² Once again, to know what really happened in those climactic hours, we have to turn to the Mother herself. "He had accumulated in his body much supramental Force, and as soon as he left ... You see, he was lying on his bed, I stood by his side, and in a way altogether concrete – concrete with such a strong sensation as to make one think that it could be seen – all this supramental Force which was in him passed from his body into mine. And I felt the friction of the passage. It was extraordinary. It was an extraordinary experience. ... When he left, there was a whole part – the most material part of the 'descent' [the formation in Sri Aurobindo] of the supramental body up to the [physical] mental – which visibly came out of his body, like this [*gesture*], and entered into mine. And this was so concrete that I felt

1 *ibid.*, vol. X, p. 320.

2 Prabhat Sanyal: op. cit.

the friction of the forces passing through the pores of the skin. It was as concrete as if it had been material.”¹

Here it should be recalled that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had divided the tasks for the accomplishment of their mission. Sri Aurobindo, secluded in his apartment, took upon him the Yoga of bringing down the Supermind into his physical body. As his physical body, like any other human body, was a formation of the terrestrial evolution, this also meant that he was bringing down the Supermind in the very stuff of the Earth.

The Mother had taken upon her the building up of the Ashram, materially as well as spiritually, and the yoga of the sadhaks and sadhikas who, as she once said, were enclosed in her consciousness “as in an egg.” Yet every new realization in his Yoga Sri Aurobindo transmitted to her, and everything that went on in the Ashram the Mother submitted to Sri Aurobindo. This “division of the tasks” is essential to understand what happened between them at the time of Sri Aurobindo’s departure.

“As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realized in me,” the Mother said afterwards to K.D. Sethna. “The Supermind had descended long ago – very long ago – into the mind and even into the vital; it was working in the physical also but indirectly through those intermediaries. The question was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. The physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.”^{2 3}

1 Mother’s Agenda, vol. VIII, p. 311.

2 K.D. Sethna: The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo, p. 105.

3 Here again we have a glimpse of the formation of what the Mother has called the “overman.” The supramental transformation of the physical mind, although enormously important in itself, was still far from the total transformation of the body, but it was a considerable first step in the formation of the overman, the intermediary between the human and the supramental being. This highlights the significance of the Mother’s words spoken in 1958: “When leaving his body and entering into mine he said: ‘You will continue. You will go to the end of the work.’ ... Then I have told my body: ‘You will realize that intermediary “more-than-humanity” [surhumanité] between man and the supramental being, in other words what I call the surhomme [overman]. And this is what I have been doing for the last eight years.’” (Mother’s Agenda, vol. I, p. 160)

Sri Aurobindo's leaving the body meant a traumatic change for the Mother in ways we cannot even try to imagine. Which human can have an idea of the relationship between the embodied Ishwara and Shakti? "There are no words which can describe the collapse that has been for it," said the Mother later, and by "it" she meant her body. It had been *un coup de massue*, a sledgehammer blow ... "When Sri Aurobindo had left, I saw that I had to cut the connection with the psychic being, otherwise I would have gone with him. And as I had promised him that I would stay on and do the work, I had to do that: I literally closed the door on the psychic."¹ It would take almost two decades before she could venture, in 1969, to open that door again.

What was threatening the accomplishment of the avataric mission?

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo wrote: "There can be no artificial escape from this problem [evil, suffering and death] which has always troubled humanity and from which it has found no satisfying issue. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil with its sweet and bitter fruits is secretly rooted in the very nature of the Inconscience from which our being has emerged and on which it still stands as a nether soil and basis of our physical existence ... There can be no final solution until we have turned our inconscience into the greater consciousness, made the truth of self and spirit our life-basis and transformed our ignorance into a higher knowledge; a complete and radical transformation of our nature is the only true solution."² Only Supermind would do. But the bringing down of the Supermind into the body of the Earth, the complete and radical transformation of our nature, was precisely what the hostile forces were trying to prevent at any cost, for it would mean the end of their dominion over the Earth and humanity.

One reads of many masters in several yogic disciplines who possessed the power to lay down their body at will. The difference with Sri Aurobindo's master act was that he went into death in full consciousness and while keeping the vital and mental sheaths which, let us not forget it, were supramentally transformed. And this he did

1 *ibid.*, p. 162.

2 *Sri Aurobindo: The Life Divine*, p. 650.

not in search of escape or dissolution, but to intervene and effect a change somewhere at the bottom of existence, in what he called “the Inconscient,” worse than hell. “He was not compelled to leave his body,” said the Mother. “He chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality.”

But why? The Mother’s “*Pourquoi?*” resounds in so many of her conversations. “He has left before telling us what he was doing. I am absolutely busy making a path in a virgin forest – more than a virgin forest.”¹ (Perhaps she was not allowed to know because she – her body – had to do the job. It may not have been permitted to have a knowledge beyond its effort.) “He told me: ‘The world is not ready.’” It looks as if “the world” here means the whole of the manifestation at this point of its evolution. For that was the burden the Avatar had to take upon him, which needed to be transformed in its foundations, and which kept resisting him.

In his marvellous poem “A God’s Labour” – which might also be called “The Avatar’s Song” or “The Ballad of the Avatar” – Sri Aurobindo had described exactly this problem.

A voice cried, “Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate.”

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things
Where the grey Sphinx guards God’s riddle sleep
On the Dragon’s outspread wings.²

True, “the keyless gate,” “the grey Sphinx,” and “the Dragon’s outspread wings,” all concrete elements of his experience, are little more than poetic metaphors to us. But “God’s riddle sleep” is clearly the dark Inconscient, and that was what Sri Aurobindo descended into for an operation which only the Avatar, the very Divine, could perform. We find something similar in his sonnet “The Inconscient Foundation:”

My soul regards its veiled subconscious base,
All the dead obstinate symbols of the past,

1 Mother’s Agenda, vol. II, p. 285.

2 SABCL 5:101

The hereditary moulds, the stamps of race
Are upheld to sight, the old imprints effaced.

In a downpour of supernal light it reads
The black Inconscient's enigmatic script –
Recorded in a hundred shadowy screeds
An inert world's obscure enormous drift; ...

There slept the tables of the Ignorance,
There the dumb dragon edicts of her sway,
The scriptures of Necessity and Chance. ...¹

In *Savitri* we find Sri Aurobindo again confronting “the black inertia of our base” and seeking for “the secret key of Nature's change:”

The ordeal he suffered of evil's absolute reign ...
Incapable of motion or of force,
In Matter's blank denial goaled and blind,
Pinned to the black inertia of our base
He treasured between his hands his flickering soul ...
Into the abysmal secrecy he came
Where darkness peers from her mattress, grey and nude,
And stood on the last locked subconscious's floor
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts
And built the world not knowing what it built. ...
He saw the secret key of Nature's change.

Then ...

Torn were the formats of the primal Night
And shattered the stereotypes of the Ignorance ...
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable ...
Matter and Spirit mingled and were one.²

As the Mother said: “All goes well as long as there is not the will of transformation. It is the protest against the will of transformation. ... It is the introduction of something totally new into Matter, and therefore the body protests ... There is a whole part of Nature which is collaborating, but not in this. Distinctly, clearly, it wells up from

1 SABCL 5:153

2 *Sri Aurobindo: Savitri*, pp. 230-32, passim.

the subconscious and the unconscious. ... It's something that wells up from below ... All the time it comes up from below."¹ This was the reason why Sri Aurobindo had to descend into death. That he was successful, that he found the key to the impossible and cured the source of darkness at the bottom of things, we know from the fact that hardly six years later the Supermind manifested in the Earth atmosphere and a new world was born.

Triumph

There is no known person who at the time of Sri Aurobindo's passing had the slightest inkling of what was happening. "You wouldn't understand," he had said. We have seen how, during that extraordinary episode, the behaviour of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother also was time and again misinterpreted in a too human way – misinterpretations which, written down by the eye-witnesses, would become part of the standard story built around the event. If we know a little better now, if we have at least some ground for a more meaningful interpretation, it is because the Mother in later years has reminisced about those days on several occasions.

The result of the lack of understanding was, in many, doubt and desperation. What use was it to continue dedicating one's life to a supramental transformation and the conquest of death when the Guru, or Master, or Avatar and bringer of the new vision had succumbed himself to death? Therefore the Mother gave the following message on the 14th of December: "To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo, who is here with us, conscious and alive."

At least there had been signs that Sri Aurobindo had not left in the ordinary way. Nirodbaran wrote in his *Twelve years*: "I also saw, to my utter wonder and delight, that the entire body was suffused with a golden crimson hue, so fresh, so magnificent. It seemed to have lifted my pall of gloom and I felt light and happy without knowing why. ... Pointing to the Light the Mother said: 'If this Supramental Light remains we shall keep the body in a glass case.' It did not remain and on the fifth day, on the 9th of December in the evening, the body was laid in a vault."²

1 Mother's Agenda, 15 July 1961.

2 *Nirodbaran*: Twelve years with Sri Aurobindo, p. 280.

And K.D. Sethna, many years afterwards, would write in *Mother India*, the Ashram periodical of which he was the editor: “I marked that there was nothing like what people usually speak of when they stand before someone dead. They refer to the expression of peace on the face. I saw the very opposite. Certainly not any stamp of agitation but the unmoving source of a sovereign dynamism. A tremendous power seemed to emanate from the face and figure. Wave after wave of it filled the room and surrounded me. I perceived an overwhelming air of Conquest ... From the flaring nostrils to the way in which the legs were stretched out, slightly apart, there was a natural aspect of domination. Spontaneously, effortlessly an assertion of empire could be experienced. Here was a silence, transcendent of all creation – an ultimate absolute of the ineffable – from which originally had flowed forth a creative energy and which now was sending out a power of re-creating all life. Such was the mysterious death of Sri Aurobindo.”¹ The poet that was K.D. Sethna had seen better than most of his less intuitive co-disciples.

“What we are doing will be a beginning, not a completion,” Sri Aurobindo had written in a letter.² He, as no one else, knew how difficult his envisioned transformation of *Homo sapiens* actually was, beginning with the bringing down of the Supermind into the body of the Earth and continuing with the transformation of the human body, as it were petrified in its evolutionary structures. The manifestation of the Supermind had been felt to be imminent in 1938-39, a possibility which may be reckoned as the main reason of the fierce counteraction by the hostile forces: the Second World War. At that point Sri Aurobindo was not even confronted by the possibility of the “fiasco” which threatened his and the Mother’s mission. This may give us at least some idea of the dimensions of the whole enterprise and of the greatness of the two Protagonists who stood up, Sri Aurobindo in 1950 and the Mother in the following years, against the assembled Powers still holding the entire manifestation in the palm of their hand.

Now we are further again. Sri Aurobindo’s intervention at the root of things has enabled the manifestation of the Supermind in 1956. His words about the capability of the Mother’s body have proved true,

1 *Mother India*, December 1991, p. 5.

2 *Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Yoga*, p. 10.

and in the following years she has gradually realized the archetype of the supramental body by means of her physical body. By these two realizations the appearance of the next step in the evolution, the supramental being, has been brought nearer by centuries if not millennia. Ours, humans of goodwill and aspiration, is the task of the intermediaries between the two species, of building the bridge over an enormous evolutionary gap.

In this we are not alone. If we can tune ourselves to them, we are helped by four powerful aids: the Supramental Force, active since 1956; the Consciousness of the Overman, active since 1 January 1969¹; Sri Aurobindo's presence; and the Mother's presence. For Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Work of building the New World cannot have been limited to their years of incarnation in a physical body. Helpers of the progress of the Earth and humanity during the whole of the past,² they are undoubtedly there to help them now, after their initiation of the new evolution in its critical present phase.

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by

Georges van Vrekhem

Stichting Aurofonds,
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1 See Notes on the Way, pp. 117 ff.

2 Asked in writing by a young sadhak, Nagin Doshi, what he had been doing in his former lives, Sri Aurobindo answered with the unforgettable words: "Carrying on the evolution."

Savitri Bhavan Activities

Calendar of Events April to October 2011

Regular Activities

Current weekly schedule

Sundays :	10.30–12 noon	Savitri Study Circle
	5–6 pm	<i>The Practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga–Human Unity</i> , led by Professor Kittu Reddy
Mondays :	4.30-5.45 pm	<i>Spoken English Practice</i> with texts of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, led by Patricia
	6-7 pm	On <i>The Mother</i> , led by Dr. Ananda Reddy
Tuesdays :	9-10.30am	' <i>Sounds of Savitri</i> ' practice for pronunciation and rhythm, led by Patricia
	4–5 pm	<i>L'Agenda de Mère</i> – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
	4.30-5.45 pm	<i>Spoken English Practice</i> with texts of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, led by Patricia
	5-6pm	<i>Savitri</i> study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan
	5.45–7.15 pm	OM Choir
Wednesdays :	5.30-6.30 pm	Reading <i>The Life Divine</i> , led by Shraddhavan
Thursdays :	4–5 pm	The English of <i>Savitri</i> , led by Shraddhavan
	3–4.30 pm:	Sanskrit Grammar, led by Nishtha (<i>by appointment</i>)
Fridays :	5-7 pm	<i>The Synthesis of Yoga</i> , led by Sraddhalu
Saturdays :	4–5 pm	<i>Learning French with Words of the Mother</i> (beginners)
	5.15-6.15 pm	<i>Learning French with Words of the Mother</i> (advanced)
	5–6 pm	<i>Mudra Chi</i> , led by Anandi A.

Monthly happenings

Full Moon Gathering in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue with a message of the Mother, *Savitri* reading, silent concentration and Sunil's music. (Full Moon day 7.15 – 8.15)

Introducing Savitri – a series of monthly talks in Tamil by Buvana. (Third Wednesdays 5-6 pm)

New Multimedia Space

As a part of the 'Community Information Centre' ICITI Project funded by Stichting De Zaaier, from May 2nd onwards Savitri Bhavan is offering individual computer access to a large range of study materials : documents, audio and video recordings relating to the lives, work and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the aims and ideals of Auroville. Three stations with monitor, mouse and earphones are connected a central server. Users can browse freely and access all the materials stored in the server. Documentary materials available include the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with search facilities, the Mother's Agenda in the original French and in English translation, all issues of Savitri Bhavan's journal *Invocation – study notes on Savitri* with indexes, and a wide range of research papers created at Savitri Bhavan, including those of Nishtha and Vladimir on the Vedas and Upanishads. Audio recordings include all the Mother's recorded talks and messages, Readings of *Savitri* by the Mother, Nirodbaran and others, Sunil-da's music, *Savitri* music from other sources, and talks by many speakers. Video materials include the entire series of *Meditations on Savitri* films of Huta's *Savitri* paintings created by Manohar, as well as films on the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, on Auroville, and on environmental and human unity issues. All Aurovilians and interested guests, visitors and volunteers are invited to make use of this opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the aims and ideals underlying the experiment of Auroville.



Special Events

April

- 1–30 : *Meditations on Savitri* Books 7, 8, 9, and 10 – Huta’s paintings in the picture gallery, continuing till the end of April.
- 2 : *Remembering the Mother* : Loretta and Dr.Susil Pani share their sweet memories – an event organized by Shyamala and Varadharajan
- 2-5 : *Being Well* – workshop led by JV Avadhanalu
- 4 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri* Book One, Canto Two – The Issue.
- 7–27 : *The Enchanted Forest* – an exhibition of photos, paintings and handwritten texts by Leonard Simeon.
- 14 : *Maa Mandir – A Grace of the Mother to the rural population of Madhya Pradesh* – A power-point presentation by members of this Centre in Hindi and English followed by a question and answer session.
- 16 : *Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the Earth and our human role in its destiny* – a presentation by Shraddhavan followed by question and answer session, as part of Auroville’s Earth Week celebrations.
- 25 : *Journey to the Life Divine (Part Two)* – the second of two films created in the Ashram about the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



Shraddhavan speaking on Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the Earth and our human role in its destiny as part of Auroville’s ‘Earth Week’ celebrations, April 16, 2011.

May

- 2 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri* – Book I Canto 3 – The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul’s Release
- 23 : Film – *City of the Dawn*: Aurovilians tell about their experiences and the process of Auroville’s towards Human Unity; at the end, the maker of the film, Francis Rothluebber, is interviewed about her work.
- 28-31 : *Health & Harmony* – 4 day workshop by JV Avadhanalu

June

- 6 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri* – Book I Canto 4 Part One – The Secret Knowledge
- 27 : *I Believe* – a film about Dr. Karan Singh’s vision and beliefs on Universal Values for a Global Society

July

- 3 ; Workshop for Tamil Ulagam night school Teachers, led by Dhanalakshmi
- 4 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri* – Book I Canto 4 Part Two – The Secret Knowledge
- 18 : *Meditations on Savitri* – Books 8 – 12 : opening of the new exhibition of Huta’s paintings in the Picture Gallery
- 25 : Film – *Sri Aurobindo and His Dreams for the Future of Mankind*

August

- 1 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri – Book I Canto 5* – The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness
- 8 : *Sri Aurobindo and Glimpses of His Life and Education in the Ashram* – two films from the Ashram (1995)
- 12-21 : Demonstration of LED lighting around the buildings and in the gardens, by Sunna Energy
- 14 : *Remembering Shyam Sunder Jhunjunwala*– a memorial gathering
- 15 am : As a part of celebrations of Sri Aurobindo’s Birthday and the Independence Day of India flowers were offered at Sri Aurobindo’s statue and some recorded messages of the Mother were played.
- 15 pm : *The Mother on Sri Aurobindo* – a film made in 1992
- 29 : Film – ‘*The Mother*’ by Sri Aurobindo, read by *The Mother (Part One)*

September

- 1-31 : *Sri Aurobindo : a Life-Sketch in Photographs* – new exhibition from the Sri Aurobindo Archives



The Full Moon Gathering on August 13th coincided with a week-long display of LED lighting by Sunna Energy around the building and in the gardens.



Memorial gathering for Shyamsundar Jhunjhunwala on August 14th – senior Aurovilian Frederick is seen greeting Mrs. Savita Jhunjhunwala. On the walls, the exhibition Sri Aurobindo : a Life-Sketch in Photographs.

- 7 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri – Book 2 – The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds* – Cantos 1 – 4 : “The World Stair”, “The Kingdom of Subtle Matter”, “The Glory and the Fall of Life” and “The Kingdoms of the Little Life”
- 8 : *Sonatas by Bach, Ysaye and Honegger* – Solo Violin Recital by Ladislav Brozman
- 12 am: *The Inner Dimension of Auroville* – Orientation session for visiting ‘Living Routes’ students from the US
- 12 pm *Life after Life* – film based on the research work by Dr. Raymond A. Moody with more than 2000 people who went to the other side and had out-of-the-body experiences
- 26 : Film – ‘*The Mother*’ by Sri Aurobindo read by the Mother – (Part Two)

From September 14 to December 19 Savitri Bhavan is hosting three weekly courses presented by the University of Human Unity, as follows :

- 1) Mondays 4 – 5 pm: *Technology and Evolution*, led by Daniel Goldsmith, Professor of Philosophy, Dawson College, Quebec
- 2) Mondays 5.15- 6.15 pm: *An Introduction to Metaphysics: Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo*, led by Rod Hemsell
- 3) Wednesdays 5 – 6 pm: *Studies of the Bhagavad Gita : Karma Yoga* by Vladimir Yatsenko

October

- 3 : Film – *Meditations on Savitri, Book Two – The Book of the Traveller of the World, Cantos 5 and 6*: “The Godheads of the Little Life” & “The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life”.
- 8 : *Why I wrote a book on Evolution* – talk by Georges van Vrekhem
- 15 : *The Integration of the 4 varnas, and the new dharma* – talk by Georges van Vrekhem
- 17 : Film – *Auroville, Integral Yoga and the Future of Mankind* – a talk by Sraddhalu Ranade
- 22 – *The closing of the Western mind and the Enlightenment* – talk by Georges van Vrekhem
- 24 : Film – *The Aim of Life* – based on the book edited by Kireet Joshi.
- 29 : *Vanished and retrograde civilizations* – talk by Georges van Vrekhem



Flower-offering and meditation in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue on the morning of August 15.



Shraddhavan introducing Georges' new book on evolution and the first of his new series of eleven talks on October 8.

New Study Materials on *Savitri*

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Translations

Gujarati

Acharya, Gautam, tr. *Savitri: Ek Purana Katha ane ek Pratheek* [*Savitri, Book One : the book of beginnings*], 2011, Sri Aravinda Kendra, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Italian

Iorco, Tommaso, tr. *Sri Aurobindo, Savitri : Una legenda e un simbolo* [bilingual English-Italian], 2010, Aria Nuova Edizioni, Italy

Portuguese

Pereira, Martha Maria, tr. *Savitri; Uma Lenda e um Simbolo – livro I, O Livro do Principio* [*Savitri, Book One : the book of beginnings*], [2011], Associação de Yoga Integral, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

Studies

Shah, Jyotsna M., *Savitri : Divya Avataran* [*Savitri : a divine descent*] [summaries of each of the 49 cantos], 2011, Sri Aravinda Kendra, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Unpublished Theses

Kulkarni, Madhumati M., *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: A Study of the Epic as a twentieth Century Indian Specimen of Apocalyptic Literature*, 1994, Goa University

B.R.M. Subramania Chetty, *Divine Life in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*, 2008, Dravidian University, AP

Art works

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch residents, *Savitri : a play* [text and photos of a performance], 2011, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch

Vas, Hans, *Songs from Savitri. 5 and 6* [texts and audio recordings] [2010]



Members of the Savitri Bhavan Advisory Group visiting the Hostel in August 2011; architect Helmut is showing the sample flooring in the dining area.

Savitri Bhavan Hostel Appeal

The Need:

Rs. 50,000,00.-
(US\$100,000.- €80,000.- £77,000.-)
is urgently needed to complete
the Savitri Bhavan Hostel
under construction since May 2010

The aim is to be able to provide free or very moderately priced temporary boarding and lodging within the complex to people offering their services in support of Savitri Bhavan, such as visiting speakers and teachers, students and researchers, and volunteers.

The official (PWD) estimated cost of the project in 2010 was Rs.125,000,00. By May 2011, Rs.50,000,00.- had been raised and spent, allowing the raw structure to be completed well within the budget. Finishing works are now going on, and it is expected that the project can be completed within Rs.100,000,00.- by Spring 2012 if the cash flow can be maintained.

The target completion date is April 24, 2012

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that will welcome Savitri lovers from every corner
of the world

that will be an inspiring centre of Savitri studies

that will house all kinds of materials and activities
to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of
Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic

that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that
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We welcome support from everyone who feels that
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Savitri Bhavan, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

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is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother