

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 34

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*April 24
is celebrated as the day
of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry.
She has spoken of this as
'A decisive victory over the adverse forces'*

*This beloved portrait of the Mother was taken
by the famous French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson
close to the April Darshan in 1950.*



The Debate of Love and Death

Book Ten, Canto Three of Savitri

A reading by Jhumur Bhattacharya

January 16, 2011

The last lines of Book Ten, Canto Two were spoken by Death, who represents the Law, the Law of a world which is ruled by its foundation of Ignorance and Inconscience, and hence by the consequence of death and final dissolution. Savitri has refused to accept this law – not for herself but for us, for the earth. That is really her love: she is claiming freedom from Death and Ignorance for Satyavan, the soul of man, the soul of the earth. She has come to save the earth and she is going to challenge this law.

These are the lines that Death speaks :

O soul misled by the splendour of thy thoughts,
O earthly creature with thy dream of heaven,
Obey, resigned and still, the earthly law.
Accept the brief light that falls upon thy days;

It's a short life, a short light that we have.

Take what thou canst of Life's permitted joy ;
Submitting to the ordeal of fate's scourge
Suffer what thou must of toil and grief and care.
There shall approach silencing thy passionate heart
My long calm night of everlasting sleep :
There into the hush from which thou cam'st retire." p. 619-20

It is like saying that we are born out of nothingness and that we retire into nothingness. Ours is also a dark mother from whose womb creation is born. But there is the other voice, a voice of Light that follows.

So here we begin Canto Three, "The Debate of Love and Death". It is as if earth and man were caught between the pull of these two opposing forces : the force that takes us forward towards the Light,

the force that pulls us down again and again into the darkness. I am always reminded of that little poem by Sri Aurobindo “A Tree” where he says that we are ‘earth-bound, heaven amorous’¹. This is



the dual law that seems to keep us in the same place – we don’t really change fundamentally. But She has come to help us to break out of this foundation of darkness, inconscience, and ignorance. As long as it is there, the law of death will remain.

¹ See page 27

A sad destroying cadence the voice sank;

It's interesting that the voice is also sad that it destroys.

It seemed to lead the advancing march of Life
Into some still original Inane.

But Savitri answered to almighty Death :
“O dark-browed sophist of the universe
Who veilst the Real with its own Idea,
Hiding with brute objects Nature's living face,
Masking eternity with thy dance of death,
Thou hast woven the ignorant mind into a screen
And made of Thought error's purveyor and scribe,
And a false witness of mind's servant sense.
An aesthete of the sorrow of the world,
Champion of a harsh and sad philosophy
Thou hast used words to shutter out the Light
And called in Truth to vindicate a lie.

So here begins the challenge : the Law is a lie. It seems true because it is founded on nothingness – that ‘original Inane’ – nothingness, inconscience, ignorance – the Void. It is out of that that all is born. Naturally, that which grows out of nothingness will retire to nothingness, the sense of dissolution, the sense of finally returning to a meaningless complete emptiness. That is what life has often meant for many : a sense of illusion. But here Savitri says that this is not the ultimate reality. Throughout, Death argues : he represents the mind and that which is divisive, that which will always insist on the division, between darkness and light, between truth and falsehood, between existence and non-existence. As long as this division lasts, Death will reign. It is only when we break out of the sense of division, out of a separateness from the Supreme, that death will go. As long as division lasts, death will last. That is where all his arguments seem to lead. Savitri is the force of Love that joins, that unites, that destroys division. She has come down from the Origin and is on earth, and is still divine in her humanity. There is no division in her : the sense of her supreme luminousness as well as her humanness both co-exist in her. She is one. Death divides things into two. As long as we are caught by this sense of separateness and division, earth will be the field of death. This is the battle, the

debate : out of division to return to unity and the origin, to go back to that wholeness of the supreme consciousness. We have something in us which is light, which is truth, which aspires for the highest. We have something in us which doesn't believe that we can be that, which is founded on darkness, division, separateness. That is where our problem lies. And he, Death, will continue to be that, to try to convince us of that.

Who veilst the Real with its own Idea

This is what the mind always does. It veils the truth with its own version of the truth. Every mind has that. We make formulas, we make versions, we make our own separate notions of truth.

Hiding with brute objects Nature's living face

That life, that force of the divine presence which is there in all things is hidden by a whole layer of inertia, of darkness, of tamas and ignorance, which is what gives to Matter its sense of inconscience.

Masking eternity with thy dance of death

The dance of death is not something that is fundamental. Behind the dance of death is eternity. Perhaps that is the sadness that is there in Death's voice. He does it, maybe, against his will?

Thou hast woven the ignorant mind into a screen

Repeatedly this notion : we believe that mind is an instrument of knowledge. How often is it an instrument that hides from knowledge, dodges knowledge? It separates. It is very clever. This mind becomes a screen and a purveyor of error.

And a false witness of mind's servant sense

This is thought. Thought has to work in oppositions. Wherever thought proceeds, it says 'This is right'; then the opposite has to be wrong. If that is light, then its opposite must be darkness. We can't see the light in all things, see the divine in all things at the same time – which is very reminiscent of Mother's last New Year's message of 1973 :

When you are conscious of the whole world at the same time,
then you can become conscious of the Divine.

When you can see that Presence in all things at the same time, then you begin to become conscious of the Divine, the omnipresent Reality.

Death seems to refine this sense of grief and loss through arguments :

An aesthete of the sorrow of the world,
Champion of a harsh and sad philosophy
Thou hast used words to shutter out the Light
And called in Truth to vindicate a lie.

Because all his arguments sound very true, very convincing.

A lying reality is falsehood's crown
And a perverted truth her richest gem.

A lying reality is really the most effective kind of falsehood, a falsehood that seems very, very convincing – then it is a really good falsehood !

O Death, thou speakest truth but truth that slays,
I answer to thee with the Truth that saves.

Hers is an all-inclusive truth. It doesn't exclude anything; it does not divide.

Then Savitri begins to describe the whole process of the evolutionary growth of consciousness which proceeds from the original Inane through matter, through life, through mind, gradually emerging into more and more conscious forms of existence. And who does that? It is the Supreme Being himself:

A traveller new-discovering himself

It's all a process of self-consciousness; it becomes more and more present to himself.

One made of Matter's world his starting-point
He made of Nothingness his living-room
And Night a process of the eternal light
And death a spur towards immortality.

It is because there is darkness that we ask for light. It is because there is death that we ask for immortality. These oppositions play a big role in our need to grow out of our present state. Because there is suffering we ask for joy. If there had not been suffering, we would not have asked for a greater joy, so it becomes a spur towards immortality. So Death is also playing a role in the Divine's plan.

God wrapped his head from sight in Matter's cowl

The Supreme got involved completely in the darkness.

His consciousness dived into inconscient depths,
All-Knowledge seemed a huge dark Nescience

“Seemed”: Knowledge and Nescience are not opposites. The One seemed so totally withdrawn into himself that what remained on the surface was darkness and nescience.

Infinity wore a boundless zero’s form.
His abysses of bliss became insensible deeps,
Eternity a blank spiritual Vast.
Annulling an original nullity
The Timeless took its ground in emptiness

That is the origin.

The Timeless took its ground in emptiness
And drew the figure of a universe,
That the spirit might adventure into Time
And wrestle with adamant Necessity
And the soul pursue a cosmic pilgrimage.

The whole purpose of our existence on earth is described in these few lines. The Timeless took its ground in emptiness and drew the figure of a universe, so that the Infinite, the Eternal, might enter into Time and gradually follow the laws, the sequences, the causalities that Time imposes, which is Necessity, out of this bondage, to move into total freedom. That can only happen when we go back to that source which freely entered into Time, and when we move back into that, then we can find him. This is our pilgrimage.

A spirit moved in black immensities

– the beginning of that consciousness that starts to evolve.

And built a Thought in ancient Nothingness;
A soul was lit in God’s tremendous void,
A secret labouring glow of nascent fire.

Gradually evolution starts, in the form of a small emergence of consciousness; and yet this small emergence gradually grows and grows. It’s a labouring glow.

In Nihil’s gulf his mighty Puissance wrought;

She swung her formless motion into shapes,
Made Matter the body of the Bodiless.

The Infinite entered into time; the Eternal entered into a body.

Infant and dim the eternal Might's awoke.

All the powers, the forces : it's very reminiscent of the first sentence of the poem – the gods have to awake, the eternal Might's : the powers, the principles that are at work in order to make this multiple universe. They emerge progressively, gradually. For a long time, many principles don't seem to be active, there are not many powers at play in the universe. Progressively, gradually more and more consciousness emerges, and as this happens more and more possibilities, faculties, expressions, which are all different potencies of the Supreme, come into play and these eternal Might's are given their roles to play.

In inert Matter breathed a slumbering Life,

That is the beginning of one principle that didn't seem to be there, and yet was there all along, and now starts to awaken, the power of Life that emerges out of what seemed to be lifeless.

In subconscious Life Mind lay asleep;
In waking Life it stretched its giant limbs

Mind grew greater and greater as Life advanced from the lesser to the higher beings, from the original protozoa to man.

To shake from it the torpor of its drowse;
A senseless substance quivered into sense,
The world's heart commenced to beat, its eyes to see,

All these are miracles. Or is it just the continuous process of a plan that was very rigorously made by the Absolute who contains in him everything, so that it is as if something that is being worked out step-by-step? But if we look at it from the surface, out of lifelessness life emerges, out of a mindless life mind emerges. These seem to be nothing but the work of some kind of a magician.

In the crowded dumb vibrations of a brain

– a brain which is made of tissue and cell –

Thought fumbled in a ring to find itself,

And maybe gets caught in the circumvolutions of the brain for a long time!

Discovered speech and fed the new-born Word

Word is a projection of consciousness. Gradually, speech expresses not only sound but consciousness.

That bridged with spans of light the world's ignorance.

The presence of ignorance is still enormous, but there are the beginnings of light.

In waking Mind, the Thinker built his house.

Progressively, this mind begins to become more and more a home of light.

A reasoning animal willed and planned and sought;
He stood erect among his brute compeers,

This is man.

He built life new, measured the universe,
Opposed his fate and wrestled with unseen Powers,
Conquered and used the laws that rule the world,
And hoped to ride the heavens and reach the stars,
A master of his huge environment.

This is man today. He thinks that with the help of his mind he can master his world, but his world still masters him. We have to move on, and the beginning of that new age is what she describes now:

Now through Mind's windows stares the demigod

– that inner presence that emerges progressively, in the form of vision, revelation, intuition.

Hidden behind the curtains of man's soul:

He has seen the Unknown, looked on Truth's veiless face;

This is the vision of the rishi.

A ray has touched him from the eternal sun;
Motionless, voiceless in foreseeing depths,
He stands awake in Supernature's light
And sees a glory of arisen wings
And sees the vast descending might of God.

Savitri has described the unfolding of the whole plan, from utter Inconscience to the emergence of the divine being.

The next passage is so comforting, in a way:

O Death, thou lookst on an unfinished world
Assailed by thee and of its road unsure,
Peopled by imperfect minds and ignorant lives,
And sayest God is not and all is vain.

So often we draw our conclusions on what we see at present around us; but here, we have to have a vaster perspective.

How shall the child already be the man?
Because he is infant, shall he never grow?
Because he is ignorant, shall he never learn?
In a small fragile seed a great tree lurks,
In a tiny gene a thinking being is shut;
A little element in a little sperm,
It grows and is a conqueror and a sage.

And these are mysteries that happen all the time.

Then wilt thou spew out, Death, God's mystic truth,
Deny the occult spiritual miracle?
Still wilt thou say there is no spirit, no God?
A mute material Nature wakes and sees;
She has invented speech, unveiled a will.

Isn't that a wonderful miracle? That out of mute material nature, consciousness, will, sight seem to become more and more evident? And it is not yet complete:

Something there waits beyond towards which she strives,
Something surrounds her into which she grows;

The next two lines are very important:

To uncover the spirit, to change back into God,
To exceed herself is her transcendent task.

This is really the purpose of our existence : to uncover the spirit, to change back into God: What we are, we have to become. That is one of Mother's later sentences : 'Il nous faut devenir ce que nous sommes déjà.' That is what we have to do : become what we are. We are in the

world of becoming. We have to enter into that world of being. And that is the miracle. But it is something so natural : it is like a process that is slowly working itself out. And the ultimate task of material nature, to exceed herself, is a transcendent task.

In God concealed the world began to be,
This is the original inconscience, which is God – concealed. When a person is concealed he is not dead, he is not absent, he is just hidden.

Tardily it travels towards manifest God:
What is concealed has to be uncovered.

Our imperfection towards perfection toils,
The body is the chrysalis of a soul:
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
Time travels towards revealed eternity.

So all these oppositions and divisions that Ignorance and Death seem to insist on are simply stages that we have to cross in order to become One, to unite with the Origin, to manifest That, so that the sense of distinct life and death is no longer there. And this possibility is latent already in the beginning, in the original Inconscient manifesting itself first as Matter. So Matter is itself a miracle.

A miracle structure of the eternal Mage,
Matter its mystery hides from its own eyes,
It is not self-conscious.

A scripture written out in cryptic signs,
An occult document of the All-Wonderful's art.

That is perhaps part of what was called “The Mysteries” in the ancient world : a scripture which has a significance which we have to grow into perceiving, we have to realize. On the surface, the significance of the mysteries are not there – we just see the words. As we grow within, the significance of the writings begin to become clear. In fact, *Savitri* is a Mystery. Matter also is a mystery because the significance is hidden deep inside. It is ‘*written out in cryptic signs, / An occult document of the All-Wonderful's art.*’

All here bears witness to his secret might,
In all we feel his presence and his power.

And then starts a very beautiful poetic page.

A blaze of his sovereign glory is the sun, ...

In this physical world, the sun is the sign of the presence of the divine at every step.

A glory is the gold and glimmering moon,
A glory is his dream of purple sky.
A march of his greatness are the wheeling stars.
His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,
His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;
The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice
Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.

The sense of the wonderful, the miraculous, present in everything all around us and even the physical universe is magical. So:

This world is God fulfilled in outwardness.
His ways challenge our reason and our sense;
By blind brute movements of an ignorant Force,
By means we slight as small, obscure or base,
A greatness founded upon little things,
He has built a world in the unknowing Void.

This is the force that we would normally call unconscious nature – *aparaprakriti* – which seems to be a mechanical automatic force and yet it performs all these wonders. It cannot be really an unconscious force. That unconsciousness is simply an appearance. Behind it is the power of consciousness, the supreme Conscious-Force.

His forms he has massed from infinitesimal dust;
His marvels are built from insignificant things.
If mind is crippled, life untaught and crude,
If brutal masks are there and evil acts,
They are incidents of his vast and varied plot,

– which has to be: if it is a play, there has to be an antagonist as well as a protagonist; there have to be opposite forces also. How else can the play proceed? It is through struggle, through tensions that any story, any play moves forward. So in this universal play, too, there

seem to be forces that counter the working of the emergence of this conscious force.

They are incidents of his vast and varied plot,
His great and dangerous drama's needed steps;
He makes with these and all his passion-play,
A play and yet no play but the deep scheme
Of a transcendent Wisdom finding ways
To meet her Lord in the shadow and the Night:

Even in the shadow and the Night we have to manifest and discover that presence, that Divine. If that is the case, then finally the role of death and ignorance will have to be removed.

Above her is the vigil of the stars;
Watched by a solitary Infinitude

Again you see the interesting phrase : '*solitary Infinitude*' – it is one in the many, the many in the one.

She embodies in dumb Matter the Divine,
In symbol minds and lives the Absolute.
A miracle-monger her mechanical craft;

That transcendent Wisdom seems to us to be a mechanical force of nature, and yet she performs miracles naturally, automatically. Sri Aurobindo uses an unusual combination of words: '*a miracle-monger*', as if she is a craftsman. She is a craftsman; she works with matter.

Matter's machine worked out the laws of thought,

That is the miracle : out of the brain, the flesh, life and thought are formed.

Life's engines served the labour of a soul:

Through the heart, devotion, love and aspiration gradually become more and more manifest.

The Mighty Mother her creation wrought,
A huge caprice self-bound by iron laws,

So, constantly, the interplay of opposite words : iron laws and caprice don't go together, and yet the Mighty Mother has freely bound herself to this play of manifestation,

And shut God into an enigmatic world:
She lulled the Omniscient into nescient sleep,
Omnipotence on Inertia's back she drove,
Trod perfectly with divine unconscious steps
The enormous circle of her wonder-works.

Perhaps this is the intuition the ancients had when they described the Omniscient sleeping at the very base of creation. The Supreme Lord was fast asleep apparently, and out of that sleep creation rose, and the force that is building creation is flawless. It moves step by step, seeming to have no consciousness and yet never making a mistake.

Immortality assured itself by death;
The Eternal's face was seen through drifts of Time.

Slowly, from certain movements of the play of the dark forces, the beginnings of aspiration, the beginnings of vision take place.

His knowledge he disguised as Ignorance,
His Good he sowed in Evil's monstrous bed,
Made error a door by which Truth could enter in,
His plant of bliss watered with Sorrow's tears.

All these opposites of the Divine become spurs for us to break out of the undivine towards the light, towards the truth; and so darkness and suffering play a very important role.

A thousand aspects point back to the One;
A dual Nature covered the Unique.
In this meeting of the Eternal's mingling masques,

– in these plays and meetings and dances of opposite forces –

This tangle-dance of passionate contraries
Locking like lovers in a forbidden embrace
The quarrel of their lost identity,

That's the problem; we have lost that sense of identity. These forces think that they are opposite forces.

Through this wrestle and wrangle of the extremes of Power
Earth's million roads struggled towards deity.

In spite of everything, more and more consciousness, more and more light seems to grow, to emerge, in spite of opposition.

All stumbled on behind a stumbling Guide,
Yet every stumble is a needed pace
On unknown routes to an unknowable goal.
All blundered and straggled towards the One Divine.

The journey to the Divine or towards the manifestation of Light is not smooth, naturally.

As if transmuted by a titan spell
The eternal Powers assumed a dubious face:
Idols of an oblique divinity,
They wore the heads of animal or troll,

So we have these other forces, the adverse forces, the forces that are apparently also complete in themselves like gods.

Assumed ears of the faun, the satyr's hoof,
Or harboured the demoniac in their gaze:
A crooked maze they made of thinking mind,

The faculties that have emerged have become the instruments of evil and darkness too : life and mind and consciousness are often used to manifest the undivine.

They suffered a metamorphosis of the heart,
Admitting bacchant revellers from the Night
Into its sanctuary of delights,
As in a Dionysian masquerade.

It is as if an expression of that original bliss of manifestation gets perverted.

On the highways, in the gardens of the world
They wallowed oblivious of their divine parts,
As drunkards of a dire Circean wine
Or a child who sprawls and sports in Nature's mire.

And that is why it takes us so long, because in us there is an attraction, an attachment to the lower nature, and these forces keep us down.

Even wisdom, hewer of the roads of God,
Is a partner in the deep disastrous game:
Lost is the pilgrim's wallet and the scrip,
She fails to read the map and watch the star.

Wisdom, which is supposed to lead us to the light, replaces that light with small ethical rules:

A poor self-righteous virtue is her stock

That is usually the best we can do ... not spirituality, not direct experience, not an opening to the higher light, but a certain sense of goodness and morality which makes us feel very noble, very superior.

And reason's pragmatic grope or abstract sight,

Reason's pragmatic grope through science, or abstract sight through philosophy, use the intellect to move towards a certain amount of clarity.

Or the technique of a brief hour's success

She teaches, an usher in utility's school.

All these are different ways that are used by our so-called wisdom. It teaches things that are good, useful or philosophical; but through all these we remain on the surface of truth.

On the ocean surface of vast Consciousness
Small thoughts in shoals are fished up into a net
But the great truths escape her narrow cast;
Guarded from vision by creation's depths,
Obscure they swim in blind enormous gulfs
Safe from the little sounding leads of mind,
Too far for the puny diver's shallow plunge.

The true Wisdom stays safe from the mind, as if mind is a little snare and the true Wisdom is something mind cannot touch, since it is direct vision, direct experience, direct knowledge and mind cannot experience that.

Safe from the little sounding leads of mind,
Too far for the puny diver's shallow plunge.
Our mortal vision peers with ignorant eyes;
It has no gaze on the deep heart of things.
Our knowledge walks leaning on Error's staff,
A worshipper of false dogmas and false gods,

Mind makes its own rules and believes in them and takes its support from these rules.

Or fanatic of a fierce intolerant creed
Or a seeker doubting every truth he finds,
A sceptic facing Light with adamant No
Or chilling the heart with dry ironic smile,

All these are different aspects of the mind, and they are so terrifying.

A cynic stamping out the god in man;

– through lack of faith : the mind believes only in itself, doesn't believe in anything else.

A darkness wallows in the paths of Time
Or lifts its giant head to blot the stars;
It makes a cloud of the interpreting mind
And intercepts the oracles of the Sun.

The sun is the source of all light, all truth. The vision of the prophet comes directly from the sun, but the mind is like a cloud and covers this vision.

And yet, as always in Sri Aurobindo, when he has developed something at length, he gives us the other point of view :

Yet Light is there; it stands at Nature's doors:
It holds a torch to lead the traveller in.
It waits to be kindled in our secret cells;

Right down to the very body, as Mother insists all the time.

It is a star lighting an ignorant sea,
A lamp upon our poop piercing the night.
As knowledge grows Light flames up from within:

As man becomes more and more evolved, this light grows.

It is a shining warrior in the mind,

– because it battles for light and truth.

An eagle of dreams in the divining heart,

– in the heart of the poet or the artist or the spiritual seer.

An armour in the fight, a bow of God.
Then larger dawns arrive and Wisdom's pomps
Cross through the being's dim half-lighted fields;

Philosophy climbs up Thought's cloud-bank peaks
And Science tears out Nature's occult powers,

These are the higher activities of the mind that lead us to where Mind has to abdicate, through direct experience. That's why philosophy is darshan, is vision, and why Science has to have its roots in some kind of intuition.

Enormous djinns who serve a dwarf's small needs,
Exposes the sealed minutiae of her art
And conquers her by her own captive force.

The captive force is also the force of that original wisdom in Nature. And now, as we climb beyond the mind ... :

On heights unreached by mind's most daring soar,
Upon a dangerous edge of failing Time
The soul draws back into its deathless Self;
Man's knowledge becomes God's supernal Ray.
There is the mystic realm whence leaps the power
Whose fire burns in the eyes of seer and sage;

This is really those who have the knowledge of the Truth, the Right, the Vast.

A lightning flash of visionary sight,
It plays upon an inward verge of mind:
Thought silenced gazes into a brilliant Void.

This is the beginning of true Jnanayoga, where one has to completely silence the mind and receive the light that comes from beyond.

A voice comes down from mystic unseen peaks:
A cry of splendour from a mouth of storm,
It is the voice that speaks to night's profound,
It is the thunder and the flaming call.
Above the planes that climb from nescient earth,
A hand is lifted towards the Invisible's realm,

The aspiration is reaching out to the highest plane.

Beyond the superconscient's blinding line
And plucks away the screens of the Unknown;
A spirit within looks into the Eternal's eyes.

The existence of man gives place to a greater man, the superman.

It hears the Word to which our hearts were deaf,
It sees through the blaze in which our thoughts grew blind;
It drinks from the naked breasts of glorious Truth,
It learns the secrets of eternity.

It has the truth-consciousness.

Thus Savitri explains the whole pattern :

Thus all was plunged into the riddling Night,
Thus all is raised to meet a dazzling Sun.
O Death, this is the mystery of thy reign.

For a long time death is needed. Out of this, the rest has to come and if this were not, then the need to come out of that darkness would never have been felt. So Death is the obstacle which insists that we should climb out of that.

In earth's anomalous and magic field
Carried in its aimless journey by the sun
Mid the forced marches of the great dumb stars,
A darkness occupied the fields of God,
And Matter's world was governed by thy shape.
Thy mask has covered the Eternal's face,
The Bliss that made the world has fallen asleep.
Abandoned in the Vast she slumbered on:
An evil transmutation overtook
Her members till she knew herself no more.

So, everything was plunged into the original darkness.

Only through her creative slumber flit
Frail memories of the joy and beauty meant
Under the sky's blue laugh mid green-scarfed trees
And happy squanderings of scents and hues,

The joy and beauty that is there in physical nature. Beauty and joy are expressions of the divine principle.

In the field of the golden promenade of the sun
And the vigil of the dream-light of the stars,
Amid high meditating heads of hills,

On the bosom of voluptuous rain-kissed earth
And by the sapphire tumbings of the sea.

All these are moments when the Eternal's face can be seen manifesting
in nature.

But now the primal innocence is lost
And Death and Ignorance govern the mortal world

– because mind has become dominant.

And Nature's visage wears a greyer hue.
Earth still has kept her early charm and grace,
The grandeur and the beauty still are hers,
But veiled is the divine Inhabitant.
The souls of men have wandered from the Light
And the great Mother turns away her face.
The eyes of the creatrix Bliss are closed
And sorrow's touch has found her in her dreams.
As she turns and tosses on her bed of Void,
Because she cannot wake and find herself
And cannot build again her perfect shape,
Oblivious of her nature and her state,
Forgetting her instinct of felicity,
Forgetting to create a world of joy,
She weeps and makes her creatures' eyes to weep;

That is the whole problem. We have turned away our face. Earth has
plunged into oblivion.

Testing with sorrow's edge her children's breasts,
She spends on life's vain waste of hope and toil
The poignant luxury of grief and tears.
In the nightmare change of her half-conscious dream,
Tortured herself and torturing by her touch,
She comes to our hearts and bodies and our lives
Wearing a hard and cruel mask of pain.
Our nature twisted by the abortive birth
Returns wry answers to life's questioning shocks,
An acrid relish finds in the world's pangs,
Drinks the sharp wine of grief's perversity.

That is our perversity. We take joy in the pain. We drink the suffering as a form of wine.

A curse is laid on the pure joy of life:
Delight, God's sweetest sign and Beauty's twin,
Dreaded by aspiring saint and austere sage,
Is shunned, a dangerous and ambiguous cheat,
A specious trick of an infernal Power

That is why those who do seek God in this world where sorrow and suffering are constant companions of pleasure and joy, they shun both. They isolate themselves away from this world of nature, in even an outer as well as inner solitude. Joy is supposed to be a danger which an infernal power has put on our road.

It tempts the soul to its self-hurt and fall.
A puritan God made pleasure a poisonous fruit,
Or red drug in the market-place of Death,
And sin the child of Nature's ecstasy.
Yet every creature hunts for happiness,
Buys with harsh pangs or tears by violence
From the dull breast of the inanimate globe
Some fragment or some broken shard of bliss.

It is a fundamental need, because that is what we are founded on – on joy.

Even joy itself becomes a poisonous draught;
Its hunger is made a dreadful hook of Fate.
All means are held good to catch a single beam,
Eternity sacrificed for a moment's bliss:

For the sake of a momentary pleasure, sometimes we sell our souls.

Yet for joy and not for sorrow earth was made
And not as a dream in endless suffering Time.
Although God made the world for his delight,
An ignorant Power took charge and seemed his Will
And Death's deep falsity has mastered Life.
All grew a play of Chance simulating Fate.

Chance, manifestation of the play of Ignorance.

After reaching the end of the first section, Jhumur closed her sharing by reading some passages from rest of the Canto :

“A secret air of pure felicity
Deep like a sapphire heaven our spirits breathe;
Our hearts and bodies feel its obscure call,
Our senses grope for it and touch and lose.
If this withdrew, the world would sink in the Void;
If this were not, nothing could move or live.
A hidden Bliss is at the root of things.
A mute Delight regards Time’s countless works:
To house God’s joy in things Space gave wide room,
To house God’s joy in self our souls were born.
This universe an old enchantment guards;
Its objects are carved cups of World-Delight
Whose charmed wine is some deep soul’s rapture-drink:
The All-Wonderful has packed heaven with his dreams,
He has made blank ancient Space his marvel-house;

Because the Creation is in Space, and this is his marvel-house.

He spilled his spirit into Matter’s signs:
His fires of grandeur burn in the great sun,
He glides through heaven shimmering in the moon;
He is beauty carolling in the fields of sound;
He chants the stanzas of the odes of Wind;
He is silence watching in the stars at night;
He wakes at dawn and calls from every bough,
Lies stunned in the stone and dreams in flower and tree.
Even in this labour and dolour of Ignorance,
On the hard perilous ground of difficult earth,
In spite of death and evil circumstance
A will to live persists, a joy to be.
There is a joy in all that meets the sense,
A joy in all experience of the soul,
A joy in evil and a joy in good,
A joy in virtue and a joy in sin:
Indifferent to the threat of Karmic law,
Joy dares to grow upon forbidden soil,
Its sap runs through the plant and flowers of Pain:

It thrills with the drama of fate and tragic doom,
It tears its food from sorrow and ecstasy,
On danger and difficulty whets its strength;
It wallows with the reptile and the worm
And lifts its head, an equal of the stars;
It shares the faeries' dance, dines with the gnome:
It basks in the light and heat of many suns,
The sun of Beauty and the sun of Power
Flatter and foster it with golden beams;
It grows towards the Titan and the God.

Then we shall skip this page, although it is very beautiful.

But not for ever endures this danger game:
Beyond the earth, but meant for delivered earth, (p. 631)

This is the transformed earth—

Wisdom and joy prepare their perfect crown;
Truth superhuman calls to thinking man.
At last the soul turns to eternal things,
In every shrine it cries for the clasp of God.
Then is there played the crowning Mystery,
Then is achieved the longed-for miracle.

Then we can go to page 635, part of the dialogue with Death :

Death from the incredulous Darkness sent its cry:
“O priestess in Imagination's house,
Persuade first Nature's fixed immutable laws
And make the impossible thy daily work.
How canst thou force to wed two eternal foes? (p. 635)

This is not possible, he says. Matter and Spirit, Nature and God, are two eternal foes.

Irreconcilable in their embrace
They cancel the glory of their pure extremes:
An unhappy wedlock maims their stunted force.
How shall thy will make one the true and false?
Where Matter is all, there Spirit is a dream:
If all are the Spirit, Matter is a lie,

This is the second and third chapter of *The Life Divine* : The Denial

of the Materialist and The Refusal of the Ascetic.

And who was the liar who forged the universe?
The Real with the unreal cannot mate.
He who would turn to God, must leave the world;
He who would live in the Spirit, must give up life;
He who has met the Self, renounces self.

This is what religion often seems to insist.

He who has met the Self, renounces self.
The voyagers of the million routes of mind
Who have travelled through Existence to its end,
Sages exploring the world-ocean's vasts,
Have found extinction the sole harbour safe.

He draws support from sages and rishis.

Two only are the doors of man's escape,
Death of his body Matter's gate to peace,
Death of his soul his last felicity.
In me all take refuge, for I, Death, am God."
But Savitri replied to mighty Death:
"My heart is wiser than the Reason's thoughts,
My heart is stronger than thy bonds, O Death.
It sees and feels the one Heart beat in all,
It feels the high Transcendent's sunlike hands,
It sees the cosmic Spirit at its work;
In the dim Night it lies alone with God."

Savitri affirms the Truth of the omnipresent Reality.

"My heart's strength can carry the grief of the universe
And never falter from its luminous track,
Its white tremendous orbit through God's peace.

This is the role of the Mother.

It can drink up the sea of All-Delight
And never lose the white spiritual touch,
The calm that broods in the deep Infinite."

– to experience joy and not be separated at all from the Spirit.

Then we can look at the last lines, from line 624 onwards :

“Why dost thou vainly strive with me, O Death,
A mind delivered from all twilight thoughts,
To whom the secrets of the gods are plain?
For now at last I know beyond all doubt,
The great stars burn with my unceasing fire ... (p. 638)

She is that Force of universal creation, the force of joy, the force of love.

And life and death are both its fuel made.
Life only was my blind attempt to love:
Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory;
All shall be seized, transcended; there shall kiss
Casting their veils before the marriage fire
The eternal bridegroom and eternal bride.

Nature and God, Matter and Spirit.

The heavens accept our broken flights at last.
On our life's prow that breaks the waves of Time
No signal light of hope has gleamed in vain.”

A Tree

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.

Sri Aurobindo
Collected Poems SABCL 5, p.47

The Everlasting Yes : *Savitri*, the Epic of Affirmation

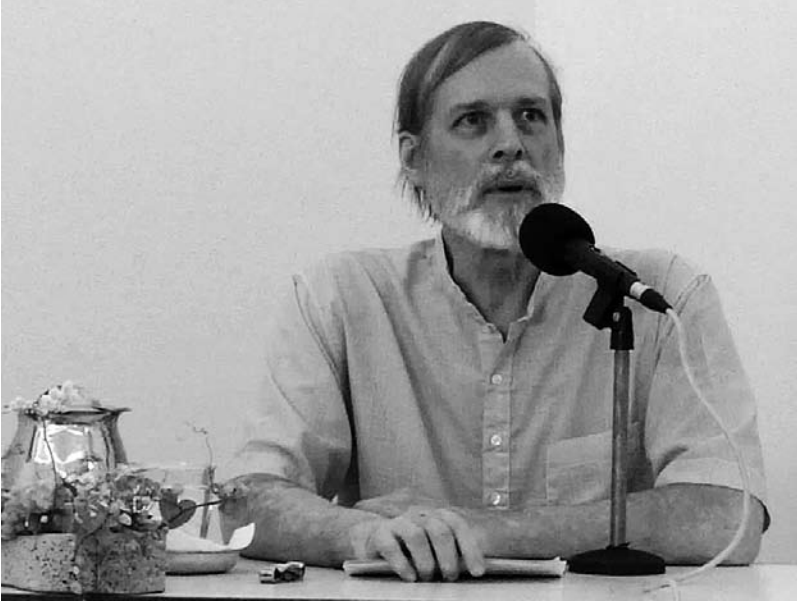
A talk by Richard Hartz
March 19, 2011

Much of the world's great literature dwells on the tragic aspect of human experience. Normally we try to keep our contact with this unhappy side of existence to a minimum. Yet it has always attracted poets, dramatists, novelists and their audiences. In Western culture, the choice of a tragic theme has often been regarded as a sign of seriousness of purpose, as if tales of fate, suffering and death revealed the true nature of things in a way that is missed by a more optimistic use of the imagination. Most critics would agree that Aeschylus sounded depths unknown to Aristophanes, and that Shakespeare's genius expressed itself more powerfully in *Macbeth* than in *Much Ado about Nothing*. In India a supposedly pessimistic worldview produced no comparable tradition of tragic drama, but we do find tragedy in works as central to the culture as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Thinkers everywhere have pondered over the appeal of tragedy. Why should the presentation of catastrophic events be conducive to the highest art? Various answers were given in ancient times, from Aristotle's theory of *katharsis* to the *rasa* concept of Sanskrit poetics. More recently, Schopenhauer reflected his Vedantic and Buddhist affinities when he wrote: "What gives to everything tragic ... the characteristic tendency to the sublime, is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them."¹ Nietzsche, deeply influenced by Schopenhauer though he rejected his asceticism, saw tragedy as pointing "to the eternity of true being surviving every

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 433–34.

phenomenal change”² and as “tending toward the shattering of the individual and his fusion with the original Oneness”.³ Keenly aware of the “tragedy at the heart of things, ... the contrariety at the center of the universe”,⁴ Nietzsche found the Dionysian key to the psychology of tragic literature in the act of “saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types”.⁵



In India, from the global vantage point of the early twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo drew on several past views, Eastern and Western, in order to explain “why the poet is able to transmute pain and sorrow and the most tragic and terrible and ugly things into forms of poetic beauty”. [Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry, with On Quantitative Metre* (FP), p. 259] Greek and Indian aesthetics, Vedantic philosophy

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 53.

3 Ibid., p. 56.

4 Ibid., p. 64.

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 562.

and Nietzschean affirmation meet in Sri Aurobindo's account of the secret of poetry:

The mental and vital interest, pleasure, pain of thought, life, action is not the source of poetic delight and beauty and can be turned into that deeper thing only when they have sunk into the soul and been transmuted in the soul's radiant memory into spiritual experience,— that perhaps was what the Greeks meant when they made Mnemosyne the eternal mother of the muses; the passions can only change into poetic matter when they have been spiritualised in the same bright sources and have undergone the purification, the *katharsis*, spoken of by the Greek critic... .

The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa* and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis, the soul's pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. The memory of the soul that takes in, broods over and transmutes the mind's thought, feeling and experience, is ... only a common way by which we get at something that stands behind, the spiritual being in us which has the secret of the universal delight and the eternal beauty of existence. [FP, p. 262.]

Tragic Fate in *Iliou and Savitri*

When this passage in *The Future Poetry* was first published in the *Arya* in 1920, Sri Aurobindo had been working for a number of years on the two epics, *Iliou* and *Savitri*, which are his most substantial contributions to the poetry of the English language. In both epics he came to grips with the tragic dimension of life, collective or personal, represented in one case by the fall of Troy and in the other by the death of Satyavan. But the sense of the inescapability of fate that overshadows *Iliou* is overcome in *Savitri*.

In *Iliou*, Sri Aurobindo depicts life with all its vicissitudes as a divine Lila or cosmic game in which something in us takes an irrepressible delight. Listen, for example, to Helen's words to Paris:

“Yes, it is good,” she cried, “what the gods do and actions of mortals; Good is this play of the world; it is good, the joy and the torture... .

Never can Death undo what life has done for us, Paris.
 Nor, whatsoever betide, can the hour be un-lived of our rapture.
 This too is good that nations should meet in the shock of the battle,
 Heroes be slain and a theme be made for the songs of the poets,
 Songs that shall thrill with the name of Helen, the beauty of Paris.
 Well is this also that empires should fall for the eyes of a woman;
 Well that for Helen Hector ended, Memnon was slaughtered,
 Strong Sarpedon fell and Troilus ceased in his boyhood.
 Troy for Helen burning, her glory, her empire, her riches,
 This is the sign of the gods and the type of things that are mortal... ”

[Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems* (CP), p. 397.]

Ilion pulsates with the Nietzschean and Dionysian “Yes” to life even at its strangest and hardest. But this, even in a Vedantic form, was far from being the whole of Sri Aurobindo’s message. Ananke, the Greek personification of adamant Necessity, has the final word in *Ilion*. But the story of Troy’s downfall could not provide a framework for Sri Aurobindo to convey what he was ultimately seeking, the discovery of a “greater luminous spiritual Necessity and its sovereign imperative” which “alone can displace or entirely penetrate, transform into itself and so replace the blind Ananke of the Inconscience.” [Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (LD), p. 997.] Consequently he turned from Greek to Indian legend. There he found the symbol of a more integral affirmation in the myth of Savitri, the young woman who follows the god of death into the realm of eternal darkness in order to win back the life of her husband, Satyavan.

“The Knot of Matter” and the Genesis of *Savitri*

The opening of the first known manuscript of *Savitri* is dated the 8th and 9th of August, 1916. Sri Aurobindo must have just completed the chapter of *The Life Divine* entitled “The Knot of Matter”, which was published in that month’s issue of the *Arya* (scheduled to come out on the 15th). In this chapter he probes the nature of matter to understand why life in the physical world is “stricken with death and pain” and whether it could be different. He concludes that indeed it could be, if certain conditions were fulfilled. These are explained in the remainder of the thousand and more pages to which his major philosophical work eventually grew, justifying the possibility of a transformed life on earth as a natural and logical outcome of the continuing evolution of consciousness.

It seems significant that, as far as we can ascertain, Sri Aurobindo began *Savitri* immediately after writing a chapter that is so directly relevant to the fundamental issues at the heart of the poem. In “The Knot of Matter”, he approaches the problem created by matter’s apparent denial of the spirit by first setting out to state the difficulty “entirely, trenchantly, with exaggeration, if need be, rather than with diminution”. In so doing, he temporarily sets aside the detachment of the philosopher and resorts to language whose intensity is closer to that of poetry than metaphysics. Identifying himself with the plight of half-conscious beings in an unconscious world, he writes:

For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind ... minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible.

[LD, p. 258. *First published in Arya, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), pp. 6–7.*]

In the midst of a seemingly abstract philosophical exposition, here is the voice of the poet who three years earlier, in “The Meditations of Mandavya”, had entertained a vision of the world as

... only a dumb Void that belches forth
Numberless larvae and phantasmal shapes
Into a void less happy than itself
Because this feels. O if this dream were true,
This iron, brute, gigantic helpless toy
They call a world, this thing that turns and turns
And shrieks and bleeds and cannot stop, this victim
Broken and living yet on its own wheel,
And if a Will created this, what name
Shall best blaspheme against that tyrant God?

[CP, p. 513.]

To be sure, this Promethean outburst against the notion of an extra-cosmic Creator expressed only the mood of a moment; for the poet goes on to affirm the “*One, multitudinous, nameless, yet a Name*” [CP, p. 515.] and the poem ends in ecstasy. But we see that, whether in poetry or prose, Sri Aurobindo had the dramatist’s gift for taking opposite viewpoints, affirmative and negative, and expressing them with equal force.

The Debate with Death

We see this method employed with the greatest power in the epic debate of Savitri and Death. A sketch of parts of that debate can be found in the draft of the poem, consisting of a few hundred lines, begun in August 1916 and revised and recopied by November of that year. At this stage much of the eventual epic is only in an embryonic form. But even in this comparatively undeveloped version, Savitri is as much an incarnation of the spirit of affirmation as Death is a personification of the negation of things.

After Satyavan is struck down by Death’s invisible hand, the contest of wills gets under way with the appearance of the god of death himself in a form perceptible to Savitri’s inner sight. In Sri Aurobindo’s fair copy of the first manuscript this passage is shorter than the final text, but we find much of it already in its definitive form. Here Death’s entry is described in these imposing lines:

Something stood there unearthly, sombre, grand,
A limitless denial of all being
That wore the wonder of a shape. The Form
Bore the deep pity of destroying gods
In its appalling eyes. Eternal Night
In the dire beauty of an immortal face
Pitying arose, receiving all that lives
Into its fathomless heart for ever. Its limbs
Were monuments of transience and beneath
Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids
Silent beheld the writhing that is life.
The two opposed each other with their eyes,
Woman and universal god.⁶

6 “Sri Aurobindo’s First Fair Copy of His Earliest Version of *Savitri*”, *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture*, vol. 33, no. 11 (November 1981), p. 622. Cf. *Savitri*, p. 574.

In an age when the gods are normally dismissed as old wives' tales, the god of death as depicted by Sri Aurobindo has few of the trappings of mythology. The suspension of disbelief demanded of the modern mind is minimal. Moreover, Death is represented as the archetypal materialist with whom today's materialist is often likely to agree, as when he describes man's proclivity for creating gods in his own image:

He sees above him with a longing heart
Bare spaces more unconscious than himself
That have not even his privilege of mind,
And empty of all but their unreal blue,
And peoples them with bright and merciful powers.
For the sea roars around him and earth quakes
Beneath his steps, and fire is at his doors,
And death prowls baying through the woods of life. [pp.586-87]

Any lingering suspicion of anthropomorphism in the representation of Death as a being with whom Savitri can interact – though a cosmic being, whose “*shape was nothingness made real*” and whose voice “*seemed the whole adverse world's*” [pp.574-75] – is dispelled when Death says:

I have no body and no tongue to speak,
I commune not with human eye and ear;
Only thy thought gave a figure to my void.
Because, O aspirant to divinity,
Thou calledst me to wrestle with thy soul,
I have assumed a face, a form, a voice. [p.593.]

Sri Aurobindo exercised his poetic abilities to the utmost in evoking the formidable figure of Death, as much as in portraying Death's indomitable antagonist, Savitri. Death's ironic critique of human hopes and ideals is devastating. His arguments, whether drawn from scientific materialism or life-negating mysticism, often seem unanswerable. He makes a plausible case against the whole project of evolution championed by his opponent:

When all unconscious was, then all was well.
I, Death, was king and kept my regal state,
Designing my unwilling, unerring plan... .
Then Thought came in and spoiled the harmonious world:

Matter began to hope and think and feel,
Tissue and nerve bore joy and agony... .
A trouble rocked the great world's blind still heart
And Nature lost her wide immortal calm.
Thus came this warped incomprehensible scene ... [p.617]

A certain tragic grandeur in the materialistic vision is conveyed in several of the speeches Sri Aurobindo has put in the mouth of Death. At times the picture of the human condition painted in these speeches brings to mind the most moving passages in Bertrand Russell's celebrated essay, "A Free Man's Worship":

In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, ... there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of the vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence. ... In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for the little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour; ... all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul, which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. ... Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. ...⁷

While Sri Aurobindo dissented from the pessimism of the materialistic worldview and its limited assessment of human possibilities, he did not underestimate the aspect of life on which it takes its stand. The central question raised in his epic is whether that discouraging aspect is the whole picture, or whether there is after all something in us that is not as isolated, transient and powerless as our surface consciousness – something that, as it struggles for survival in an inhospitable universe, not only can feel the mystery of existence, but whose inner strength is

⁷ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship", http://www.skeptic.ca/Bertrand_Russell_Collection.pdf.

potentially a match for matter's seeming omnipotence. The presence of this incalculable factor is what Sri Aurobindo suggests through his heroine's response to her husband's doom:

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

The Two Negations

Though there is an archaic element in *Savitri* that links it to an ancient tradition, Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied with contemporary realities as much as with timeless truths. The challenge to spirituality posed by rationalistic materialism was a reality that could not be ignored. Sri Aurobindo was concerned not merely with refuting the materialist position however, but with disengaging the truth from which it derives its force and incorporating that in a larger synthesis. In his poetry, furthermore, intellectual truth had to be transfigured into artistic revelation. In *Savitri*, the materialist's denial of the spirit is voiced by Death with all the inspired force of language and image at the poet's command. At the same time, the truth and attraction of the ascetic refusal which is the mirror image of that denial are given an equally compelling statement, as in Death's admonition to Savitri:

The One lives for ever. There no Satyavan
Changing was born and there no Savitri
Claims from brief life her bribe of joy. There love
Came never with his fretful eyes of tears,
Nor Time is there nor the vain vasts of Space... .
If thou desirest immortality,
Be then alone sufficient to thy soul:
Live in thyself; forget the man thou lov'st.
My last grand death shall rescue thee from life;
Then shalt thou rise into thy unmoved source. [pp 593-94]⁸

8 Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 696.

The two negations, materialistic and spiritual, contradictory though they appear to be, agree in ruling out the possibility of the fulfilment of the spirit in matter. By splitting reality into incompatible parts that reject each other, both serve the purpose of Death, the great divider. As he points out,

Where Matter is all, there Spirit is a dream:
If all are the Spirit, Matter is a lie... .

The mutual exclusion of the two poles of existence makes the problem of life insoluble and leaves extinction, physical or spiritual, as the only way out:

Two only are the doors of man's escape,
Death of his body Matter's gate to peace,
Death of his soul his last felicity.
In me all take refuge, for I, Death, am God. [p. 635.]

Remaking the Universe

Convincing as Death's nihilism may be to the logical mind and however tempting to the disillusioned and the world-weary, there is something deep within us that can hardly fail to leap up at Savitri's

response. Remaining silent at first, when she finally speaks it is to assert the unconquerableness of the human soul in a world where Death seems all-powerful:

"I bow not to thee, O huge mask of death,
Black lie of night to the cowed soul of man,
Unreal, inescapable end of things,
Thou grim jest played with the immortal spirit. ..."

[p.588.]

Sri Aurobindo anticipates here the tone of a talk given years later, after his passing, by the Mother who was undoubtedly his model for the character of Savitri. Calling death a "macabre joke of Nature", she commented on the reactions that the first contact with it arouses in individuals with a somewhat awakened consciousness:

In persons who are sensitive, it produces horror; in others, indignation. There is a tendency to ask oneself: "What is this

monstrous farce in which one takes part without wanting to, without understanding it? Why are we born, if it is only to die? Why all this effort for development, progress, the flowering of the faculties, if it is to come to a diminution ending in decline and disintegration? ...” Some feel a revolt in them, others less strong feel despair and always this question arises: “If there is a conscious Will behind all that, this Will seems to be monstrous.”

The Mother acknowledged that this process of perpetual destruction and new creation can be looked at as a game that Nature enjoys, even if we do not. But she believed that it is possible “to convince Nature that there are other methods than hers”. She added: “This looks like madness, but all new things have always seemed like madness before they became realities.”

[The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957–1958*, pp. 33–36.]

Madness or not, there is an epic sublimity in Savitri’s defiance of Death for which one could not easily find a parallel in recent poetry. When he warns her of the divine retribution awaiting those who violate the law of things, she replies:

“Who is this God imagined by thy night,
Contemptuously creating worlds disdained,
Who made for vanity the brilliant stars?
Not he who has reared his temple in my thoughts
And made his sacred floor my human heart.
My God is will and triumphs in his paths,
My God is love and sweetly suffers all. ...
A traveller of the million roads of life,
His steps familiar with the lights of heaven
Tread without pain the sword-paved courts of hell;
There he descends to edge eternal joy.
Love’s golden wings have power to fan thy void:
The eyes of love gaze starlike through death’s night,
The feet of love tread naked hardest worlds.
He labours in the depths, exults on the heights;
He shall remake thy universe, O Death.”

[pp. 591–92]⁹

⁹ Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 695.]

The remaking of the universe would seem to require divine intervention in the cosmic process, but what individuals can do is to remake themselves. By the time Sri Aurobindo took up *Savitri*, this self-refashioning had been his principal occupation for several years. We cannot begin to understand his epic without an idea of the spiritual practice and realizations that led to its composition and make it something more than a work of literature. Some of his prose writings, his other poetry, his letters and especially his diary, the *Record of Yoga*, give glimpses of the Yogi's inner life. They confirm the largely autobiographical nature of *Savitri*, his final self-revelatory masterpiece, which complements and completes these other sources.

Affirmations of the Developing God

Sri Aurobindo's sadhana followed an inner guidance rather than an established tradition, though the Sanskrit terminology he employed shows his indebtedness to the ancient spiritual culture of India. Under this inner guidance, the formulation of his personal system of Yoga took a significant turn in June 1914. This was a little over

two years before he started to write *Savitri* and two months before the publication of the first issue of the *Arya*, the monthly philosophical review in which for the next few years he would present his thought and vision to the world in works such as *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In fact, the introduction of what he called the "affirmations" into his sadhana coincided with the beginning of his work for the *Arya*. This development in his Yoga was to influence perceptibly some of the writings that appeared in the *Arya*, especially *The Life Divine*, and is relevant to appreciating the spirit of affirmation that is characteristic of *Savitri*.

On June 10th and 12th, 1914, Sri Aurobindo listed nine items in his diary which he described as "affirmations, stomach, of the developing God". [Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga* (RY), p. 485.] We will come back to the precise meaning of the Vedic term *stoma* in connection with *Savitri*. For now let us take a glance at some of these affirmations. They were written down in three groups under the heading "Script". Script in the *Record of Yoga* was a communication, received through a process resembling automatic writing, from a source which was

often identified as the Master of the Yoga, Sri Aurobindo's inner guide.

Four affirmations were given first, with an indication that there were more to come; the next three followed on the same day and the last pair two days later. The original grouping into four, three and two was to remain important throughout the coming year, during which the affirmations come up repeatedly in the *Record*. In an entry dated a year after they were first received, the three groups are referred to as the "four Brahma affirmations", the "three Krishna affirmations" and the "two Prakriti affirmations". [RY, p. 880.] Frequently only seven affirmations are mentioned, however, the last two being perceived as dependent on the perfection of the other seven.

The division of the first seven affirmations into those concerned with Brahma and with Krishna, with the impersonal and the personal experience of the divine Reality, is a helpful simplification; but in practice Sri Aurobindo found that these aspects could not be separated. They are combined in the second affirmation of the first group, which was later placed first:

The universal sense of the Anandamaya Lilamaya Krishna in the Brahmadrishhti as the continent of all the conscious activity.
[RY, p. 484.]

Here we get a clue to the reason for the prominence of Krishna in the affirmations – for Sri Aurobindo was not a Vaishnava and there was nothing sectarian in his references to Krishna. Krishna is the lord of the Lila, the divine play. The sense of the world as Lila was strong in Sri Aurobindo's consciousness at this time, evidently due to the increasing intensity of his realization of the Brahman as Ananda, the eternal and universal delight of being. This brought with it a heightened awareness of the living Personality behind all things. He explains in *The Life Divine* that the world can be seen in terms of Maya if we regard it "in its relation to pure, infinite, indivisible, immutable Existence" (Sat). Or if we look at it in relation to pure consciousness (Chit), it is natural to view the world as a movement of Force, as Prakriti. But world-existence can also be experienced "in its relation to the self-delight of eternally existent being". In that case,

... we may regard, describe and realise it as Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanician's joy

of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation,—Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground.¹⁰

When Sri Aurobindo drafted his first version of *Savitri*, he evoked the vision of this Lila using imagery traditionally associated with Krishna. The final text of this passage differs little from what it was in 1916:

One who came love and lover and beloved
Eternal, built himself a wondrous field
And wove the measures of a marvellous dance.
There in its circles and its magic turns
Attracted he arrives, repelled he flees... .
His bliss laughs to us or it calls concealed
Like a far-heard unseen entrancing flute
From moonlit branches in the throbbing woods,
Tempting our angry search and passionate pain. [pp. 613–14.]¹¹

The affirmations in the *Record* are of interest to us here mainly as part of the background of the composition of *Savitri*. For our immediate purpose, therefore, the affirmation of Krishna’s Ananda and Lila in the vision of Brahman can be taken to represent the first group of four. We will come back to two other affirmations in this group in connection with *The Life Divine*. The three Krishna affirmations proper, pertaining to the personal relation with the Lord and Lover, form the second group. A convenient summary of them is found in an entry within a month after the affirmations were initially recorded. On 7 July 1914, Sri Aurobindo noted an instance of what he termed “lipi”, or etheric writing seen with the faculty of subtle vision. The words he saw were “*Ecstasy – Love – God*”. Later in the same entry he commented: “Love ... ecstasy ... God is the formula of fulfilment

10 First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 12 (July 1915), pp. 706–8. In a summary of the state of his sadhana at the beginning of the month in which this chapter (“Delight of Existence: The Solution”) appeared in the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo observed: “The Anandam Brahma is now fixed in the vision of all things and only occasionally goes back for a moment into the Anantam Jnanam Brahma. Along with this finality there is also the finality of the *Lilamaya darshana* in all existences... .” (*Record of Yoga*, p. 883)

11 Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 699.

of the second group of affirmations.” [RY, pp. 535–36.] The last item in this group affirms the acceptance of all experience as “a slave & instrument of the Lover”. [RY, p. 485.] When he drafted the first version of *Savitri* in 1916, Sri Aurobindo described this condition of rapturous surrender in a passage near the end, where a divine voice speaks to Savitri:

Thou shalt drink down my sweetness unalloyed
And bear my ruthless beauty unabridged
Amid the world’s intolerable wrongs... .
Insistent, careless of thy lonely right,
My creatures shall demand me from thy heart.
All that thou hast shall be for others’ bliss;

All that thou art shall to my hands belong.
I will pour delight from thee as from a jar
And whirl thee as my chariot through the ways
And use thee as my sword and as my lyre
And play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.
And when thou art vibrant with all ecstasies
And when thou liv’st one spirit with all things,
Men seeing thee shall feel my siege of joy,
And nearer draw to me because thou art... .
This shalt thou henceforth learn from thy heartbeats,
That conquering me thou art my captive made,
And who possess me are by me possessed.
For ever love, O beautiful slave of God.¹²

The affirmations as formulated in June 1914 and restated in December were a major feature of the *Record of Yoga* only for a year or so. During that period the last pair of affirmations lagged behind the other seven. These two final affirmations implied an expansion of the scope of the Yoga, an acceleration of its pace and a more decisive application to life. Only a preparation for this was possible while the foundation outlined in the other affirmations was being laid. But the twin Prakriti affirmations anticipated subsequent developments in Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana that figure prominently in *Savitri*. The eighth affirmation is:

12 *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 2 (February 1982), pp. 82–83. Cf. *Savitri*, pp. 700–702

Siddhi must be on the basis of the largeness in the five worlds
& not a selective & limited siddhi. [RY, p. 488.]

This was rephrased six months later in a manner that again brought
in the sense of Lila and connected the Prakriti affirmations with the
preceding Krishna affirmations:

The field of play of Krishna the five worlds working themselves
out in the fifth, Bhurloka. [RY, p. 766.]

A detailed account of the worlds was not part of the original scheme
of *Savitri*, but was introduced in the late 1920s into what eventually
became the longest of the twelve books of the epic. Sri Aurobindo did
not pursue or expound the knowledge of the supraphysical planes in
the spirit of an otherworldly mysticism however. As the reformulated
affirmation suggests, what preoccupied him was the worlds of life,
mind, supermind and Sachchidananda “working themselves out” in
the world of matter represented by the earth (“Bhurloka”). In *Savitri*,
the impact on the terrestrial plane of the subtle forces proper to higher
grades of substance and consciousness is the subject of much of
the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. This interconnectedness is
indicated in the opening canto of Book Two, “The World-Stair”:

Our earth is a fragment and a residue;
Her power is packed with the stuff of greater worlds
And steeped in their colour-lustres dimmed by her drowse;
An atavism of higher births is hers,
Her sleep is stirred by their buried memories
Recalling the lost spheres from which they fell.
Unsatisfied forces in her bosom move;
They are partners of her greater growing fate
And her return to immortality [pp. 99–100.]

The final affirmation deals with the question of time. This was crucial
if the thoroughgoing transformation envisaged by Sri Aurobindo was
to be achieved within the span of a single life. In its original form,
the ninth affirmation reads:

Time must be no longer a determinative, but only an instrumental
factor in the siddhi. So also with Space & Circumstance.
[RY, p. 488.]

In Savitri's dialogue with Death, her adversary rebukes her as one of those spirits who

Have come into the narrow bounds of life
With too large natures overleaping time.

Death argues for respecting the established order and letting time take its meandering course:

The wise think with the cycles, they hear the tread
Of far-off things; patient, unmoved they keep
Their dangerous wisdom in their depths restrained,
Lest man's frail days into the unknown should sink
Dragged like a ship by bound leviathan
Into the abyss of his stupendous seas.
Lo, how all shakes when the gods tread too near!
All moves, is in peril, anguished, torn, upheaved.

But Savitri insists on a dynamic view of the process of time, invoking the lives of heroes and geniuses, prophets and incarnations to support her optimism:

Ever to the new and the unknown press on
The speeding aeons justifying God.
What were earth's ages if the grey restraint
Were never broken and glories sprang not forth
Bursting their obscure seed, while man's slow life
Leaped hurried into sudden splendid paths
By divine words and human gods revealed? ...
I claim from Time my will's eternity,
God from his moments.

[pp. 650–52.]¹³

The Affirmations of Vedanta

Ten days after writing out the first seven affirmations, Sri Aurobindo noted in his diary: "the first Book of the Life Divine begun (the Vedantic Affirmations)." [RY, p. 504.] His major philosophical work was thus initiated in the spirit of the principle he had adopted in his personal sadhana, summed up in the third affirmation in the *Record of Yoga*: "The principle of Affirmation to replace the principle of

13 Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 5–6.

rejection & denial.” [RY, p. 484.] A statement in *The Life Divine* suggests the underlying rationale of this “principle of Affirmation” justifying its inclusion among the “Brahma affirmations”:

All affirmations are denied only to lead to a wider affirmation of the same Reality. All antinomies confront each other in order

to recognise one Truth in their opposed aspects and embrace by the way of conflict their mutual Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent. [LD, p. 38.]

When the opening chapter of *The Life Divine* appeared on 15 August 1914 in the first issue of the *Arya*, the heading “Book I / The Affirmations of Vedanta” was printed above the title of the chapter. In the text itself, significant occurrences of the word “affirmation” begin with the second paragraph:

These persistent ideals of the race are at once the contradiction of its normal experience and the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences.... [LD, p. 4]

Although Sri Aurobindo later substituted “Omnipresent Reality and the Universe” for “The Affirmations of Vedanta” as the title of Book One, the idea of affirmation and the Vedantic interpretation of it continued to be a persistent feature of *The Life Divine*, found even in passages he added or rewrote when he revised and expanded it to its present dimensions twenty-five years after its serial publication began in the *Arya*. The best explanation of what he meant by “the affirmations of Vedanta” occurs in such a passage, first published in the 1940 edition of Book Two:

In the Upanishads, in the inspired scripture of the most ancient Vedanta, we find the affirmation of the Absolute, the experience-concept of the utter and ineffable Transcendence; but we find also, not in contradiction to it but as its corollary, an affirmation of the cosmic Divinity, an experience-concept of the cosmic Self and the becoming of Brahman in the universe. Equally, we find the affirmation of the Divine

Reality in the individual: this too is an experience-concept; it is seized upon not as an appearance, but as an actual becoming. In place of a sole supreme exclusive affirmation negating all else than the transcendent Absolute we find a comprehensive affirmation carried to its farthest conclusion: this concept of Reality and of Knowledge enveloping in one view the cosmic and the Absolute coincides fundamentally with our own. ...¹⁴ [LD, pp. 661–62]

In *Savitri*, these “experience-concepts” are affirmed in the evocative language of poetry. In a well-known passage in “The Secret Knowledge”, for instance, we meet first the transcendent Absolute, but not as an “exclusive affirmation negating all else”:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.

This leads to the affirmation of the same Absolute as the cosmic Self that becomes the universe:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has entered with his silence into space:
He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;
He has built a million figures of his power;
He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he.

Finally, the divine Reality in the individual is affirmed:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,
One who is in us as our secret self,
Our mask of imperfection has assumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh his own,

¹⁴ This passage is the revised version of the following sentence in the *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 8 (March 1917), p. 452: “On the other hand in the Isha Upanishad we find the tendency of comprehensive affirmation carried to its farthest conclusion and a point of view arrived at which coincides with our own.”

His image in the human measure cast
That to his divine measure we might rise. ...

[p. 67]

The Everlasting No and the Everlasting Yes

Meanwhile, the mask of our imperfection hides very effectively whatever divinity is within us. This fact has led to two opposite conclusions. At one extreme of the spectrum of thought are those who deny the divinity altogether. At the other extreme are those who, while affirming the divinity, reject not only the mask, but the tenement. These two negations, the materialist denial and the refusal of the ascetic, are contrasted in the second and third chapters of *The Life Divine*. Each affirms what the other rejects, but both affirmations are radically incomplete and vitiated by their own one-sidedness. As Sri Aurobindo observes:

Liberty pursued by exclusion of the thing exceeded leads along the path of negation to the refusal of that which God has accepted. Activity pursued by absorption in the act and the energy leads to an inferior affirmation and the denial of the Highest. [LD, p. 46]

In place of these limiting alternatives, Sri Aurobindo proposes a complete affirmation. He explains its nature most clearly in “The Problem of Life”, a chapter of *The Life Divine* originally published in the *Arya* in May 1916, three months before he commenced his work on *Savitri*.

“All life,” he writes, “depends for its nature on the fundamental poise of its own constituting consciousness. ...” Consciousness can take any of four poises. First there is its poise in the unity of Sachchidananda, the infinite existence-consciousness-bliss that is the source of all. At the other end of things, consciousness seems to disappear in the enormous machinery of material nature. Out of this self-oblivion has arisen the third poise, the divided consciousness of mind, “limiting itself in various centres, ... aware of things and forces in their apparent division and opposition to each other but not in their real unity”. The final possibility is consciousness “in possession of both the diversity and the unity”, whose nature is “the One knowing itself as the Many and the Many knowing themselves as the One”.

Force has a different relation to consciousness in each of these poises. In Sachchidananda they are one. In the material world,

characterized by Sri Aurobindo as “the great denial of Sachchidananda by Himself”, we see “the utter apparent separation of Force from Consciousness, the specious miracle of the all-governing and infallible Inconscient”. The third relation describes our own condition. It “is the poise of being in Mind and in the Life which we see emerging out of this denial, bewildered by it, struggling ... against the thousand and one problems involved in this perplexing apparition of man the half-potent conscient being out of the omnipotent Inconscience of the material universe.” But this unsatisfactory state of affairs is not the end of the matter. Sri Aurobindo continues:

The fourth relation is the poise of being in Supermind: it is the fulfilled existence which will eventually solve all this complex problem created by the partial affirmation emerging out of the total denial; and it must needs solve it in the only possible way, by the complete affirmation fulfilling all that was secretly there contained in potentiality and intended in fact of evolution behind the mask of the great denial. [LD, pp. 223–25.]

This brief summary of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy provides a framework in which to interpret *Savitri*. The entire epic can be understood in these terms – not surprisingly, since the whole of existence appears to be encompassed in this all-inclusive scheme. Numerous passages in the poem could be cited pertaining to each of the four poises. But what is symbolized in *Savitri* as a whole is the “complete affirmation” belonging to the poise in Supermind (Vijnana) where consciousness and force are reunited as inseparable equals. This integral affirmation is not envisioned as an exit from the manifestation and a return to the starting-point in undifferentiated Sachchidananda. Rather, it corresponds to the “Vijnanamaya Sachchidananda” mentioned in a reformulation of the fourth affirmation in the *Record of Yoga*, which is to bring “the fulfilment of mind, life & body”. [RY, p. 765.]

The occurrences of the verb “affirm” in *Savitri* will provide us with a sample of passages illustrating the kinds of affirmation proper to the various poises of consciousness in the universe and beyond. But first it may be observed that, though the noun “affirmation” itself does not occur in the poem, we find its opposites, “denial”, “negation”, “refusal” – often in connection with Death, who personifies the

cosmic opposition to the spirit of affirmation embodied in Savitri herself. We have already seen Death described as a “*limitless denial of all being*”. [p. 574.] Let us look at a few more of these negative expressions:

Across the fruitless labour of the worlds
His huge denial’s all-defeating might
Pursued the ignorant march of dolorous Time. [p. 643]

Immutable, Death’s denial met her cry [p. 654]

A great Negation was the Real’s face
Prohibiting the vain process of Time [p. 600]

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

As the last phrase suggests, “Yes” and “No” are of course equivalent to affirmation and negation or refusal. Their occurrences should also be included, therefore, in a study of *Savitri* as the epic of affirmation. But here we have to take into account a complexity in the idea of negation which enriches at the same time the concept of affirmation. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo refers to a “superior Negation” as well as an “inferior negation”. [LD, p. 53.] The inferior one evidently corresponds to the “great denial” and the “immense refusal” we have already encountered. With regard to the superior negation, Sri Aurobindo points out that “it is through both a supreme affirmation and a supreme negation that we can arrive at the Absolute.” [LD, p. 663.] He elaborates on this elsewhere:

The Absolute is in itself indefinable by reason, ineffable to the speech; it has to be approached through experience. It can be approached through an absolute negation of existence, as if it were itself a supreme Non-Existence, a mysterious infinite Nihil. It can be approached through an absolute affirmation of all the fundamentals of our own existence. ... [LD, p. 493.]

Consequently there is a certain ambivalence in Sri Aurobindo's use of the word "No" in *Savitri*. He describes the all-negating Absolute as

An endless No to all that seems to be,
An endless Yes to things ever unconceived
And all that is unimagined and unthought ... [p. 547]

Nevertheless, as we saw in the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo's approach was to replace the principle of rejection and denial as far as possible by the principle of affirmation. Accordingly, after the canto in Book Three entitled "The Pursuit of the Unknowable", a powerful evocation of the "stillness absolute, incommunicable" that "makes unreal all that mind has known" is followed by the warning:

Only the everlasting No has neared
And stared into thy eyes and killed thy heart:
But where is the Lover's everlasting Yes ...? [p. 310]

The Epic of Affirmation

After *Savitri* experiences Nirvana in the "all-negating Absolute", she seems to be on the verge of the "last annulment", when a very different spiritual outcome is suggested:

Even now her splendid being might flame back
Out of the silence and the nullity,
A gleaming portion of the All-Wonderful,
A power of some all-affirming Absolute ... [p. 549]

This is one of four occurrences of "affirming" or "affirmed" in *Savitri*. Interestingly, these can be correlated with the four poises of consciousness outlined in *The Life Divine*. The "all-affirming Absolute" would belong to the first, the poise of consciousness in the infinity of Sachchidananda.

Another occurrence of "affirming" is in "The Book of the Divine Mother". It relates to Sachchidananda's aspect of eternal delight, but only as a concealed presence in the unconscious and insentient universe where life has evolved. This is the second poise:

Affirming in life a hidden ecstasy
It held the spirit to its miraculous course;
Carrying immortal values to the hours
It justified the labour of the suns. [p.313]

“Affirming” is found a third time (reversing the order in which these passages occur in the poem) in “The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life”, the sixth canto of Book Two:

All powers of Life towards their godhead tend
In the wideness and the daring of that air,
Each builds its temple and expands its cult,
And Sin too there is a divinity.
Affirming the beauty and splendour of her law
She claims life as her natural domain [p. 185]

Sin and evil, as we experience them, clearly belong to the “partial affirmation” of a consciousness divided against itself, emerging with its “thousand and one problems” out of matter’s negation of Sachchidananda. [LD, pp. 224–25.] But these lines in “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds” express an occult truth explained in *The Life Divine*:

Those life impulses which are to earth-nature inordinate and out of measure and appear here as perverse and abnormal, find in their own province of being an independent fulfilment and an unrestricted play of their type and principle. ... Here on earth these things exist in an unsatisfied and therefore unsatisfactory and obscure state of struggle and mixture, but there reveal their secret and their motive of being because they are there established in their native power and full form of nature in their own world and their own exclusive atmosphere. [LD., pp. 813–14.]

Every aspect of existence in this and other worlds finds a place in Sri Aurobindo’s epic. In a sense, all is affirmed because behind all there is a truth, however partial. By itself this might lead only to a Nietzschean “Yes” to life even at its strangest and hardest. The aesthetic appreciation of tragedy gives a kind of meaning to reality as it is. But Sri Aurobindo goes on to posit a fourth poise of consciousness, where the reaffirmation of Sachchidananda in

Supermind – the “Vijnanamaya Sachchidananda” of the *Record of Yoga* – is expected to solve the myriad problems that have arisen in the third poise.

The introduction of a supramental consciousness into the scheme of things is grounded in experience as well as philosophy. This factor distinguishes *Savitri* from *Ilion*. It also justifies the story’s happy ending as something more than a fairy tale; for the Supermind would heal the division between consciousness and force, enabling the illumined and empowered will to override the decrees of Ananke. The result of this Siddhi is symbolized by the victory of Savitri over Death. The poem’s climactic event is anticipated at the end of the second canto, “The Issue”. Here, significantly, is the remaining occurrence of the verb “affirm”:

A living choice reversed fate’s cold dead turn,
Affirmed the spirit’s tread on Circumstance,
Pressed back the senseless dire revolving Wheel
And stopped the mute march of Necessity. [p. 21]

The passage concludes a few lines later with the bursting of “*the bounds of consciousness and Time*”. We are reminded of the last affirmation in the *Record of Yoga*, which insists that time, space and circumstance must be no longer “determinative”, but only “instrumental”. [RY, p. 488.]

Much of what we find in *Savitri* is explained in Sri Aurobindo’s prose writings in ways that may seem more accessible to the logical mind. Undoubtedly a comparison with these writings is helpful for understanding the meaning of *Savitri*. But in the end, it is not to convey logical ideas that it was written. In the first chapter of the work that was originally called *The Psychology of Social Development* and later revised and published as *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo spoke in passing of the higher function of poetry in ancient times. It is worth noting that along with “The Knot of Matter”, quoted earlier, this appeared in the *Arya* in the month when he began to draft what we now know as *Savitri*:

To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy, imagination a
plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer,

the nautch-girl of the mind. But to the men of old the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination no dancing courtesan but a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but to image difficult and hidden truths ... [HC p. 9]¹⁵

It was as “a revealer of hidden truths”, like the Rishis of the Vedic age, that Sri Aurobindo wrote *Savitri*. But besides the disclosure of mystic truth, Vedic poetry had a closely related intention. The Vedic *sūkta* was also called a *stoma*, translated by Sri Aurobindo as “hymn of affirmation”. [*The Secret of the Veda, with Selected Hymns* (SV), p. 270.]

Incidentally, as we have seen, he applied the same word, *stoma*, to the affirmations which played an important role during a substantial period of his sadhana as recorded in his diary. During this period he began to write and publish, in monthly instalments, several of his major works including *The Secret of the Veda*. In one of the first commentaries on selected Vedic hymns which accompanied that work, he explained the meaning of *stoma* as he understood it:

By expression then we create and men are even said to create the gods in themselves by the mantra. Again, that which we have created in our consciousness by the Word, we can fix there by the Word to become part of ourselves and effective not only in our inner life but upon the outer physical world. By expression we form, by affirmation we establish. As a power of expression the word is termed *gīh* or *vacas*; as a power of affirmation, *stoma*. In either aspect it is named *manma* or *mantra* [SV, p. 271.]

Affirmation of the truth – in the sense of fixing or establishing it in our consciousness – was, then, part of the function of the Vedic *mantra* according to Sri Aurobindo. This idea also enters into his broader concept of the Mantra as extended to poetry in general, where it designates “the highest power of the inspired word”. [FP, p. 240.] It was probably in 1950, when he was occupied with the final revision of *Savitri*, that Sri Aurobindo dictated a paragraph on the Mantra for *The Future Poetry*. The Mantra, he says here, “is the word that carries the godhead in it

¹⁵ First published in *Arjya*, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), p. 30.

or the power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute”. [FP, p. 313.]

In this sense we can speak of *Savitri* as the epic of affirmation, a Vedic *stoma* on a grand scale. Affirming our divine potential, it can bring the godhead into our consciousness and “fix there it and its workings”; yet it does not reject or disparage our humanity, which is a mask but also a tenement of God. Sri Aurobindo’s epic, like its heroine, is “the living body of his light”. Like her, the poem houses the Name and the Nameless, “the Word or Name vibrating out of the nameless Silence”. [LD, p. 165.] Challenging Death’s power over aspiring humanity, Savitri’s words epitomize the spirit of affirmation she represents – the everlasting Yes:

“Yes, I am human. Yet shall man by me,
Since in humanity waits his hour the God,
Trample thee down to reach the immortal heights,
Transcending grief and pain and fate and death.
Yes, my humanity is a mask of God:
He dwells in me, the mover of my acts,
Turning the great wheel of his cosmic work.
I am the living body of his light,
I am the thinking instrument of his power,
I incarnate Wisdom in an earthly breast,
I am his conquering and unslayable will.
The formless Spirit drew in me its shape;
In me are the Nameless and the secret Name.” [p. 634]

The English of Savitri (3)

Book One, Canto One, lines 139-185

by Shradhdhavan

(continued from issue no. 33)

Today we are starting at the top of page 5. Sri Aurobindo has given us this wonderful picture of the complete darkness of the hour before the dawn, as if that darkness is a Mind, a Mind of Night that is resisting the coming of the Light, and as if that Mind of Night is an image of, or has a similarity to, the darkness at the very beginning of the material creation, the total Inconscience. Then into that darkness a little movement comes; Mother says that it is like the first movement of aspiration, like the tiny breeze that comes before the dawn. And it is as if that aspiration, like '*a childlike finger laid upon a cheek*' wakes up '*the heedless Mother of the universe*' and there is a response. First a thin line of light comes like a faint smile, and then there is something like an eye, an 'eye of Deity', an eye of light peering through the darkness, looking : where did that tiny movement of aspiration come from? Where is that soul '*too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss*'? The movement grows, the light grows, it becomes like a window opening on hidden worlds, and then suddenly it is as if the darkness falls away like a cloak and reveals the body of a god, there pours out '*the revelation and the flame*' and suddenly the full glory of the dawn appears. Last time we read that beautiful description on page 4, of the wonderful colours of the dawn, the Dawn-goddess leaning over the earth, glancing behind her to see whether the sun is following her, and then moving on into the vast spaces to her next task. Then Sri Aurobindo shows us the response of Nature : the natural world on earth responds to the passage of the Dawn-goddess. So we shall read on from there.

Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,
Here where one knows not even the step in front

And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
On this anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Impartial witness of our joy and bale,
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray.

In those previous sentences which we read last time, Sri Aurobindo told us how the world of Nature responds to that passage of the dawn-goddess. There is an aspiration which comes up, and it is as if the hills and the wind and the air and the trees are all worshipping, praying, reaching out to that divine presence. Now he tells us about our human world, our *'half-lit ignorance'*, which *'skirts the gulfs / On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth'*. To *'skirt'* means to move around the edge of something. There are the huge gulfs of outer space, and here we are on our little globe, spinning and going round and round on the edge of something much vaster, something that seems to be deep and dark and empty. We live on the bosom of earth. The earth is our mother, our material mother, we are her children and she keeps us on her bosom, her breast, and nourishes us. But to our mental view, this mother of ours is *'ambiguous'*. *'Ambiguous'* means *'having more than one meaning'* If something is ambiguous, we cannot be sure what it means; is it positive or negative? Is this earth of ours a good mother or a bad one? Is she divine, or is she dragging us back into the material inconscience? Is she loving or indifferent? The earth is ambiguous to us – sometimes it seems green and smiling, at other times dangerous and fierce, or just indifferent. Our earth is a kind of riddle to us, and we live in a world of duality, of opposites. Everything here goes in pairs : hot and cold, light and dark, good and bad, left and right – pairs that are inseparable. Here we ignorant beings who have a little bit of consciousness, mental consciousness, are aware that we don't even know what will be the next step in our lives. Even, if we go deep inside ourselves – it is very interesting – we may be able to get an indication of what we should do; but it is only for *this* step – the one we are taking now, not for the next one. For the next one we need fresh inspiration. So here, Truth – who is of course a goddess, a great goddess – here on our earth, she is seated on Doubt. In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo has written about how important doubt is for us in our quest for truth. It is one of our tools for coming

closer to the truth. We cannot just believe that everything really is just the way that we see it and experience it. We have to question to find the truth. So here in this world, *‘Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of Doubt’*. A throne is the special seat for a queen or an empress, a great goddess – it is the seat that lifts her up and gives her a high place. Mother has shown Huta how to paint that shining



golden goddess of Truth, seated on a dark seat, as if made of black rock, the black rock of Doubt. *‘On this anguished and precarious field of toil ...’* – ‘anguish’ means suffering, intense pain, whether physical or psychological. Our earth is a field of anguish; and it is a ‘field of toil’ – a field of effort and striving : we don’t get anything here without effort. And it is ‘precarious’ : we may make an effort and gain something, but our gains are precarious, whatever we have is not certain and lasting – it can be lost at any time, we are always at risk, in danger, we are not secure. We could say that this expression *‘field of toil’* is a translation of ‘Kuruksheetra’ – the field of action, of effort and of battle and danger – that is our world. This field of toil seems to be spread out beneath a sky that is looking down on us with *‘a large indifferent gaze’* : whatever powers are there on the higher levels, they do not seem to care much, they do not seem to

take much interest in all our efforts and struggles and sufferings. Whatever is there is looking down on us as an impartial witness – it is not taking sides and supporting this one or that one – it simply looks on, without saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’, not preferring this or that. It does not care whether we are experiencing joy or bale – bale is the opposite of joy : misfortune, suffering, things going wrong. But even here – on our ‘*prostrate soil*’: prostrate means ‘lying flat’ – when we want to offer a full pranam we prostrate ourselves, we lie down stretched out flat. Sri Aurobindo is referring to the human race, so he doesn’t only mean the soil, the flat ground out there, he also means us in our most material part, the unresponsive material part of us, which just bears the pressure of that ‘awakening ray’: the awakening ray of the close passage of the Divine Dawn, with its promise of a greater light and a greater fulfilment.

Here too the vision and prophetic gleam
Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes;
Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
Unwanted, fading from the mortal’s range.

So here too, in our human world, that wonderful vision of the divine presence offers its ‘*prophetic gleam*’ – ‘gleam’ refers to light, a soft shining light; this ‘gleam’ is ‘prophetic’: a prophet is one who can see into the future and tell us about what will happen. Sri Aurobindo told us that the Dawn-Light is foretelling and promising an epiphany – you remember? – a full revelation or Darshan of the Divine Presence. Here too, in our human world, that light comes and touches all the common meaningless shapes that we see around us every day, and lights them up into something absolutely magical. You might have experienced this : we wake up in the very early morning ... I remember it happening to me in a railway station somewhere in North India, all those ordinary things looking so beautiful, in such magical colours, in the first dawn light – everything gets lit into miracle and looks impossibly beautiful and wonderful. But it is only for a short time. ‘*Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,*’. ‘Afflatus’ means originally, literally, ‘breath’; but it has come to mean ‘inspiration’ – which also has something to do with breath – the divine breath enters for a moment and makes everything divine, fills everything with divine beauty and wonder and significance. But here, in the material world,

it cannot last long, it is soon spent, it withdraws – because there is no response : it is ‘*unwanted*’; so it fades away from our mortal range. The word ‘mortal’ occurs 256 times in *Savitri* so it is worth learning what it means. Literally it means ‘subject to death’. Everything that is born is subject to death, it must die. Only the unborn part of us, our true soul, can give us immortality and free us from the subjection to death. And when we are born in the material world we are born into a world of limitation – our senses are limited, our consciousness is limited, so our range of experience and understanding is limited : usually to the most material realities that we can touch and see and taste. Finding no response, that vision, that prophetic gleam withdraws and fades away so that we can no longer see it or feel it – if at all we were aware of its presence.

A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
The worship of a Presence and a Power
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.

Something beautiful has come and gone, and leaves behind a sense of it being missed : ‘*A sacred yearning*’ – a longing for that divine Presence and Power. That yearning, that longing, ‘*lingered in its trace*’. To linger means to remain for a time. The Presence and Power have come and gone, but behind something remains lingering. If a lady passes you in the street, the fragrance of the flowers in her hair, or the perfume she is wearing, may sometimes linger in her trace – she has moved on, but the fragrance still lingers where she has passed. Here it is not exactly a fragrance that lingers, but a ‘yearning’ – a sense of longing for something missed. And this longing, this yearning, is a sacred one, there is something holy in it, some aspiration, some worship for that lovely divine Presence that has come and gone but was too perfect to be kept by our mortal hearts, our death-bound hearts. That Presence carried a promise, revealed some great possibility awaiting us in the future, so that yearning and that worship are also carrying a ‘prescience’ – Prescience is foreknowledge, knowing in advance – a kind of intuition of what is to come; and what has been promised is ‘*a marvellous birth to come*’ – the Dawn-goddess has moved on, but she will come back – in the form of Savitri, and in the form of our own new birth, the birth of the revealed divine here on earth.

The Mother has spoken about this in connection with the sunset. She has said that after the sun set there is a very special atmosphere, as if the whole of Nature is feeling that sacred longing for the sun which has disappeared below the horizon, the sun that brought warmth and light and energy; there is an atmosphere of yearning, an aspiration for the return of the sun after the darkness has passed – ‘*The prescience of a marvellous birth to come*’. But here the longing is not just for the return of a new day, it is for that perfect Divine Presence that promises us a completely new birth, an new world.

Only a little the god-light can stay:
Spiritual beauty illumining human sight
Lines with its passion and mystery Matter’s mask
And squanders eternity on a beat of Time.

It seems that Sri Aurobindo is telling us that the wonderful god-light, the light of the direct divine presence, can only stay with us a little time. That wonderful power of spiritual beauty comes and lights things up and allows us human beings to see for a moment behind the mask of Matter ... do you know what a mask is? We put something over our face to disguise who we are – children love to do that : they put on a wolf mask or a Superman mask. Here Sri Aurobindo is telling us that the whole of Matter, the whole material universe, is just a mask – it is hiding something from our view, disguising something. That light of spiritual beauty lights up the mask and lets us see something of the passion and the mystery it is hiding – the intense feeling and meaning, and the mysteriousness and marvel behind. This happens just for a moment, a single beat of Time, but for that moment all the riches of eternity are there. ‘To squander’ means to waste. If you have some money and you spend it all at one go, without thinking about tomorrow, if you spend it on apparently useless things – this is how we usually use this word. Here it is very expressive, because of course the riches of eternity are infinite, but Sri Aurobindo is making us feel how lavishly they are all spent in one short moment of time – the moment when the indwelling Divinity is revealed.

As when a soul draws near the sill of birth,
Adjoining mortal time to Timelessness,
A spark of deity lost in Matter’s crypt

Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,
That transitory glow of magic fire
So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.

Sri Aurobindo gives the image of a soul emerging from the psychic world and about to take birth here in our material world. It comes near to *'the sill of birth'* : the sill is the threshold, the step or line dividing mortal time from Timelessness, the world of birth from the world of the Unborn. In our houses we may have a window-sill, dividing the inside from the outside. As the soul crosses over the threshold, the sill, and is born into the world of Matter, the light that it is carrying, its *'spark of deity'* – the fire of divinity it is carrying in it – its *'lustre'*, its shining light, vanishes. It has entered *'Matter's crypt'*. A crypt is a secret deep cave in the foundations of a sacred building. The root of the word means 'hidden', 'secret'. There is an adjective 'cryptic' which means 'mysterious', 'difficult to understand'; in some newspapers you find Crosswords – a special kind of word-puzzle, where clues are given and you have to find the right word and fill in the puzzle. If the clues given are very difficult to unravel, the puzzle is called a 'Cryptic Crossword' – you really have to be very expert to find the answers. People who work with codes, with ciphers, secret writing, will 'encrypt' the message, hide its meaning so that only someone who has the right clue will be able to find it out. So the world of Matter is a place where things from higher planes get hidden and disguised, they are no longer seen clearly, their lustre vanishes in the Inconscient planes – the levels where consciousness hides from itself. So, in the same way as the light of the soul vanishes as it crosses the threshold and is born into the world of Matter, that short-lived Dawn-light becomes invisible, dissolves into the ordinary bright air of day. 'Transitory' means 'passing', 'short-lived' : that glorious glow of magic fire does not last long. 'Accustomed' means what we are used to, the ordinary, usual thing.

The message ceased and waned the messenger.
The single Call, the unaccompanied Power,
Drew back into some far-off secret world
The hue and marvel of the supernal beam:
She looked no more on our mortality.

The Dawn-goddess has come, she has bent over the earth, she has brought her message – Sri Aurobindo told us that she is an Ambassadors bringing a message from the realm of Eternity to the realm of Change. She has given her message, and now the message has ceased and the messenger ‘waned’ – this is a word that we use for the moon. The moon ‘waxes’ – it gets bigger and brighter and becomes full, and then it starts to wane – it starts to get smaller and less bright. That lovely bright magical messenger of the Dawn fades away. Sri Aurobindo refers to her as ‘*The single Call*’ – she is calling us to those higher worlds, to our greater destiny. She is also ‘*the unaccompanied Power*’ – a great Power that works alone, without any companion or helper. Now she starts to withdraw all those magical colours, all the wonderful beauty of the special light she had brought with her, ‘*the supernal beam*’, to draw them back into some faraway secret world, the world she has come from. ‘Beam’ here is a ray of light – we talk about sunbeams and moonbeams, rays of light. The Dawn’s light is ‘*supernal*’ – heavenly, coming from a higher world. She moves on in her journey, she has cast her eyes on our earth, but now she is no longer looking at ‘*our mortality*’ – our death-bound existence.

The excess of beauty natural to god-kind
Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;
Too mystic-real for space-tenancy
Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:
The rarity and wonder lived no more.

‘*Excess*’ – too much : the amount and quality of beauty that is natural to the beings of heavenly worlds is too much for us. It could not continue to impose itself on physical eyes, the eyes born in this world of time. Our eyes are tuned to something else. Sri Aurobindo says that the body of the Dawn Goddess was too real, real not in the physical way that we use that world, but in a mystic way, a much truer way that is typical of higher worlds. ‘*Tenancy*’ – a tenant is someone who lives in a place that does not belong to him, a house or a room or a space that he rents for a time. Her body of glory is too real to live in our kind of time and space. So that body of glory ‘*was expunged from heaven*’ – as if wiped out, it disappeared from our sky, our atmosphere: here on earth that rare and precious influence, that marvellous wonder was no longer present, and could not be seen.

There was the common light of earthly day.

It is no longer completely dark, the special magic light of Dawn has passed, there is just our ordinary daylight.

Affranchised from the respite of fatigue
Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
Pursued the cycles of her blinded quest.

‘*Affranchised*’ means ‘set free’; something is set free from that ‘*respite*’ – a respite is just a short period of rest or relief between two difficult periods. If you are in pain and someone gives you the right pill, you may experience some respite – but after some time the effect will probably wear off and the pain will come back. ‘*Fatigue*’ means tiredness, exhaustion. Exhaustion gives us some respite. We fall asleep, our tiredness gives us some respite from all the business of life. But in the morning, we wake up, we are set free from that respite. Here it is ‘*the rumour of the speed of Life*’ which is *affranchised*, set free and once more sets off on its way. Here ‘*rumour*’ means ‘sound’ – all the noise that accompanies Life speeding on its way – the sound ‘*pursues*’ – it follows behind ‘*the cycles*’ of Life’s ‘*blinded quest*’. The Life-power is always hunting after something – a ‘quest’ is a search for something. Life’s quest – for bliss, for delight, for satisfaction – is ‘*blinded*’. Here in the Ignorance, the Life-power is cut off from the consciousness of her origin and her aim, she does not know where she is going, how to gain what she wants. ‘*Cycle*’ means something that moves in a circle ... so it has come to mean a wheel : a bicycle is a vehicle with two wheels – that is what its name means. But there is also the cycle of the day, from morning to noon to evening to night, and back to dawn; there is the cycle of the year through the seasons; and there is the cycle of the ages, the yugas. Life’s quest has its cycles too, of desire and the excitement of the chase, then possession and enjoyment, and then she gets tired and feels disgust and exhaustion, enjoys ‘*the respite of fatigue*’ and then she is off again, hunting for something new. And all this movement of quest makes a sound – ‘*the rumour of the speed of Life*’. Now all this starts again.

All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
Obeyed the unforeseeing instant’s urge,

And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
Alone who stares at the future's covered face,
Man lifted up the burden of his fate.

Everybody just wakes up, starts on their daily acts, that are '*unvarying*' – they do not vary much, do not change much, everyday we have to do more or less the same things. '*The thousand peoples of the soil and tree*' – all the insects and birds and animals – they just obey their impulses, they follow the instinctive urge of the moment, they do not think about the future, they are '*unforeseeing*', they just do what they have to do, what instinct drives them to do. The only one who tries to look into the future is the human being, Man. Man is the leading species here, even though our minds are so uncertain, although we live in this half-lit ignorance, still we are the leading species here at present, the only one who thinks about the future – but we cannot see what the future is like : its face is covered; nevertheless we keep staring at that covered face, trying to find some clue to what it holds for us, what is going to come next. When day comes, Man must lift up the burden of his fate – there has been a respite, the respite that fatigue brings, now he must again lift up that heavy load, the load of responsibility, the load of destiny.

Mother asked Huta to paint a figure like a weight-lifter, standing on the curve of the earth, lifting up his heavy load. Huta says that Mother liked this image very much; she said 'One likes to see this picture, because it shows some sense of effort and aspiration.'

This is the end of the first section of the first canto of the first book of Sri Aurobindo's amazing epic. In this canto there are two sections – we shall start the second one next week. This first section has taken us from the complete darkness of the hour before the dawn, the hour before the gods awake, to the common light of earthly day. The Dawn has come, and now it has passed. And by his title for this canto 'The Symbol Dawn', Sri Aurobindo has made it clear that what he is showing us is not only a physical dawn, the rising of the sun above our physical horizon. The darkness at the beginning is not just the absence of the sun; it is a 'Mind of Night' – a consciousness that is resisting the coming of the light. More and more I see that this is a theme running through the whole poem. There is the Night, all the forces of darkness that resist; and there is the new Light coming.

Savitri is connected with the Dawn, with the coming of the new Light. When Mother was explaining to Huta about the painting of the Dawn-goddess going away, Huta said, 'Oh, she has gone.' Mother said 'She will come back – as Savitri'. Savitri represents that early light before the sun comes fully over the horizon; that is what her name means, or that is one of the meanings of her name. This first book is the Book of Beginnings; it opens like that with the Dawn coming, against all the resistance of the Mind of Night, giving her promise, her message of Light and hope and love and the possibility of a higher life, a divine life. She plants her glorious seed of promise in the hours – and now she has moved on and a new day is starting. As we shall see, this is the day when Satyavan must die. The whole story takes place in this one day.

As I said before, it is possible to read this first part for yourself, with concentration, and try to feel those movements, or observe and see those movements happening in yourself: the parts that are in darkness ... some of them are happy in the darkness and unconsciousness, they don't want the light to come, they would rather go back to sleep, back into unconsciousness; but somewhere deep in the darkness there is a tiny movement that allows something to awake – a first beginning of aspiration. And there is something that begins to look for absent light ... it doesn't even know what light is, and yet it feels that something is missing. And it is as if that tiny movement is like a child reminding its sleeping mother, a response comes: something comes looking for that soul lost in the darkness '*too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss*'. Gradually a faint light appears, and grows, and then suddenly it is as if the darkness falls away completely and there is the full revelation of all the divine possibilities – that is the message that the Dawn Goddess brings. All the apparently inert earth-nature responds to that, it is as if for a moment everything is on fire with aspiration, with love of all that divine beauty; even something in the human world responds, feels that magic touch. But that message, that promise cannot stay long – there is something in our present earth-nature which does not allow it to stay. When it has passed, there may be a longing, a yearning for something truer and purer and higher – but the common light of earthly day and the speed of life's blinded quest take over. Savitri will come to change all that – but we shall read about that next time.

My experience with “Meditations on Savitri”

By Manohar (Luigi Fedele)

‘Manohar’ is the Aurovilian name of Luigi Fedele, who joined Auroville in 2004. At Huta’s request he has created over the past six years the series of ‘Meditations on Savitri’ films which are now being issued in DVD form by Huta’s Havyavahana Trust.

*In a narrow plot he has pitched his tent of life
Beneath the wide gaze of the starry Vast.*

(Savitri p. 166)

These lines in Book Two, Canto Five of *Savitri*, for some reason that is not difficult to find since they reflect a certain attitude in my life, particularly attracted and inspired me during one of my early attendances at the Sunday morning ‘Savitri Study Circle’ gatherings in Savitri Bhavan, in the Spring of 2005: a gathering that I had recently discovered at the time, and one that would become a pleasant weekly habit of collective reading and commenting on *Savitri*, forming my closest approach to and contact with the poetry, the vision and the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo.

Noticing my interest in the image suggested by these lines, Shradhdhavan, who is the caring guide in these weekly explorations, showed me a reproduction of a painting inspired by and depicting this passage: it too struck me by the immediacy of the image, resonating with my own feelings.

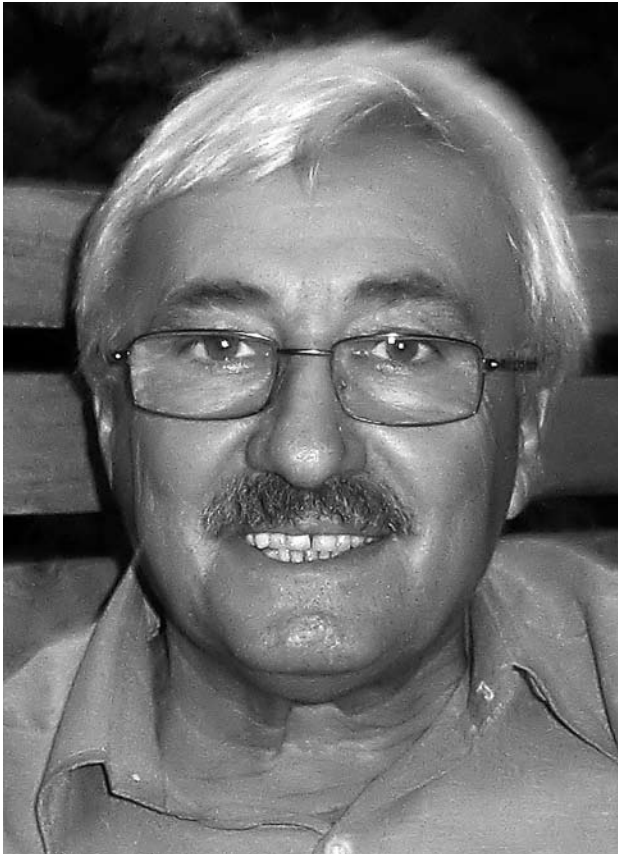
I discovered that, in the early nineteen sixties, the Mother had been training, helping, inspiring and supervising a young ashramite, Huta Hindocha, to paint pictures illustrating selected passages from Sri Aurobindo’s epic, supplying her with sketches made by her own hand and detailed instructions, and then closely supervising Huta’s artistic work.

472 paintings were created this way. Huta also recorded the Mother’s readings of the passages corresponding to the paintings,

and these recordings were later set to the Mother's own organ music, as well as to compositions by the Ashram musician Sunil Bhattacharya.

Some time later, Shraddhavan suggested to me the idea of creating a "power-point presentation" of these paintings, as a further step in the various opportunities offered by Savitri Bhavan for a closer approach to and understanding of *Savitri*.

My immediate reply was: "But with the current possibilities offered by computers, something better can be done, even a motion picture journey through the paintings, a visual re-visitation of them under the guidance of Mother's voice and music. A real movie can be created by a close-up journey across and 'inside' the paintings".



I had the technical skills and instruments for transforming these ideas into reality, in my mind a clear idea of what to do, and I was strongly inspired to at least give it a try.

Shraddhavan encouraged me by telling me that Huta was eager to get films made of the paintings, as this had been the Mother's wish.

The next step was to find photographic reproductions of the paintings. Photographs of them had been taken earlier, and were available as slides, but when I looked at these I was not satisfied with the colours and the low definition of the reproductions. If films were going to be made, the paintings would be shown on a large screen, revealing all their beauty, but also any shortcomings in the reproductions.

I was offered the opportunity to take a look directly at the originals which, a further enthusiastic discovery for me, were kept in Savitri Bhavan itself, having been offered by Huta to be kept there, with the intention that they would eventually be displayed in a planned but at that time yet to be built picture gallery.

With deep emotion I finally found myself holding one of these paintings in my hands, a few centimeters from my very eyes. I have no words to express my emotions at being so close to such meaningful works, charged with energy, with inspiration, with beauty. The colours were much more brilliant than in any photo-reproduction I had seen, transmitting something that made me feel blessed for simply having the chance to see them so closely.

No, the existing photos and slides could never transmit the effect of the real paintings: they belonged to the past of photography; nowadays new possibilities are offered by modern digital technology.

A friend of mine, Giorgio, a 'newcomer' to Auroville like myself, is a talented and experienced photographer. With Huta's permission I asked him to help in creating new digital photographs of all the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings. He enthusiastically accepted. We had special permission to install a temporary photo-studio inside the library of Savitri Bhavan, where the pictures were stored at that time, and we started taking technically-advanced digital photos of each of them.

Giorgio would sit on top of a structure with his camera, and I would lay each of the paintings on a desk below, exactly

perpendicular, at a well-determined distance from the camera, with spotlights arranged at the right angle to show even the brush strokes made by the artist.

It was a formidable experience which took weeks, and was a source of surprise for me as I discovered the paintings one by one in my hands.

Finally a full set of high-resolution digital photos was available, the colours perfectly corresponding to the originals, ready for me to use in my further “treatment”, but also for Giorgio to prepare original-size archival-quality prints, hardly distinguishable from the paintings themselves, which would later be exhibited in the specially built gallery in Savitri Bhavan.

My real work of film-making could finally start, but the problems and challenges were not over.

Firstly, the recordings of Mother’s readings of the *Savitri* passages, which were to form the soundtrack of the films, had been made in the sixties under difficult and technically poor conditions. I have been told that the recordings were made by Huta on the old type of tape recorder available in those days, and of course they had to be done without any acoustic isolation as they were made in Mother’s room itself.

Together with the Mother’s voice, all kinds of noises and sounds were recorded from the surroundings: taxi horns, shouts and street sounds from the outside, clocks ringing the hours in the room, loud chatting and working noises from nearby rooms, the sound of the big sheets of paper from which the Mother was reading dropping to the floor during use, etc.

Again, current digital technology can help a bit in reducing these disturbing noises as far as possible. This task was undertaken by other volunteers at Savitri Bhavan, making this more and more a collective work.

One by one I was furnished the “cleaned” recordings: now it was time for me to start synchronizing the readings and music with the paintings.

I found that one last but not least detail had to be solved: at an enlargement of 200-300% of the original, some almost invisible dark spots – microscopic humidity stains due to the effect of time and

tropical weather, also little flaws due to the handling of the paintings in and out of their individual shelves – were now showing quite clearly and would be disturbing when projected on a large cinema screen.

Once again the digital technology of computer programs such as Photoshop are of much help also in this case, and I started a patient, precise and passionate work on each one of the dark spots, with the special aim of making them disappear without affecting the overall painting and avoiding any interference with the work and the intentions of the artist.¹

After a very patient work of preparation, now finally all tools were in my hands for creating the movies.

As a first step the soundtrack with Mother’s reading and music must be set as background, its duration to be matched by the movements within the paintings.

A special effect in the program I am using allows me to decide and set the point in the picture and the enlargement I want to start with, the point and enlargement to end, and the duration of the movement. With several appropriate time-set movements I can cover the whole length of the background track with a visual journey through the picture. The transitions between the movements and between the successive paintings also have to be considered.

It is a work of precision, and at the same time of interpretation of the text and of creativity.

After carefully reading and listening to the text, I try to understand the meaning and feelings of the writer, and to apply them to the intentions of the painter. It is a work that brings me very close to the poem, and at the same time to the interpretation of the image that Mother, through Huta, wished to convey to the future “Meditators on Savitri”: a visual helping tool for a better and deeper understanding of the writings. Everybody, by hearing or reading the passage and watching closely the relevant painting, could fall into a meditative state and somehow get closer to Sri Aurobindo’s vision itself.

1 Manohar has not mentioned that he was instrumental in involving Dr. Laura Tacelli, Chief Conservator of Paintings for the province of Liguria in Italy. With her help a professional analysis was made of the spots, and instructions were given on how to prevent them developing further. The original paintings, cleaned, retouched and revarnished by Huta, are now stored under optimal conditions of constant temperature and humidity to prevent any further imperfections from developing.

I must admit that on several occasions, working so closely with these texts and paintings and Mother's voice and music, I have felt deeply inspired, discovering inner meanings and deeper images, enjoying the fullness of being completely immersed in this experience.

Of course the journey within each painting in creating the video is a personal approach, often flowing freely with my inspiration of the moment. Sometimes I can see very clearly the path I want to follow, sometimes it just comes like an "inspiration from above" and surprises me as it comes completely unexpectedly.

It has even happened that I have met with sudden technical difficulties with the computer: I would plan "orders" to be given to the program and then find it impossible to get them executed; I would be forced to stop and have to search for alternative ways of getting around the difficulty. Well, it seems to always happen "for a reason", as the effect in the end is better than the "planned" one!

In each DVD in addition to the film itself is also offered, in the spirit of individual "meditation", a separate gallery of the paintings, so that anybody can enjoy the fullness of the picture, for as long as they wish, to explore it personally and discover other details and other sources of inspiration.

Each film contained in each DVD has a duration ranging from 40 to 60 minutes. The total opus consists of 18 DVDs, presented in 3 boxes of 6 DVDs each². The inner sleeve pages contain the full texts of the passages as well as information for the best understanding and enjoyment of the user.

All the work, specially the graphic work of the sleeves and DVD containers, has been fully supervised by Huta with her particular care and precision.

At the moment of writing, I am about to present the first public screening of the 16th DVD, covering Book 10 of the poem, while the editing and mastering of the film of Book 11 has just been completed, and I am going to start work on the last DVD, Book 12.

² The first set of 6 DVDs, covering the five cantos of Book One, published by Havyavahana Trust was released in November 2010. The two further sets are expected to follow shortly.

Huta has been following my work closely, after coming in person to Savitri Bhavan in 2005 for a private screening of the first DVD, on which occasion I was so happy to hear her saying, “It is exactly the type of work that Mother wanted” !

During these years of work, she has been encouraging me with words, letters, small sweet presents, and above all with the inspiration coming from the autobiographical books which she has been writing and publishing.

I don’t have words for expressing the “bliss” and the gratitude I feel for getting so close to the masterpiece that is *Savitri* and to these works of art that have been inspired by it.

It has been a great fulfilment and enjoyment for me to somehow “continue the work” of such great Masters, their greatest gift to help me to understand and discover the great meanings and secrets still hidden in this great poem.

Very personally, the highlight of my week is the Sunday morning gathering of the Savitri Study Circle in Savitri Bhavan: the collective reading, exploring, understanding and commenting on the passages opens in me visions and deep insights: sometimes I feel myself and the group as a privileged gathering of souls in the Elysian Fields. In return for our “voluntary service”, Auroville offers us the outer and inner space for climbing as high as possible towards the vision of the universe which Sri Aurobindo has offered in his poetry.

Poetry in itself is for me the most immediate and intuitive way for penetrating secrets and insights otherwise invisible, closer to my sensitivity than any treatise of philosophy or any inspired talk.

From this point of view, the opportunity given to me by the making of the *Meditations on Savitri* films has been at the same time a tool for a better and more complete understanding and enjoyment, and a reward for somehow completing, in all modesty, a small detail of the huge work started by Sri Aurobindo, continued by Mother, by Huta and by all the people who have allowed me to have these tools available at the best possible level.

This multi-media realisation, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, is another opportunity offered to all for the eternal ascent of humanity towards knowledge and further evolution, and at the same time, a sign of the actuality and modernity of Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s vision – the vision that we are trying to pursue in our activities in Auroville.

I am deeply grateful for this.

‘Quartered on the Scaffold’

An allusion elucidated

We would like to draw our readers’ attention to *Śraddhā*, a journal launched in August 2009 by the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Kolkata. The February issue, which has just reached us, contains 13 interesting articles on *Savitri*; and we understand that the April issue will also be devoted to articles on Sri Aurobindo’s epic.

In an article by Professor Makarand R. Paranjape on Book Six, Canto Two, ‘The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain’ there is the explanation of an allusion by Sri Aurobindo which, so far as we know, has not been pointed out before.

It occurs in these lines :

He who has found his identity with God
Pays with the body’s death his soul’s vast light.
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.
Hewn, quartered on the scaffold as he falls,
His crucified voice proclaims, ‘I, I am God;’
‘Yes, all is God,’ peals back Heaven’s deathless call. (p. 445-46)

In *Invocation* 31 we published under the title ‘The Saviour’s Way’ a comment by Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) on the passage of which these lines form part. He was evidently unaware when he wrote it of their exact connotation, which is elucidated by Professor Paranjape as follows :

Narad ... talks about Christ here, *The Son of God born as the Son of man*, carrying his cross on Calvary, scorned and wounded. He also talks about Mansoor al Hallaj, who was the great Sufi mystic from Persia, crucified because he dared to say ‘I am the Truth.’ He offended the orthodox and was put to death at the orders of the Caliph, who was no doubt guided by the Ulema. He was quartered and cut into pieces in the public square of Baghdad; it is believed that every part of his dismembered body cried out its oneness with God.¹

We are grateful to Professor Paranjape and to Mr. Arup Basu, the Editor of *Śraddhā*, for sharing this insight.

¹ *Śraddhā*, Kolkata, Vol.2 no.3, Feb. 2011, p. 75

Recent Developments at Savitri Bhavan

Collaboration with Auroville Radio

Auroville Radio is a website where live and recorded materials originating in Auroville can be accessed and either listened to, or downloaded. In March 2010, when Narad gave the first Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture, with the title '*Savitri – The Way of Love*' we were able to arrange for the occasion to be broadcast live – the recording can still be accessed on the website's archive. All the 10 talks given by Georges van Vrekhem last October and November, four in the Town Hall and six at Savitri Bhavan were recorded and then posted on the website, where they are still available. From January 2010, the Radio team offered us a collaboration by which they gave us technical assistance so that talks given at Savitri Bhavan can be recorded in sufficiently good quality. As a result, our audio-visual team can prepare the recordings and supply the material to the Radio, who then post it on their site. The first recordings made available in this way were of five presentations given by Loretta Shartsis in January and February, in connection with her exhibition at Savitri Bhavan in February, on the theme 'Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – The Supramental Transformation'. These presentations focussed on recorded talks by the Mother in French, about different aspects of the Supramental realisation. Then came the second Dr. M.V. Nadkarni lecture on February 20, when Sonia Dyne spoke on *Savitri* as 'The Rainbow Bridge' – this talk, which will also be made available soon in booklet form, can be heard or downloaded from <http://www.aurovillerradio.org/spirituality/sri-aurobindo/2092-the-rainbow-bridge>. A DVD is also in preparation. Other Savitri Bhavan materials now available in this way include the talk by Richard Hartz which appears in this issue, 'The Eternal Yes – *Savitri* as the epic of affirmation', and two earlier presentations by Shraddhavan : 'The Silent Self – Sri Aurobindo's first major spiritual experience' given in January 2008 and 'The Cosmic Spirit – Sri Aurobindo's second major spiritual

experience' from May 2009. Readings from *The Life Divine* and *Savitri* have also been posted.

Listening Space

This collaboration with the Auroville Radio complements another development which has come up in the Savitri Bhavan Reading Room over recent months. There, recordings of most of the guest lectures that have been given at Savitri Bhavan since the earliest days can now be accessed in a quiet 'Listening Space', either on our own equipment, or on your own laptop. A list of the recordings that are available there can be found on our webpage http://www.auroville.org/education/edu_centres/savitribhavan_main.htm in the 'Learning Materials' section.

Webpage Update

Savitri Bhavan has had a webpage on the Auroville website since 2006, where details of our current programmes could be access. In the summer months of 2010, with the help of new members of our team, a lot of work was done to bring the webpage up to date, and a new 'Photo Gallery' section has been added. The 'Architecture' section has yet to be brought up to date, but work is on-going for that. We invite our readers to take a look.

The Mother's Flower Significances

The garden at Savitri Bhavan was started even before the buildings began to come up. Aurovilians Lakshminarayan and later Soham started planting flowering trees, bushes and shrubs, bearing in mind the significances given to them by the Mother. In August 2010, at our annual staff gathering, the whole Savitri Bhavan team made a tour of the garden and listed as many of the significant names as we could identify – more than 120. Our friend Franz, a founder member of Savitri Bhavan, designed and had made some sturdy labels to identify the plants, showing for each one the Mother's significance, her message, and the botanical name. With the change in seasons we have identified many more significances in our garden, and new labels will go on being added. The aim is to enhance awareness of the beautiful messages which the plants are conveying to us silently by their beauty and colour. The Mother's yoga of flowers is a unique contribution to spirituality, and in this way we hope to help make it more accessible to all who enter the Savitri Bhavan garden.

The work of identifying and labelling the plants in the garden was complemented by an exhibition of beautiful flower photographs gifted by our brother Narad, and held in December 2010. The photographs were offered for sale in various sizes, and the proceeds dedicated to development of the Savitri Park which should surround the buildings of our complex. Another exhibition of Narad's flower photographs with their spiritual significances as given by the Mother is planned to take place throughout August 2011.

In addition, Franz has designed and published a boxed set of flowers and their messages under the title 'The Mother's Flower Blessings'. This is available at Savitri Bhavan, or from Prisma, Auroville. Proceeds will go towards the project of labelling plants all over Auroville with the Mother's significances.

Hostel

The first brick for the Savitri Bhavan hostel was laid at a dawn ceremony on March 29, 2010. One year later, the raw structure is now complete, and finishing works are about to start. The initial donation which allowed us to make a start has been spent – now we look to our well-wishers for further support to enable us to make the Hostel fully functional by April 2012. This means finding means first to complete all the carpentry work, plumbing, electrical fittings, bathrooms, etc. and then for equipping the rooms, kitchen and dining area, laundry and utility room, receptionist's office and so on. Two small enclosed gardens are also planned to be integrated into the building. For supporting this project, and future developments, we would like to request our well-wishers not only to send your offerings in support of the Mother's work at Savitri Bhavan, but also to remember us if making a will – a bequest in favour of Savitri Bhavan could help considerably in carrying the work forward.

Sri Aurobindo's Statue

It is now three years since Sri Aurobindo's statue was installed in front of Savitri Bhavan – a gift of the Auroville Foundation to Auroville, an inspiration of Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation.

For visitors and Aurovilians alike it is an impressive and inspiring sight, and people like to come and sit on the benches in front of it in the garden, to absorb the special atmosphere there. Especially in the

late afternoon, when the rays of the sun sinking in the western sky fall directly on the majestic figure, many experience it as a tangible blessing.

But we have also received some expressions of anxiety – some people feel that the statue is too exposed, and should be sheltered by a pavilion or canopy. Others are worried about its rough appearance



A recent photo of the statue, showing the developing patina

and feel that it is not being cared-for properly. We know that these feelings are inspired by reverence and genuine concern, so we would like to make things clear.

The statue has been cast in bronze, like many monumental statues around the world which have weathered over decades and even centuries under the open sky. With time, the metal develops a beautiful surface, called a 'patina'. This happens by a natural chemical process. We have taken advice from a number of experts, including the maker of the statue. All confirm that no artificial polishing should be done. Regular removal of dust with water and drying with a soft cloth is all that is required, they assure us. The use of any kind of cleanser or polish will inhibit the formation of the patina, which develops over a period of ten years or more. This is how the statue is being cared for, and we look forward to the patina maturing gradually over the years to come. Another feature of this statue is that it has been cast in six pieces, which were then joined by the craftsmen who made it. There is a certain roughness at the joins, and there some white marks have developed. At first we tried to treat these marks with coloured wax – but now we find that this was a mistake. The bronze must be left to mature in its own way, in reaction with the wind and rain and sun, to reach its full beauty.

Also the statue has been designed to stand under the open sky. It seems that the Mother was asked about this question in connection with another statue of Sri Aurobindo. She, with her great knowledge of art and understanding of beauty, advised that if the statue was to be kept indoors, it could be seated, but if standing – outdoors. A sense of the appropriateness of this, and the position chosen by Dr. Karan Singh for the statue, make us unwilling to complicate its setting by adding any covering or canopy.

The statue, like Sri Aurobindo himself, is strong enough to stand alone. We think of these lines from *Savitri* which seem to characterise the Master himself:

Immeasurable by the common look,
He made great dreams a mould for coming things
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's.

p. 44-45

Calendar of Special Events

November 2010 to March 2011

November:

- 8 2 films on the Mother : *Glimpses of Her Life* and *Four Aspects of the Mother*
- 13 *2012 and 1956* – the first of a series of 6 talks by Georges van Vrekhem on Sri Aurobindo’s vision in relation to issues of contemporary interest.
- 15 *Meditations on Savitri: Book 10* – film of Huta’s paintings prepared by Manohar.
- 17 Anniversary of the Mother’s passing – the Mother’s chair was displayed in the Hall for concentration from 9am to 6pm. At 7pm a film was shown : *The Mother – Darshan Photos*, prepared by Tatiana from photos by Sudha Sundaram.



The Mother’s Chair on November 17, 2010

- 18 *Bridges across the Afterlife* – the 2nd talk of the series by Georges van Vrekhem
- 21 Full Moon Gathering in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue – a message of the Mother with her organ music, reading from *Savitri*, singing of Sri Aurobindo’s mantra, silent concentration and Sunil-da’s music.

- 24 *Introduction to Savitri, Part 2* - Talk in Tamil by Buvanasundari.
27 *Being Human and the Copernican Principle* – the 3rd talk by Georges

A new activity was started this month : *Savitri reading*, 4-5pm on Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

December

Two exhibitions :

- 1–31 *Flowers with their Spiritual Significances* – photographs by Narad.
3–10 *The Mystery of Sri Aurobindo's Passing* – photographs and documentation
4 *Sri Aurobindo's Descent into Death* – the 4th talk by Georges van Vrekhem
6 Film – *The Mother on Sri Aurobindo*
9 *Sri Aurobindo and the Big Bang* – the 5th talk by Georges
11 *Theodicy : 'Nature makes no mistakes'* – the 6th and last talk in the series by Georges van Vrekhem



Georges van Vrekhem

- 20 Film – *Sri Aurobindo : A Life Divine*
21 Full Moon Gathering

January

Exhibitions :

In the Picture Gallery, *Meditations on Savitri, Books 7, 8, 9, 10* – paintings by Huta.

- In the corridor, *Colourful Silence* – paintings by Auroville artists Nathalie and Grazi
- 13 *Introduction to Savitri, Part 3* – talk in Tamil by Bhuvana
 - 16 *The Debate of Love and Death* – Jhumur Bhattacharya of the Ashram spoke on Book Ten, Canto Three.
 - 20 *The Supramental Ship* – the first of a series of five presentations by Loretta on the Mother's talks about the Supramental Transformation.
 - 17 *Meditations on Savitri : Book Eleven 'The Book of Everlasting Day'* – film by Manohar of Huta's paintings.
 - 19 Full Moon Gathering
 - 24 Film : *Journey to the Life Divine, Part One* The first part of this new film created in the Ashram covers the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from childhood up to November 24, 1926
 - 27 *The Psychic Being Materializes Into The Supramental Being* – 2nd talk by Loretta
 - 31 Film : *Journey to the Life Divine, Part Two*, covering the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from November 1926 to the present day.

February

- 3 *The Certainty of Completion* – 3rd talk by Loretta
- 10 *The Work is done for us* – 4th talk by Loretta
- 14 *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – The Supramental Transformation*, opening of an exhibition of photos and texts compiled by Loretta.
- 17 *The Way Things Will Be* – 5th talk by Loretta



'The Supramental Transformation' exhibition organised by Loretta

Full Moon Gathering

- 19 Film : *Meditations on Savitri – Book Twelve, ‘Epilogue’* – the latest and last film by Manohar of Huta’s Savitri paintings
- 20 *The Rainbow Bridge* – the second Dr.M.V Nadkarni Memorial Lecture was given by Mrs. Sonia Dyne
- 21 Film : *The One we Adore as the Mother* – a presentation on the Mother’s life prepared by the Sri Aurobindo Archives in 2010.
- 24 *The Symbol Dawn* – the 4th talk in Tamil on *Savitri* by Bhuvana
- 26 Solo violin recital by Ladislav Brozman



‘The Rainbow Bridge’ – Sonia Dyne giving the 2nd Dr. M.V. Nadkarni lecture on February 20, 2011-03-21

March

- 7 Film : *Meditations on Savitri, The Symbol Dawn*
- 10 Opening of exhibition *Images of Savitri* – installations by Sundandaben Poddar and paintings on stone by Emanuele (to April 2)
- 12 *Science and Spirituality* – presentation by Dr. Vibha Vaishnav, Research Scholar with Sri Aurobindo’s Action
- 17 *Introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri in Tamil* – Talk No.5 by Bhuvana
- 19 *The Eternal Yes – Savitri, the Epic of Affirmation*, talk by Richard Hartz
Full Moon Gathering, with ‘*Songs from Savitri*’ composed and played by Hans Vas, Dutch *Savitri* translator
- 28 Film : *Journey to the Life Divine (Part One)*

‘Images of Savitri’

This unusual exhibition was held in March 2010. It consisted of works by two very different artists. Mrs. Sunanda Poddar of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has kindly donated to us 5 beautiful installations she has created to illustrate ‘Scenes from *Savitri*’ :



‘*The Destined Meeting Place*’
(*Book Five – The Book of Love*)

Aurovilian artist Emanuele had earlier offered to us four remarkable paintings, illustrating scenes from *Savitri*, which he had prepared on stone. These were exhibited alongside other more recent works of his, some on stone, others created with mixed media.



‘*The Poet and his Muse*’

The Dream of Savitri Bhavan

We dream of an environment in Auroville

that will breathe the atmosphere of Savitri

that will welcome Savitri lovers from every corner
of the world

that will be an inspiring centre of Savitri studies

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

that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that
has come from the Sun

We welcome support from everyone who feels that
the vibration of Savitri will help to manifest a better
tomorrow.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF SAVITRI BHAVAN

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

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

Cheques and DDs should be payable to **Auroville Unity Fund (SAIER)** and sent to the address given below

If you have an Auroville Financial Service account, you can transfer an offering to account no. 240001, mentioning "Savitri Bhavan" as the purpose.

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

If you live in India

If you would like to send your offering through Internet Banking or direct transfer, it should be sent to **State Bank of India : Branch code No. 03160 : Account No. 10237876031**. If you do send an offering in this way, please inform us at the time of sending, so that we can check up with the bank and acknowledge receipt as soon as possible.

If you live Abroad

To send your offering by SWIFT Transfer, please use the following code :

SWIFT Code : SBININBB474
State Bank of India, Branch Code 03160
Auroville International Township Branch
Kuilapalayam Auroville 605101 INDIA
Auroville Unity Fund Foreign Account no. 10237876508
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Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother