



## The everlasting Yes: Savitri, the epic of affirmation

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by Richard Hartz

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 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."<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, deeply influenced by Schopenhauer though he rejected his asceticism, saw tragedy as pointing "to the eternity of true being

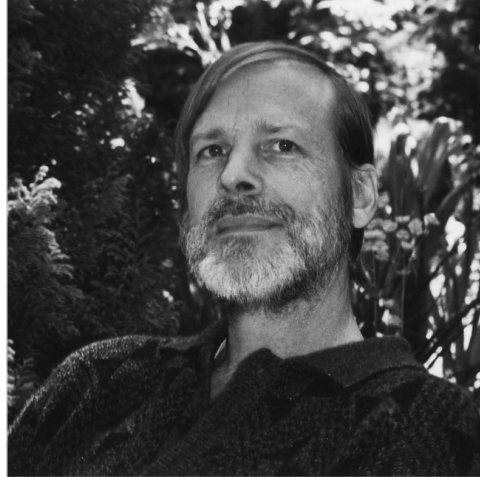


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surviving every phenomenal change"<sup>2</sup> and as "tending toward the shattering of the individual and his fusion with the original Oneness."<sup>3</sup> Keenly aware of the "tragedy at the heart of things, . . . the contrariety at the center of the universe,"<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> Greek and Indian aesthetics, Vedantic philosophy 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.<sup>7</sup>

### Tragic fate in *Iliad* and *Savitri*

When this passage in *The Future Poetry* was published in 1920, Sri Aurobindo had been working for a number of years on the two epics, *Iliad* 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 *Iliad* is overcome in *Savitri*.

In *Iliad*, 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. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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?<sup>11</sup>

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”<sup>12</sup> 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 unwearied calm large god-  
like lids  
Silent beheld the writhing that is life.  
The two opposed each other with  
their eyes,  
Woman and universal god.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

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”<sup>15</sup>—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.<sup>16</sup>

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 incomprehen-  
sible scene. . . .<sup>17</sup>

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. . . .<sup>18</sup>

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 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 driv-  
ing wheels:  
Its giant workings paused in front of  
a mind,  
Its stark conventions met the flame of  
a soul.<sup>19</sup>



## 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 vast  
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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

## 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 im-  
mortal spirit. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

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."<sup>23</sup>

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;

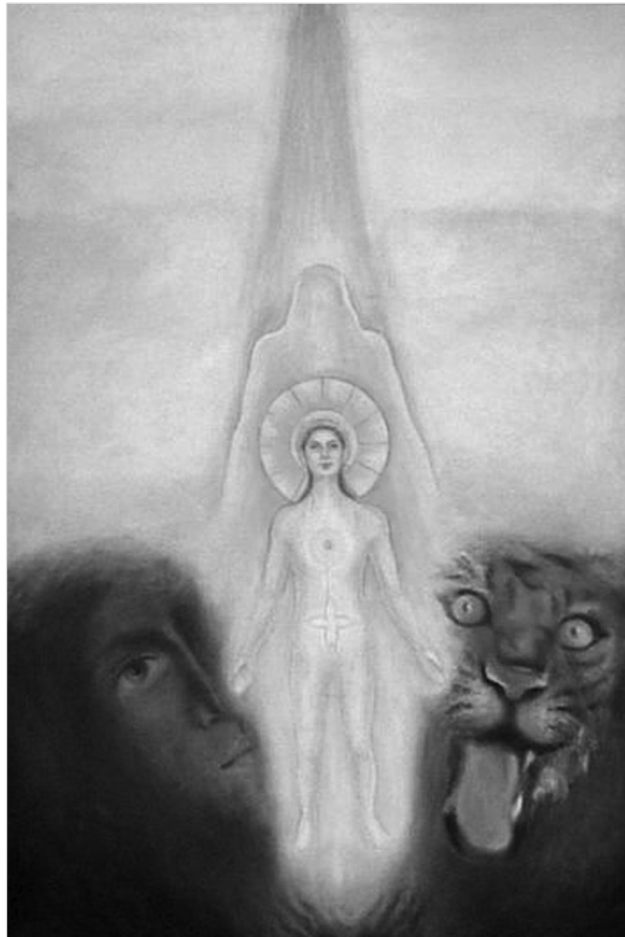


He shall remake thy universe,  
O Death.<sup>24</sup>

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



"Descent of the Truth-Consciousness." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

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."<sup>25</sup> 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 affir-

mations 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."<sup>26</sup> 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 Brahman 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 Brahmadrishi as the continent of all the conscious activity.<sup>27</sup>

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 mechanic'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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

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 of the second group of affirmations."<sup>30</sup> The last item in this group affirms the acceptance of all experience as "a slave & instrument of the Lover."<sup>31</sup> 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 unbridged  
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.<sup>32</sup>

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:

Siddhi must be on the basis of the largeness in the five worlds & not a selective & limited siddhi.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup>

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 grow-  
ing fate  
And her return to immortality. . . .<sup>35</sup>

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 determina-  
tive, but only an instrumental factor  
in the siddhi. So also with Space &  
Circumstance.<sup>36</sup>

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 estab-  
lished order and letting time take its me-  
andering 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 un-  
known should sink  
Dragged like a ship by bound levia-  
than  
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 incar-  
nations 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.<sup>37</sup>

### 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 Affirma-  
tions)."<sup>38</sup> 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 rejection & denial."<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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. . . .<sup>41</sup>

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. . . .<sup>42</sup>

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 Im-  
mune,  
One who is in us as our secret self,  
Our mask of imperfection has as-  
sumed,  
He has made this tenement of flesh  
his own,  
His image in the human measure cast  
That to his divine measure we might  
rise. . . .<sup>43</sup>

### 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.<sup>44</sup>

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.<sup>45</sup>

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.”<sup>46</sup>

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.”<sup>47</sup> 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. <sup>48</sup>

Immutable, Death’s denial met her  
cry . . . <sup>49</sup>

A great Negation was the Real’s face  
Prohibiting the vain process of  
Time. . . . <sup>50</sup>

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. <sup>51</sup>

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.”<sup>52</sup> 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.”<sup>53</sup> 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. . . . <sup>54</sup>

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. . . . <sup>55</sup>

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. . . . <sup>56</sup>

### 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. . . . <sup>57</sup>

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. <sup>58</sup>

“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. . . . <sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> 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 ab-



normal, 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.<sup>61</sup>

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 *Iliad*. 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 Circum-  
stance,  
Pressed back the senseless dire revol-  
ving Wheel  
And stopped the mute march of  
Necessity.<sup>62</sup>

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."<sup>63</sup>

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. . . .<sup>64</sup>

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."<sup>65</sup> 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. . . .<sup>66</sup>

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."<sup>67</sup> 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 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."<sup>68</sup>

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."<sup>69</sup> 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 im-  
mortal 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.”<sup>70</sup>

## Notes

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 433–34.
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.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry, with On Quantitative Metre* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 259
7. Ibid., p. 262. First published in *Arya: A Philosophical Review*, vol. 6, no. 8 (March 1920), pp. 506–7.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2009), p. 397.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005), p. 997.
10. Ibid., p. 258. First published in *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), pp. 6–7.
11. *Collected Poems*, p. 513.
12. Ibid., p. 515.
13. “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: A Legend and a Symbol* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1993), p. 574.
14. *Savitri*, pp. 586–87.
15. Ibid., pp. 574–75.
16. Ibid., p. 593.
17. Ibid., p. 617.
18. Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship”, [http://www.skeptic.ca/Bertrand\\_Russell\\_Collection.pdf](http://www.skeptic.ca/Bertrand_Russell_Collection.pdf).
19. *Savitri*, p. 20.
20. Ibid., pp. 593–94. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 696.
21. *Savitri*, p. 635.
22. Ibid., p. 588.
23. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957–1958* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), pp. 33–36.
24. *Savitri*, pp. 591–92. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 695.
25. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 485.
26. Ibid., p. 880.
27. Ibid., p. 484.
28. *The Life Divine*, pp. 109–11. 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)
29. *Savitri*, pp. 613–14. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 699.
30. *Record of Yoga*, pp. 535–36.
31. Ibid., p. 485.
32. *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 2 (February 1982), pp. 82–83. Cf. *Savitri*, pp. 700–702.
33. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
34. Ibid., p. 766.
35. *Savitri*, pp. 99–100.
36. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
37. *Savitri*, pp. 650–52. Cf. *Mother India*, vol. 34, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 5–6.
38. *Record of Yoga*, p. 504.
39. Ibid., p. 484.
40. *The Life Divine*, p. 38.
41. Ibid., p. 4. First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1914), p. 2.
42. *The Life Divine*, pp. 661–62. 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.”
43. *Savitri*, p. 67.
44. *The Life Divine*, p. 46.
45. Ibid., pp. 223–25.
46. *Record of Yoga*, p. 765.
47. *Savitri*, p. 574.
48. Ibid., p. 643.
49. Ibid., p. 654.
50. Ibid., p. 600.
51. Ibid., p. 583.
52. *The Life Divine*, p. 53.
53. Ibid., p. 663.
54. Ibid., p. 493.
55. *Savitri*, p. 547.
56. Ibid., p. 310.
57. Ibid., p. 549.
58. Ibid., p. 313.
59. Ibid., p. 185.
60. *The Life Divine*, pp. 224–25.
61. Ibid., pp. 813–14.
62. *Savitri*, p. 21.
63. *Record of Yoga*, p. 488.
64. *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 9. First published in *Arya*, vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1916), p. 30.
65. *The Secret of the Veda, with Selected Hymns* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), p. 270.
66. Ibid., p. 271. First published in *Arya*, vol. 1, no. 2 (September 1914), p. 34.
67. *The Future Poetry*, p. 240.
68. Ibid., p. 313.
69. *The Life Divine*, p. 165.
70. *Savitri*, p. 634.



## Vision of the future: supramental transformation

by Kalpana Bidwaikar

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**T**he seer-vision of Sri Aurobindo comprehends that “Man is a transitional being; he is not final, for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood. The step from man towards superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth’s evolution.”<sup>1</sup> The terrestrial manifestation is progressive and evolutionary and the present condition of man with its heavy load of miseries of pain and suffering cannot be the last act of manifestation. Sri Aurobindo points out in *Savitri*,

Since God has made earth, earth must  
make in her God;  
What hides within her breast she  
must reveal. (p. 693)

This world is a creation of God and must reveal the god himself. The spiritual transformation turns the mental man wholly to the consciousness of a spiritual being but even this is the middle step. The consciousness is joyously freed, uplifted and illumined through the spiritual transformation of the being. After this transformation one is united with the Cosmic Divine; and enjoys a universal Peace, Light, Power, and Bliss but even all these cannot entirely transform and conquer the ignorant nature. The Spirit is free but the nature remains in bondage and is full of imperfections. The cosmic consciousness is able to liberate but does not have the dynamic power which will bring down the highest knowledge to change the outer actions of life. The inner being is full of higher Knowledge and Power and Bliss after this change, but the outer being is not



(Photo courtesy Kalpana Bidwaikar)

adequately able to express it in its external activities. This can be made possible only after a further ascent towards the Supermind and its descent bringing about the supreme perfection. At that level of consciousness, one attains a true identity with God and fully possesses the spirit and its power in the outer person and nature for a perfect living in the Divine. In order to achieve this perfect perfection one has to ascend into the gnostic (truth-consciousness) plane and bring down its greatness and glory into the terrestrial life for its supreme fulfillment. Sri Aurobindo says, “As the psychic change has to call in the spiritual to complete it, so the first spiritual change has to call in the supramental transformation to complete it.”<sup>2</sup> This is his famous triple transformation about which he has also written in *Savitri*,

But first the spirit’s ascent we must  
achieve  
Out of the chasm from which our  
nature rose.  
The soul must soar sovereign above  
the form  
And climb to summits beyond mind’s  
half-sleep;  
Our hearts we must inform with  
heavenly strength,  
Surprise the animal with the occult  
god.  
Then kindling the gold tongue of  
sacrifice,  
Calling the powers of a bright hemi-  
sphere,

We shall shed the discredit of our  
mortal state,  
Make the abyss a road for Heaven’s  
descent,  
Acquaint our depths with the super-  
nal Ray  
And cleave the darkness with the  
mystic Fire. (p. 171)

But what is the supramental transformation? Sri Aurobindo says, “the supramental transformation [is that] in which all becomes supramentalized in the divine gnostic consciousness. It is only with the last that there can begin the complete transformation of mind, life and body—in my sense of completeness.”<sup>3</sup> Supramental connotes the Truth-Consciousness and this transformation means that the entire being, the inner and even the most outer being receives the descent of the Supermind and there is no place for inconscience or obscurity or falsehood in any part of the being. However, for the descent of the Supermind one has to ascend towards the higher planes.

The Supermind is the dynamic principle and infinite Wisdom and of the Supreme Sachchidananda through which the creation came into being. The Supermind is a perfect “Truth-Consciousness” that is in possession of the integral knowledge of both Self and the world. Here the seeming opposites of matter and Self, finite and infinite, the One and the Many appear as different aspects of the same reality. The truth of the Divine is no more hidden in manifestation but realized as an expression of the One and the Infinite in his many forms. The Supermind has a complete and indivisible knowledge which is not affected by the principle of division of the lower mental planes.

Sri Aurobindo through his yogic realizations found that the mind cannot ascend directly to the Supramental consciousness. This change would be too vast for man to bear, and he “cannot by his own effort make himself more than man; the mental being cannot by his own unaided force change himself into a supramental spirit. A descent of the Divine Nature can alone divinize the human receptacle.”<sup>4</sup>



Overmind is an intermediary level of consciousness for the spiritual seeker when one moves from mind to Supermind. The spiritual transformation achieves the universalization of human consciousness and widens and illumines the human nature. However, the union and communion with the Cosmic Divine at the level of Overmind consciousness cannot transform the whole human nature into the supernatural. The human mind may consider the achievement of the spiritual transformation to be exceptionally high and rare, but it is inadequate to the fulfillment of the ideal that Sri Aurobindo has placed before us. He says, "A Divine life in a divine body is the formula of the ideal that we envisage."<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo discovered that there is an omniscient power which he calls the Supermind and which he wanted to bring down onto earth as it alone could bring a decisive change in the evolution of the earth consciousness. He says,

*In order to approach, realize and attain the supramental, man must first consent to be spiritualized. He must have a true attitude, a psychic realization, open only to the Divine...*

I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness; I see it above and know what it is—I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution.<sup>6</sup>

The Supermind while transforming and divinizing the lower principles of mind, life and body effectuate their perfect integration with one another. The different parts of our being which govern the will and action, knowledge, thinking being, life attain their perfect harmony in the gnostic plane. The action of the Supermind helps the soul to realize the divine bliss, the mind regain its divine light, the life

its divine power and the body possess its divine essence and liberty. All the parts of the being undergo a change which is powerfully expressed. The psychic expresses its originality of true and pure love. The mind no more dwells in ignorance but becomes luminous with the Supreme Light. The life also attains a larger significance and becomes vast, calm, intense, powerful and sheds its old narrow self of petty impulse and desire. The body no longer adheres to its animality and tamasic nature and becomes a conscious and a willing servant of the Spirit. When one ascends into the Supermind one is raised in consciousness of the divine gnosis and the descent of Light and Truth brings about a divine integration and perfection of the dynamic nature. The power of the Supermind is described in Savitri thus,

An Immeasurable cast into many forms,  
A miracle of the multitudinous One,  
There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,  
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.  
It has no home on earth, no centre in man,  
Yet is the source of all things thought and done,  
The fount of the creation and its works, (p. 705)

The one essential condition of the ascent to the Supermind is the emergence of the psychic or the inner being. There should be the psychic development and the change of nature first, because then, it will be safe for one to receive the descent of the higher consciousness and the spiritual transformation without which the supramental realization would not be possible. It is of utmost importance that

the consciousness should shift its position from the outer to the inner self and all the actions should be guided from the inner self and its will and action. The psychic should take over the mental being and exercise its full control over the nature. This control of the psychic over the inner and outer being should increase with a conscious participation in the action of the Universal Nature. "The individual purusha would become the master of his executive energy and at the same time a conscious partner, agent, instrument of the Cosmic Spirit in the working of the universal Energy."<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo says that one cannot overleap any of the intermediary stages to reach the supramental. All the planes of consciousness have to be attained. The Overmind descent is indispensable for bringing about the supramental change. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo was aware of the difficulty to bridge the gap between earth and heaven,

How shall earth-nature and man's nature rise  
To the celestial levels, yet earth abide?  
Heaven and earth towards each other gaze  
Across a gulf that few can cross, none touch, (p. 689)

In order to approach, realize and attain the supramental, man must first consent to be spiritualized. He must have a true attitude, a psychic realization, open only to the Divine and his whole being should live only in the Divine. He should be open to the Intuition and the Overmind so that his whole nature is ready for the supramental change. But how many are ready to give up the human nature that is grounded in the Inconscient base? Sri Aurobindo explains how man likes to cling to his human type,

Human I am, human let me remain  
Till in the Inconscient I fall dumb and sleep. (p. 520)



Man does not consent to be changed as he is contented to live in ignorance although his inner being strives for the glory of the heaven. He is so caught up by the activities of the outer mind, life and body that he does not pay any attention to the call of his soul and keeps on ignoring it.

Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart  
that heeds;  
The doors of light are sealed to common mind  
And earth's needs nail to earth the  
human mass,  
Only in an uplifting hour of stress  
Men answer to the touch of greater  
things: (p. 689)

When there is a call from the higher regions the human nature acts as a resistance that impedes the action of transformation. The human nature refuses to offer itself for the change. "Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, man has to resolve this difficulty of his and give his consent to rise to the higher levels of consciousness for his betterment. The mind of man works as an instrument of the soul to drive it out of ignorance. In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo says,

Mind the thought-driven chariot of  
the soul  
Carrying the luminous wanderer in  
the night  
To vistas of a far uncertain dawn,  
To the end of the Spirit's fathomless  
desire,  
To its dream of absolute truth and  
utter bliss. (p. 704)

The actual role of the mind is to show man the road towards divinity. Due to this influence of the mind there is a hidden urge, an aspiration in man which is a sure sign of conscious evolution and there is a natural inner will for a higher way towards its fulfillment. This is why it is so important that he should shift his consciousness

from the outer to the inner and prepare himself for the higher consciousness.

When man proceeds towards a further evolution from Nature to Supernature he will feel the working of the Divine Shakti more and more in himself. As a result, the being would emerge and put on a Divine nature; at the same time the higher nature would emerge in and descend into the being. The psychic would then be conscious of its work and become an instrument participating in the transformation of the nature, while as a person he would be one with his universal and supreme Self. This opening of the psychic being and its participation in the higher transformation is indispensable for the transition from Nature to Supernature.

One should not rest content with the spiritual realization but aspire to ascend further towards the higher levels of consciousness because,

There is a fire on the apex of the  
worlds,  
There is a house of the Eternal's light,  
There is an infinite truth, an absolute  
power.  
The Spirit's mightiness shall cast off  
its mask;  
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the  
world's course: (p. 704)

Mind is not the summit of man's consciousness. It is not able to grasp the infinite Truth and the absolute Power. And hence, he has to ascend from the spiritualized mind to the Supermind by rising through a series of ranges or planes of consciousness. He rises through the four main degrees of consciousness, namely the higher mind, illumined mind, Intuition and the Overmind, each with its own intrinsic light and power.

The Overmind is the last in the gradation. It is more original and dynamic than the lower planes. One opens here to the cosmic consciousness and becomes aware of the play of the cosmic forces. When the Overmind descends, the ego is abolished and is replaced by a cosmic perception and a feeling of boundless universal Self. The thoughts, feelings, actions and sensa-

tions do not seem to originate in the body, but are felt as the waves from the vast cosmic existence. As the ego dissolves, one is not limited to the individual person and is free from separative thoughts and feelings that create conflict. A divine harmony and an infinite oneness pervades in the being. There is a feeling of an overpowering peace, silence, joy and bliss that is beyond expression, as well as a sense of immortality and eternity.

The knowledge of the Overmind is an inner experience that can bring liberation but cannot achieve the transformation of nature. As one ascends the higher planes one finally discovers the vastness of the truth in the realm of the Supermind.

Ascending out of the limiting  
breadths of mind,  
They shall discover the worlds huge  
design  
And step into the Truth, the Right,  
the Vast. (p. 704)

Sri Aurobindo promises that the level of the Overmind also will be transcended; this is his affirmation for the future. In order to enter the realm of the Supermind, the inner knowledge is not sufficient because the Supermind works on the principles of both Knowledge and Will for dynamic change and perfection. In the long ascent to Supermind, the truths of the Intuition and the Overmind must be allowed to rule the active life and they should take hold of our relations with the outward world. The external life and activities must be fully governed by the power of the consciousness of these higher planes. The Overmind change is the penultimate stage in the dynamic spiritual transformation. It heightens the workings of the previous grades and also adds to them a wideness of consciousness and force and a greater harmony of knowledge and a delight of being. However, the Overmind does not have the supreme unity and the harmony of knowledge of the Supermind. It cannot rise altogether beyond the ignorance which is the result of the separation of mind, life and matter from the Supreme origin. Secondly, the Overmind



descent cannot wholly transform the inconscience. The original darkness of the inconscient and the subconscious levels would still remain and would invade and even expel the newly evolved light and truth from its very kingdom. A last transition from the Overmind to the Supermind is therefore indispensable for an integral transformation.

The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,  
Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,  
The Immense that calls to man to expand the Spirit,  
The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,  
A channel for the little he tastes of bliss. (p. 705)

The Supermind is the divine gnosis that is the all-seeing and all-powerful wisdom and will of the Divine. It is the infinite and eternal Knowledge-Will of the divine Consciousness-Force. It is the Power and Light of the divine Will and the divine Consciousness. The Supermind is the realm of all knowledge; it has the complete, perfect and infallible truth of the Self and the world, about all actions, things and persons. As Sri Aurobindo says, "Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops."<sup>9</sup> Supermind is the very truth-consciousness which is absolutely free from the ignorance and it is also the foundation of the present evolutionary existence. Its knowledge is a spiritual identity with the truth, with the object of knowledge. The object seen here is not something outside the Self but is contained in its consciousness.

Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought  
A high proximity to Truth and God.  
(p. 707)

The integral Truth is seen in the Self and by the Self and therefore it is self-



"Aspiration-Answer." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)

evident, faultless and absolute. The knowledge contains spiritual sight that is able to see the invisible truth of all things and even the force behind them. The gnosis thus discloses all the truths of the same reality and also the phenomenon by a direct contact and vision. The experience of the Supermind is therefore a positive, direct and a living experience of the Supreme Infinite, the Brahman which is the culmination of divine knowledge and the source of all divine delight and all divine living.

The Supermind not only has the full consciousness of the truth but also a will and a force that can make the consciousness effective. The supramental will is 'a conscious force of the eternal knowledge' that acts and creates as well as knows. It has the power and vision to create and execute all things faultlessly. The will of the

mental mind is often involved in the conflict with the ideal of right or the intellectual knowledge. The mind is aware of what is good and right but it is often found to lack power to make it effective in active life. There may be an incapacity to work out in living form and action the ideal that inspires the mind or the truth that one feels in his consciousness. In the lower creation the will of the individual is not always in harmony with the Universal Will. It often deviates and asserts itself against the Universal Will, but in the supramental plane the will is in complete harmony with the Universal Will.

The supramental change is the ultimate stage in the process of spiritual transformation. The lower planes of consciousness have an inferior power and hence are unable to bring about a radical change in the human consciousness. The power of these higher planes decrease on descending due to the obscurity of the lower nature. The Supermind is the omnipotent power of the divine which alone can act with full power in the obscure physical plane. And Sri Aurobindo declares in *Savitri* that,

The supermind shall claim the world for Light  
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart  
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head  
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base. (p. 707)

It is the supramental power that can deal effectively with the unyielding subconscious parts of the human nature. And there is no other power which can penetrate and transform the inconscience that is the base of our existence. The Supermind alone can dispel the ingrained ignorance and bring the higher light down in these nether regions. The Supermind on descending into the adhar would take direct control of the evolving nature. On



account of the descent of the Supermind the process of transformation of the human nature would be accelerated. This would result in a transition from the nature of ignorance to the luminous Supernature of the Divine. As a result of the gnostic change, there will be a complete reversal of the human consciousness. A new being will arrive as a result of this change.

There is a being beyond the being of mind, (p. 705)

But Sri Aurobindo clarifies that the supramental descent will not be experienced by all but will only be received by those who are ready for it. He says,

It is not . . . that all humanity would rise in a block into the supermind; at first those only might attain to the highest or some intermediate height of the ascent whose inner evolution has fitted them for so great a change or who are raised by the direct touch of the Divine into its perfect light and power and bliss.<sup>10</sup>

It is vain to think that even while clinging to ignorance the common man with his ordinary consciousness will also experience the supramental descent. In order to receive this descent it is indispensable to rise to the highest summits of one's consciousness and reject the demands and desires of the lower nature. The one who has undergone this evolution of consciousness will only be able to bring about the supramental descent. The seer-poet says in *Savitri*,

Some shall be made the glory's  
receptacles  
And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.  
These are the high forerunners, the  
heads of Time,  
The great deliverers of earth-bound  
mind,  
The high transfigurers of human clay,  
The first-born of a new supernal race.  
(p. 705)

Only those who have prepared themselves for the descent shall be able to receive it and they will be the forerunners who will take upon themselves the responsibility to deliver the ignorant human race and lead it towards the new light.

The mind dwells in ignorance and works on the principle of division and does not have the true sense of unity. But the Supermind is a supreme principle that unites and harmonizes everything and sees things in the light of oneness. Therefore, the gnostic being that would emerge after the gnostic change would live in an intimate sense of unity in his inner and outer life or the life of the community. The ideas, feelings and sense of the gnostic being will be based on oneness and his action will proceed from that basis,

Then shall the embodied being live  
as one  
Who is a thought, a will of the Divine,  
A mask or robe of his divinity,  
An instrument and partner of his  
Force,  
A point or line drawn in the infinite,  
A manifest of the Imperishable. (p.  
706)

The gnostic being would possess the cosmic consciousness and be united with all things and beings in the world. He will see and feel all as himself and constantly live and act in that sense. His individual will would be in perfect harmony with the universal will and his individual action with the universal action. The feeling of oneness would be such that he will feel the whole world in himself and also its forces and movements as part of himself. This will create a better order on earth which will be based on universal love and harmony as the right law of existence. The established mental consciousness and power shapes the race of mental beings and takes up into all the earthly nature that is ready for the mental change. With the establishment of the Truth-Consciousness or the Supermind on earth, a race of gnostic spiritual beings will take shape in the form of a new race. The new supramental consciousness will take over the earth nature

that is ready for the new transformation.

When superman is born as Nature's  
king  
His presence shall transfigure Matter's  
world:  
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's  
night,  
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's  
greater law;  
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's  
call. (p. 708)

The emergence of the gnostic individual would be the fulfillment of the spiritual man. Not only in his inner life he would realize the Individual, Universal and the Transcendent which are the three aspects of the Spirit, but the whole being will be intimately one with this integral reality. He would be a conscious being finding its self-expression in Nature. The whole of his life, with its thoughts, feelings, actions would be based upon that consciousness which constitutes the truth of the being. Sri Aurobindo mentions that, "The gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his Self of transcendence above it; he would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separative individuality."<sup>11</sup> The gnostic being would not be allured by personal joys, griefs and desires but would be above them and yet share the joys and sorrows of others. Nothing would be able to disturb or hinder his intimate communion and supreme identity with the "supracosmic reality." There will be a radical change in his consciousness from that of ignorance to knowledge which will result in a dynamic unity with the Supreme.

Another result of the gnostic change will be that the ignorant nature will be delivered from the incessant flux of its different elements. The different elements of nature bind us down to the inferior nature. The separation of the soul from the nature helps in delivering us from the lower nature. The soul draws back from the nature and observes the action of the different modes but does not accept or interfere with their course, and thereby remains





untouched by the actions of the nature. In this way, the soul regains its natural spiritual freedom, but the nature remains in bondage due to the workings of the different modes of the lower nature. In order to liberate the nature, the inferior unequal lower modes must pass into the greater modes of the divine nature. The lower nature has to transcend and uplift itself in order to be transformed into a higher divine supernature. This can only be achieved by the descent of the Supermind which alone can deliver the nature by uplifting and remoulding it into a higher spiritual status. The descent of the Supermind will raise the lower nature from its dense obscurity towards eternal calm, light, force and bliss of the divine nature.

Here the soul is free and a dynamic transformation of the nature takes place. The body receives directly the spirit's force and responds to its demands. The vital power consents to tireless action, and the mind opens to the new light and consciousness and the self-existent bliss. There is a free play of action and knowledge as the inertia is replaced by peace and tranquility. The desire for possession will not exist and there will be no impulsive drive for action. One can experience a limitless power of action based on unshakable calm, peace and bliss. The mind will no more dwell in the inferior light and will not seize and imprison the truth by its limited knowledge. It will experience a direct knowledge that comes straight from its source. There will always be the living presence of the Supreme Divine Shakti and one shall become a part of her eternal light, force and bliss as a result of the new creation. The descent of the Supermind will result in the illumination of the mind, the heart and life and these will become an expression of the Divine. The rule of the inconscience will disappear as the inconscience will be changed by the Supermind into "a sea of the superconscience." Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri* that due to the descent of the Supermind,

The Immanent shall be the witness God  
Watching on his many-petalled lotus-  
throne  
His actionless being and his silent  
might  
Ruling earth-nature by eternity's law,  
A thinker waking the Inconscient's  
world,  
An immobile centre of many infin-  
itudes  
In his thousand-pillared temple by  
Time's sea. (p. 706)

With the advent of the Supermind, the being will not only be transformed into a higher Divine consciousness but into a larger divine existence. The elements of the lower nature will undergo a complete transformation and also attain to their utmost perfection. The mind will become a luminous channel for the Divine Knowl-

The being would be filled with the divine Ananda and rapture even in the very cells of the body.

edge and will know the inner as well as the outer phenomenon through intuitive vision and identity.

For knowledge shall pour down in  
radiant streams  
And even darkened mind quiver with  
new life  
And kindle and burn with the Ideal's  
fire  
And turn to escape from mortal  
ignorance. (p. 710)

The sense mind will directly perceive and receive the thoughts and sensations and the physical and subtle senses would be illumined so as to perceive the true sense of things. The Supermind delivers the feelings and emotions from their errors and perversions. They would be turned into the forms of love and delight and feelings of devotion. As a result of the integral transformation the vital being would be delivered from its desires and lower elements and would become an instrument

of the unlimited force of the Supreme. The will of the individual would be united with the Divine Will and act for the manifestation of his glories on earth. Then even the most insignificant actions would become a movement of truth and become part of the integral perfection. The result of the advent of the Supermind and its impact on nature is described in *Savitri* thus,

The supermind shall be his nature's  
fount,  
The Eternal's truth shall mould his  
thoughts and acts,  
The Eternal's truth shall be his light  
and guide.  
All then shall change, a magic order  
come  
Overtopping this mechanical uni-  
verse. (p. 706)

The descent of the Supermind would release the body from its obscurity and inertia. The movements of the body would

not be directed by the ignorant nature but would be governed by the spirit. The body will become supple due to higher spiritual power and also experience a fuller life-force and a diviner strength and ease. There would be a greater control of the higher consciousness and also a greater equality of the spirit. The being would be filled with the divine Ananda and rapture even in the very cells of the body.

The greatest achievement of the descent of the Supermind will be the transformation of the gross matter which is the most undivine. The supramental change of this gross physical is the most difficult and it is the ultimate stage in the supramental transformation. The physical is a storehouse of obscure forces which act as a bar for the inner progress. This obstruction towards the true movement will disappear as the light and power of the Supermind will grow in one's being. When the power of the Supermind penetrates into the physical it will integrate the experiences and the developments of



the mind and vital. With the descent of the Supermind the gross physical would be divinized and would become aware of the divine and also feel its concrete presence. The body consciousness will be filled with the Divine consciousness and there will be the feeling of the concrete presence of the divine in the body consciousness. The higher Peace, Light and Ananda will pour through the whole being and take possession of the whole nature: "... we shall feel the light, power or Ananda flowing through the body, the limbs, nerves, blood, breath and, through the subtle body, affecting the most material cells and making them conscious and blissful and we shall sense directly the Divine Power and Presence."<sup>12</sup> The supramental transformation which will not only affect the mind but also the gross body has been explicitly described in *Savitri* thus,

A divine force shall flow through  
tissue and cell  
And take the charge of breath and  
speech and act  
And all the thoughts shall be a glow  
of suns  
And every feeling a celestial thrill.  
(p. 710)

The action of the Supermind will deal radically with the physical nature. The physical being in man today labours under the inconscience and the ignorance but with the coming of the Supermind the body will cease to be gross and inert. The very cells of the body which are the most inconscient part of the system would be illumined. Before Sri Aurobindo came on the scene, the established idea was that the body could never be organized or divinized by the action of a higher Consciousness and Will from above as the cells are in a state of constant flux and movement. But Sri Aurobindo asserts that this can be achieved with the supramental transformation. Even the very cells, having come from the Divine, are essentially conscious of the divine Presence and eagerly aspire for it. The cells allow the force to act without intervening and also yield to the persistent pressure, in order to be divin-

ized. Consequently, the cells would obey the higher conscious spiritual will. When the very cells of the body are transformed, they will be fully conscious of the Presence and in obeisance to the divine Will and will live in the divine Bliss.

The supramental transformation which results in the transformation of the body will be the final stage in the spiritual evolution. It implies a complete change of the ordinary human consciousness into the divine and supramental. "The mental man that we are is changed into the gnostic soul, the truth-conscious godhead."<sup>13</sup> The human being would be transformed into a superman, a divine man. With a divine life in a divine body man would attain perfection with a transformed mind, life and body free of the obscurity, falsehood, death and suffering of the present worldly existence. As Sri Aurobindo says,

Then shall the earth be touched by the  
Supreme,  
His bright unveiled Transcendence  
shall illumine  
The mind and heart and force the life  
and act  
To interpret his inexpressible mystery  
In a heavenly alphabet of Divinity's  
signs. (p. 705)

The light and power of the Supermind will affect not only the life of the individual but also the collective life on earth. A gnostic evolution will result in a new kind of being that is the gnostic being and a new collective life with a new consciousness, There will be a new race of supramental beings which will inhabit the earth with a fuller Light, Love and Power. These beings of the new race will lead a life that is guided by an inner spiritual force of love and sympathy for others. The supramental consciousness will be the governing principle of the inner and the outer individual and collective life. Their action will be an expression of the Divine and the victory of the divine Will upon the earth. The advent of the new race is described in *Savitri* thus,

A mightier race shall inhabit the  
mortal's world.

On Nature's luminous tops, on the  
Spirit's ground,  
The superman shall reign as king of  
life,  
Make earth almost the mate and peer  
of heaven,  
And lead towards God and truth  
man's ignorant heart  
And lift towards godhead his mortality. (p. 706)

Sri Aurobindo described this supramental race in *The Life Divine* as follows.

A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the Supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order.<sup>14</sup>

He says that there will be variation in the new race and individuals would not be of a single type. They would be different from each other and unique in their own way.

As a result of the manifestation of the Supermind, there will be an emergence of immortality. Death would become alien for the Superman who has risen to the supramental consciousness, but would remain for the man who lives in ignorance. The coming of the new race or the Superman will influence the man living in ignorance and lead him towards God because he would then be a channel of the divine Force. The power and light of the Supermind will thereby invade the subconscious and the inconscient on earth. In the due course of time, one would witness miraculous changes on earth. Disharmony will no more be earth's governing law, but will be replaced by a greater law of harmony,

All shall be drawn into a single plan,  
A divine harmony shall be earth's law,  
Beauty and joy remould her way to live:  
Even the body shall remember God,  
(p. 707)



There will be a greater and profounder truth that will reign supreme on earth which will lead the thought and govern the life and act. An immortal fire will be experienced by the aspiring soul.

A soul shall wake in the  
Inconscient's house;  
The mind shall be God-  
vision's tabernacle,  
The body intuition's instru-  
ment,  
And life a channel for  
God's visible power.  
(p. 707)

The mind in the future will become the temple of God and the body will have its own intuitive strength. The life itself will have a new meaning. With his enigmatic sense of the future, Sri Aurobindo conveys that, the god shall himself reside on this earth and as a result of that man shall not consent to mortality. The occult world would manifest itself on earth. Even the process of evolution would then change. Presently in the process of evolution the inconscience is in front, but in the future there will be the release of the wisdom that is hidden below. The Superconscient and not the Inconscient will rule the world. The nature hides the Spirit behind the mind, life and body but in the future nature itself will reveal the hidden godhead. Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*,

The outward world disclose the Truth  
it veils;  
All things shall manifest the covert  
God,  
All shall reveal the Spirit's light and  
might  
And move to its destiny of felicity.  
(p. 708)



*"Conquest of inertia." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)*

The advent of the Supermind will bring unimaginable change on earth. "One result of the intervention of Supermind in the earth's nature, the descent of the supreme creative Truth-Power, might well be a change in the law of evolution, its method and its arrangement—a larger element of the principle of evolution through knowl-

edge might enter into the forces of the material universe... evolution would itself evolve, but it would not be perturbed or founder."<sup>15</sup> Sri Aurobindo does not rule out the possibility of a resistance caused by the anti-divine forces, but affirms that the secret truth shall manifest itself in its fullness. The anti-divine forces have to give way to the full manifestation of the greater truth. Sri Aurobindo emphatically says that the advent of the Supermind cannot be stopped by anything whatsoever because "the supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit."<sup>16</sup> However, he states that the greater truth must first establish itself on earth and there should be a strong aspiration in man for the change. He should strive for the higher power and also find his inner being. Even though he gives this as a precondition, yet he promises with full certainty that this too shall take place and a new life shall be there on earth. Not only is the supramental advent decreed, but even the end of death and ignorance is sure to follow,

The hour must come of the  
Transcendent's will:  
All turns and winds towards  
his predestined ends  
In Nature's fixed inevitable

course  
Decreed since the beginning of the  
worlds  
In the deep essence of created things:  
Even there shall come as a high crown  
of all  
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance. (p. 708)



The ignorance and falsehood is presently the high crown of nature but the future will belong to the Truth. It will be an ocean of Light, Ananda and Bliss in which the forms and beings would be suffused with the greater Light and Truth. Sri Aurobindo is certain that the Superconscious truth will establish itself on earth and

It shall make earth's nescient ground  
Truth's colony,  
Make even the Ignorance a transparent robe  
Through which shall shine the brilliant limbs of Truth  
And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head  
And Truth shall be the guide of Nature's steps  
And Truth shall gaze out of her nether deeps. (p. 708)

When the Superman arrives on earth his presence will have its influence on matter itself. He will guide humanity and help man progress towards Light. The higher truth from above will wake up the truth embedded below. The Superman shall be a channel to connect the Inconscious and the Superconscious so that

Even the dumb earth become a sentient force.  
The Spirit's tops and Nature's base shall draw  
Near to the secret of their separate truth  
And know each other as one deity. (p. 709)

The Spirit is luminous and its luminosity would be there but matter also will become luminous, transparent and full of consciousness. There would be no antagonism between Matter and Spirit. The form would change according to the character of the consciousness it embodied. It is noteworthy that this change would not be limited to one individual, but would affect the collectivity in general. This is the major difference between the man of the past and the man of the future. In the future, as prophesied by Sri Aurobindo,

The Spirit shall look out through  
Matter's gaze  
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face.  
Then man and superman shall be at one  
And all the earth become a single life.  
(p. 709)

The ordinary human being shall grow into the spiritual being because of the supramental consciousness pervading the earth. The great knowledge of the Superconscious will be known to them and the collectivity will bear the splendour of the divine's rush. All shall feel as if lifted up in consciousness. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo clarifies that,

All touched by it might not be able to embody it fully, but each would give some form to it according to his spiritual temperament, inner capacity, the line of his evolution in Nature: he would reach securely the perfection of which he was immediately capable and he would be on the road to the full possession of the truth, of the Spirit and of the truth of the Nature.<sup>17</sup>

Sri Aurobindo affirms and declares that the life of man has to become a manifestation of the Spirit. The secret intention of the evolutionary nature is to manifest the Spirit involved in it. The coming of the new race is the harbinger of the divine life in a perfected consciousness in the form of first the gnostic being and then the higher supramental being. Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future culminates in *Savitri* in the following lines,

Thus shall the earth open to divinity  
And common natures feel the wide uplift,  
Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray  
And meet the deity in common things.  
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,  
The Spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life become the life divine. (p. 710)

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## Some key symbols in *Savitri*

by Larry Seidlitz

In this essay I consider some of the central symbols in *Savitri*. Let me begin by quoting Sri Aurobindo's Author's Note, printed at the beginning of most editions of the poem:

The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

Sri Aurobindo refers to the tale as belonging to one of the symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Sri Aurobindo spent a considerable time delving into the ancient Vedas and deciphering its symbolism. Results of this work were published in two books, *The Secret of the Veda*, and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. The first work concen-



Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz

trated on deciphering the main symbols of the Vedas, and the second work was an English translation of much of the Rig Veda in a form that reveals its spiritual and psychological significance. There are many similarities between the Vedas and *Savitri*, especially their common central theme of the battle between the forces of Light and Darkness. In addition to the symbolism associated with the main characters, there are other symbols in *Savitri* that allude back to the Vedas that I will touch on in this essay.

But first I would like to emphasize the last point of this passage. Sri Aurobindo says that this is not a mere allegory, these characters are not simply personified qualities, but emanations or incarnations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch; they even take human bodies in order to help humankind rise to a divine consciousness and immortal life. This suggests something of the real power behind this epic. The characters can inspire us not only through the depiction of their magnificent courage and heroism in the story; but by putting us into contact with divine Beings and Powers that can help us in our spiritual endeavor.

Although not a mere allegory, the psychological and spiritual significances Sri Aurobindo attaches to these characters points to a level of meaning in the overall story that should not be overlooked. The tapasya or spiritual endeavor of the soul, represented by Aswapati, and its complete surrender to the Divine, calls down the grace of the Divine Consciousness into the darkness of the outer consciousness. The

human soul, like Satyavan, even though inwardly free, is subject in its expression in the outer life to ignorance and death. The forces of ignorance and the unconscious basis of the material body resist, deny and oppose the growth of consciousness. But the tie of love between the Divine Consciousness and the human soul draws the divine Light and Power down into the depths of the Inconscient, eventually enlightening it and vanquishing death.

The many symbols in *Savitri* do not refer simply to intellectual abstractions. Sri Aurobindo said, "To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event." ("Letters on *Savitri*," in *Savitri*, 1973 edition, p. 736). He said that "Savitri is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences." (p. 794) He added, "I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience." (p. 794)

### The Dawn

The epic begins, interestingly enough, with a canto named "The symbol Dawn." Dawn here seems to signify the dawn of a new, momentous day in the life of Savitri, and the dawn of creation, the first awakening of the universe out of inconscience:

A wandering hand of pale enchanted  
light  
That glowed along a fading moment's  
brink,  
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent  
hinge



A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's  
verge.  
One lucent corner windowing hidden  
things  
Forced the world's blind immensity  
to sight.  
The darkness failed and slipped like a  
falling cloak  
From the reclining body of a god.  
Then through the pallid rift that  
seemed at first  
Hardly enough for a trickle from the  
suns,  
Outpoured the revelation and the  
flame.  
The brief perpetual sign recurred  
above.  
A glamour from unreached tran-  
scendences  
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,  
A message from the unknown im-  
mortal Light  
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,  
Dawn built her aura of magnificent  
hues  
And buried its seed of grandeur in the  
hours.  
An instant's visitor the godhead shone  
On life's thin border awhile the Vision  
stood  
And bent over earth's pondering  
forehead curve.  
Interpreting a recondite beauty and  
bliss  
In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic  
sense,  
It wrote the lines of a significant myth  
Telling of a greatness of spiritual  
dawns,  
A brilliant code penned with the sky  
for page. (pp. 3-4)

"Dawn" is also an important symbol in the Vedas, and it is in this context that we can bring out some of its associations. Of course, dawn is the rising of the sun, and in the Vedas, according to Sri Aurobindo, the sun was a symbol of the Divine Truth. In a section on symbols in his *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo writes, "The sun is the symbol of the concentrated light of Truth," and in another letter he says, "The Sun is the Truth from above, in the

last resort the supramental Truth." (p. 957) In the *Secret of the Veda*, he writes, "Dawn comes as a bringer of the Truth, is herself the outshining of the Truth. She is the divine Dawn and the physical dawning is only her shadow and symbol in the material universe." (p. 125).

What we can take from this is that the dawn in this first canto of *Savitri* is not only the start of a new day or even the start of the creation, it is the breaking out of the Divine Light of Truth in the world of darkness and ignorance. It concerns not only a dawn of the past, but the outpouring of divine Light into the world today. It concerns not only the coming of Savitri, an incarnation of the Divine Mother in remote Indian history, but the incarnation of the Divine in our own time. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have emphasized that their avataric mission was to bring down the supramental consciousness upon earth. As in the story, so in the present, it is an incarnation of the Divine that comes to manifest and bring the divine Light here and to conquer ignorance and death and found a divine life on earth.

The dawn also carries a personal significance, the revelation of divine Light in the individual consciousness that occurs through yoga. At present, for most of us, our consciousness is only half-lit. There remain dark shadows, aspects of our nature still obscure, areas not yet open to the Truth that follow their own unconscious routines. We should read *Savitri* with an eye toward experiencing the dawning of the divine Light within our own life and consciousness.

To more deeply understand this psychological significance of the symbol dawn, of this inner opening to the spiritual Light, it may be useful to turn to Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda*. In the Veda, Usha is the goddess of the dawn. Sri Aurobindo says that Usha is a form or power of the Supreme Light, of the supreme Consciousness, of Aditi, the Divine Mother. This connection helps us tie together the symbols of this first canto—specifically, the symbol of the dawn and the descent of the Divine Mother at the beginning of creation, later as an incarnation in *Savitri*, and

in our present era, as the incarnation of the Divine Mother bringing the supramental Light and Force to earth. It is also interesting from a psychological perspective to note the distinction in the Vedas between Aditi, the undivided Infinite consciousness, and Diti, the divided consciousness, who is the mother of Vritra—an enemy of the gods and of man in his progress. The spiritual Light is a power of the undivided Divine Consciousness.

In the Veda there are connections of Usha, the Dawn, with various psychological and spiritual qualities. There is a close connection between the Dawn and the Truth. For example, in Sri Aurobindo's translations in *Secret of the Veda*, Usha is described as "following effectively the path of the Truth," (p. 131) and "She moves according to the path of the Truth and, as one that knows..." (p. 132) She is also associated with the Vast. For example, one Vedic verse reads, "Dawn true in her being with the gods who are true, vast with the Gods who are vast." (p. 133) Dawn is also associated with an "awakening to vision, perception, right movement." (p. 128). For example, one verse reads, "the goddess ... fronts and looks upon all the worlds, the eye of vision shines with an utter wideness; awakening all life for movement she discovers speech for all that thinks." (p. 134) Further, in another verse, she represents the perception of Immortality, and in others, of Truth and Bliss. She is constantly put in conflict with the Night, a symbol in the Veda for the obscure consciousness full of ignorance, stumblings of will and action, and consequently of evil, sin, and suffering. For example, there is the line "Dawn comes divine repelling by the Light all darkneses and evils." (pp. 134-135) She is also the bringer of spiritual wealth and happiness. Interpreting several verses of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo writes, "The Dawn is the inner dawn which brings to man all the varied fullnesses of his widest being, force, consciousness, joy; it is radiant with its illuminations, it is accompanied by all possible powers and energies, it gives man the full force of vitality so that he can enjoy the infinite delight of that vaster existence." (p. 136)



The connection between the character Savitri and the spiritual Light is inherent in the name itself. Sri Aurobindo translated the word Savitri in his Gayatri mantra as the Light of the Supreme. The mantra as a whole is translated as: "Let us meditate on the most auspicious form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme, which shall illumine us with the Truth." Traditionally, the masculine form of the word is used in the mantra to refer to the Sun-god. The feminine form, Savitri, used for the character in the Mahabharata legend and Sri Aurobindo's epic, refers to his female descendent.

In the first canto of the poem, the connection between the dawn and the character Savitri is made through a rather abrupt juxtaposition. After describing the dawn, and then the absorption of the Light by the Inconscient turning it into the "light of common day," and "man lifting up the burden of his fate," comes the abrupt transition, "And Savitri too awoke among these tribes," and the description of her that follows. Later, in Canto 2, the connection is made more explicit, when Savitri is described as having:

A body like a parable of dawn,  
That seemed a niche for veiled Divinity  
Or golden temple door to things  
beyond. (p. 15)

Another passage in Canto 2, when Savitri is reviewing her past in memory, also makes reference to the Dawn:

As in a many-hued flaming inner  
dawn,  
Her life's broad highways and its  
sweet bypaths,  
Lay mapped to her sun-clear recording  
view... (p. 9)

## Night and Death

I now turn to the opposite symbol of Night and Darkness. I have mentioned that Night in the Veda is a symbol for an obscure consciousness full of evil, sin, and suffering. We are introduced to the central conflict between these powers of Light

and Darkness in the very first lines of the poem.

It was the hour before the Gods  
awoke.  
Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night,  
alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence'  
marge.  
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,  
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless  
muse  
The abyss of the unbodied Infinite;  
A fathomless zero occupied the  
world. (p. 1)

On a cosmic level, this primordial Night represents a kind of reverse symbol of the Infinite. Sri Aurobindo calls it an "unbodied Infinite," "a fathomless zero." In a line that follows it is referred to as "A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown," suggesting the notion of an empty, featureless symbol or figure of the Unknown. As the word "Unknown" is capitalized, it seems to refer to the Infinite or Absolute. Shortly afterwards, the words Nought and Nothingness are applied to it, which are also capitalized. And later, in the third line on page 2, as this Nothingness is beginning to awake, Sri Aurobindo calls it by the psychological term, "the Inconscient."

Richard Hartz, in his long, penetrating article titled "the Composition of *Savitri*," which was published serially in the journal *Mother India* (October 1999-November 2003), affirms this view of the Night. He suggests (see the October 2001 issue) that the inconscience and the Void of non-being came about as a consequence of what Sri Aurobindo has called in *The Life Divine* "the great denial of Sachchidananda by Himself." (p. 211) This suggests that this the Spirit of the Night who denies God and soul is ultimately God himself denying His own existence. This connection also helps us to understand the paradoxical twist in Book 11 in which Death was transfigured into a beautiful and luminous god.

Hartz suggests an interesting theory that ties together several of the characteristics surrounding these symbols of the Night. An important piece of the theory is the close connection of the terms Night and Death in the poem. In several places, the terms coincide in a single line suggesting their close identity. For example:

The voice of Night that knew and  
Death that thought" (p. 586)  
One whom her soul had faced as  
Death and Night. (p. 678)

Hartz suggests that "mind of Night" in the opening passage refers to Death. He further notes that Death is repeatedly referred to in the poem as a god, with such phrases as "a dreadful god," "a universal god," "the dire god," or simply "the god." Death even claims to be God himself in the line, "In me all take refuge, for I, Death, am God." (p. 635) And Savitri grants a certain truth in this claim when she responds,

O Death, thou too art God and yet  
not he,  
But only his own black shadow on his  
path  
As leaving the Night he takes the  
upward Way  
And drags with him its clinging  
inconscient Force. (p. 586)

Hartz suggests that Death and Night represent the duality of Purusha and Prakriti at the level of the Inconscient, an opposite reflection of the duality Ishwara-Shakti. Death represents the Purusha aspect and Night the Prakriti aspect. He notes the association of the Inconscient with "God's plunge into the Night." and a suggestive line that follows says, "A Being woke and lived in the meaningless void." (p. 107).

But "mind of Night" implies a consciousness, and Night, we have seen, represents the Inconscient. To reconcile this apparent contradiction, Hartz suggests that the term "mind of Night" may refer to a mental Purusha, a mental being. He supports this possibility with a reference to Death in the poem as a "cosmic mind"



with “its immense destroying thought,” and the names used by Savitri to refer to Death, such as, “Death, who reasonest” and “dark-browed sophist of the universe.” Hartz adds that mind is the faculty of dividing consciousness, and that Death is the “ruling spirit of its oppositions.”

### The Dragon and the Sphinx

Hartz, in his analysis of Night and Death in *Savitri*, revealed interesting aspects of two related symbols: the dragon and the sphinx. The following line, Hartz suggested, may best sum up the epic: “Alone her hands can change Time’s dragon base.” (p. 314) The dragon appears in several other places as well.

The Dragon of the dark foundations  
keeps  
Unalterable the law of Chance and  
Death. (p. 336)

There is also this passage from Book I, Canto 5 regarding Aswapati’s rapid ascent:

Opponent of that glory of escape,  
The black Inconscient swung its  
dragon tail  
Lashing a slumbrous Infinite by its  
force  
Into the deep obscurities of form:  
Death lay beneath him like a gate of  
sleep. (p. 79)

Regarding the significance of the dragon, Hartz noted the following entry in Sri Aurobindo’s *Record of Yoga*, a diary of his sadhana: “the Dragon of the nether foundations who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested.” Another sentence in the same entry refers to the Dragon as “representing the resistance of the universal inconscience.” (quoted in *Mother India*, June 2001) Hartz also noted the following passage from *The Life Divine*, where Sri Aurobindo writes of the Inconscient as the apparent foundation of mind, life, and matter:

All these three lower powers of being  
build upon the Inconscient and seem

to be originated and supported by it: the black dragon of the Inconscience sustains with its vast wings and its back of darkness the whole structure of the material universe; its energies unroll the flux of things, its obscure intimations seems to be the starting-point of consciousness itself and the source of all life-impulse. (pp. 665-666)

Finally, there is one other mention of the dragon in *Savitri* that occurs in Book 10, even as the Light penetrates the Inconscient:

A golden fire came in and burned  
Night’s heart;  
Her dusky mindlessness began to  
dream;  
The inconscient conscious grew,  
Night felt and thought.  
Assailed in the sovereign emptiness of  
its reign  
The intolerant Darkness paled and  
drew apart  
Till only a few black remnants stained  
that Ray.  
But on a failing edge of dumb lost space  
Still a great dragon body sullenly  
loomed;  
Adversary of the slow struggling Dawn  
Defending its ground of tortured  
mystery,  
It trailed its coils through the dead  
martyred air  
And curving fled down a grey slope of  
time. (p. 601)

This last line suggests a retreat of the darkness and obstruction of the Inconscient, a shrinking, but still a survival and perhaps a consolidation of its diminished power for its continued action and future battles. Hartz notes that the phrase “tortured mystery” suggests not only a negation of consciousness, but a perversion of the intrinsic delight of being. In this context, he suggests that it may be the dark shadow of another dragon described in *Savitri*, “The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss.” (p. 684)

Another symbol associated with the Inconscient is the Sphinx. It is mentioned

in the Book of the Divine Mother, referring to the giant powers in league against the human advance towards Light:

On his long way through Time and  
Circumstance  
The grey-hued riddling nether  
shadow-Sphinx,  
Her dreadful paws upon the swallow-  
ing sands,  
Awaits him armed with the soul-  
slaying word... (p. 336)

Hartz interprets this dark sphinx as “the power of the Inconscient to withhold and obscure the knowledge of the truth of our being and all being, thus turning life in this world into an impenetrable enigma.” (*Mother India*, July 2001, pp. 516-17)

Hartz suggests that the Night’s resistance to the Light is supported by a will of denial put forth by a fallen spirit or spirits within it. This spirit and will of denial assumes great importance in the epic. There are many references to it in the canto, “The World of Falsehood...”

Opponents of the Highest they have  
come  
Out of their world of soulless thought  
and power  
To serve by enmity the cosmic scheme.  
Night is their refuge and strategic  
base.  
Against the sword of Flame, the  
luminous Eye,  
Bastioned they live in massive forts of  
gloom,  
Calm and secure in sunless privacy:  
No wandering ray of Heaven can  
enter there.  
Armoured, protected by their lethal  
masks,  
As in a studio of creative Death  
The giant sons of Darkness sit and plan  
The drama of the earth, their tragic  
stage. (pp. 226-227)

The following passage illustrates the work of these opposing forces in the world at large:

Nature they fill with evil’s institutes,





Turn into defeats the victories of Truth,  
Proclaim as falsehoods the eternal  
laws,  
And load the dice of doom with  
wizard lies;  
The world's shrines they have occu-  
pied, usurped its thrones. (p. 226)

More personal, closer to our individu-  
al and human experience, is the following  
passage from the same canto. It is refer-  
ring to a dark spirit rising from the Void  
retarding the human advance:

Arresting the passion of the climbing  
soul,  
She forced on life a slow and faltering  
pace;  
Her hand's deflecting and retarding  
weight  
Is laid on the mystic evolution's curve:  
The tortuous line of her deceiving  
mind  
The Gods see not and man is impotent;  
Oppressing the God-spark within the  
soul  
She forces back to the beast the human  
fall. (pp. 223-224)

### Fate, sorrow and suffering

Night and Death are also connected in  
the poem with the concept "Fate," which  
assumes a prominent place in the epic. Of  
course, the fate that Savitri confronts and  
eventually triumphs over is Death. The  
close connection between fate and death  
in the poem is brought out in various  
places. For example, in the Book of the  
Traveler of the Worlds, Aswapati, in the  
world of falsehood, sees a being,

Sitting on Death who swallows all  
things born.  
A chill fixed face with dire and mo-  
tionless eyes,  
Her dreadful trident in her shadowy  
hand  
Outstretched, she pierced all creatures  
with one fate. (p. 222)

Or, referring to the Divine Mother in-  
carnating in the life of Savitri:

She keeps her will that hopes to  
divinise clay;  
Failure cannot repress, defeat o'erthrow;  
Time cannot weary her nor the Void  
subdue,  
The ages have not made her passion  
less;  
No victory she admits of Death or  
Fate.

Another important facet of the symbol  
of Night is suffering. This is also brought  
out in the first canto of the poem.

All came back to her: Earth and Love  
and Doom,  
The ancient disputants, encircled her  
Like giant figures wrestling in the  
night:  
The godheads from the dim Inconsci-  
ent born  
Awoke to struggle and pang divine,  
And in the shadow of her flaming  
heart,  
At the sombre centre of the dire  
debate,  
A guardian of the unconsolated abyss  
Inheriting the long agony of the globe,  
A stone-still figure of high and god-  
like Pain  
Stared into Space with fixed regard-  
less eyes  
That saw grief's timeless depths but  
not life's goal. (pp. 9-10)

This is a powerful passage that con-  
veys the author's sensitivity to the sorrow  
and suffering of life with such phrases  
as "unconsolated abyss," "long agony," and  
"grief's timeless depths." We see here other  
powers of the Inconscient: pain, grief, and  
doom, the latter signifying a destiny of de-  
struction or calamity. It is interesting that  
"pain" is put at the "sombre center" of the  
"dire debate," of the problem that Savitri  
must confront. How is it to be confronted?  
Through "love."

### The significance of 'love'

Let us consider more deeply then this  
symbol of love. We have already alluded to  
the notion that the love between Satyavan

and Savitri represents at one level the love  
between the human soul and the Divine.  
I would now like to expand on this sym-  
bolic aspect of the love between Savitri  
and Satyavan. Some of these points were  
brought out by Themis, a poet and long-  
time resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ash-  
ram in Pondicherry, in an article on the  
internet called "Some rambling thoughts  
on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*." (<http://www.aumusic.org/online%20books/articles/savitri/OnSavitriByThemis.html>)

At the heart of the symbolism is this  
notion that the Satyavan's and Savitri's  
love represents the love between the hu-  
man soul and the Divine. But now I would  
like to emphasize the word "human," and  
stretch its significance even further to in-  
clude the earth and matter. Consider, for  
example, this passage from the canto, "The  
Destined Meeting Place," where Savitri  
first meets Satyavan:

There expectation beat wide sudden  
wings  
As if a soul had looked out from  
earth's face... (p. 389)

And consider how Satyavan first ap-  
pears to her, embedded in the earthly  
scene.

As might a soul on Nature's back-  
ground limned  
Stand out for a moment in a house of  
dream  
Created by the ardent breath of life,  
So he appeared against the forest  
verge  
Inset twixt green relief and golden  
ray. (p. 393)

Note the significance of this last line, he is  
inset between the earth, or matter, and the  
golden ray, the divine Truth.

Then note what Satyavan says when he  
first speaks to Savitri, and notice in par-  
ticular the repeated use of the word 'earth':

Although to heaven thy beauty seems  
allied,  
Much rather would my thoughts  
rejoice to know



That mortal sweetness smiles between  
thy lids  
And thy heart can beat beneath a  
human gaze  
And thy aureate bosom quiver with  
a look  
And its tumult answer to an earth-  
born voice.  
If our time-vexed affections thou  
canst feel,  
Earth's ease of simple things can  
satisfy,  
If thy glance can dwell content on  
earthly soil,  
And this celestial summary of delight,  
Thy golden body, dally with fatigue  
Oppressing with its grace our terrain,  
while  
The frail sweet passing taste of earthly  
food  
Delays thee and the torrent's leaping  
wine  
Descend. Let thy journey cease, come  
down to us. (p. 402)

Notice also how he refers to her "golden body." Gold, we may recall, is symbolic of the supramental. Note also the last line, "Descend. Let thy journey cease, come down to us." He repeats this word "descend," about six pages later when he says,

Descend, O happiness, with thy  
moon-gold feet  
Enrich earth's floors upon whose  
sleep we lie. (p. 408)

Note the symbolism here of "earth's floors, upon whose sleep we lie." What is the sleep of the earth's floor? The inconscience of matter. And he continues:

O my bright beauty's princess Savitri,  
By my delight and thy own joy  
compelled  
Enter my life, thy chamber and thy  
shrine.  
In the great quietness where spirits  
meet,  
Led by my hushed desire into my  
woods  
Let the dim rustling arches over thee  
lean... (p. 408)

He calls her into to his life, her chamber and shrine, into his woods, beneath the dim rustling arches. And continuing:

Then down she came from her high  
carven car  
Descending with a soft and faltering  
haste;  
Her many-hued raiment glistening in  
the light  
Hovered a moment over the wind-  
stirred grass,  
Mixed with a glimmer of her body's  
ray  
Like lovely plumage of a settling bird.  
Her gleaming feet upon the green-  
gold sward  
Scattered a memory of wandering  
beams  
And lightly pressed the unspoken  
desire of earth  
Cherished in her too brief passing by  
the soil. (p. 409)

Notice the earthy word "soil." Note also the symbolism of the green-gold sward: her moon-gold feet touch the green grass, and it becomes a green-gold sward.

Then down the narrow path where  
their lives had met  
He led and showed her her future  
world,  
Love's refuge and corner of happy  
solitude.  
At the path's end through a green cleft  
in the trees  
She saw a clustering line of hermit-  
roofs  
And looked now first on her heart's  
future home,  
The thatch that covered the life of  
Satyavan. (p. 411)

Here we see symbols of the earth: "down the narrow path," that is, the path leading into the depths of matter, "at the path's end through a green cleft in the trees," "the thatch that covered the life of Satyavan." This word "thatch" is repeated two more times in this one-page passage.

Finally, in this same canto, is this wonderful passage where Satyavan and Savitri

wed, or rather unite. It is a beautiful description of the soul of the earth uniting with the Divine, creating a new world.

In a wide moment of two souls that  
meet  
She felt her being flow into him as in  
waves  
A river pours into a mighty sea.  
As when a soul is merging into God  
To live in Him for ever and know His  
joy,  
Her consciousness grew aware of him  
alone  
And all her separate self was lost in his.  
As a starry heaven encircles happy  
earth,  
He shut her into himself in a circle of  
bliss  
And shut the world into himself and  
her.  
A boundless isolation made them  
one;  
He was aware of her enveloping him  
And let her penetrate his very soul  
As is a world by the world's spirit  
filled  
As the mortal wakes into Eternity,  
As the finite opens to the Infinite.  
Thus were they in each other lost  
awhile,  
Then drawing back from their long  
ecstasy's trance  
Came into a new self and a new world.  
Each now was a part of the other's  
unity,  
The world was but their twin self-  
finding's scene  
Or their own wedded being's vaster  
frame. (p. 410)

This is really the key to the whole puzzle, the solution to the whole problem of the Inconscient, of death and evil: this opening of the finite to the Infinite, this merging into God, this penetration of the soul and life by the divine Light and Bliss. And it is not simply the soul, the inner psychic being, that must surrender—but the whole earth, all our life and mind and body. Thus united with the Divine, we will come into a new world, a transformed world, our "wedded being's vaster frame."

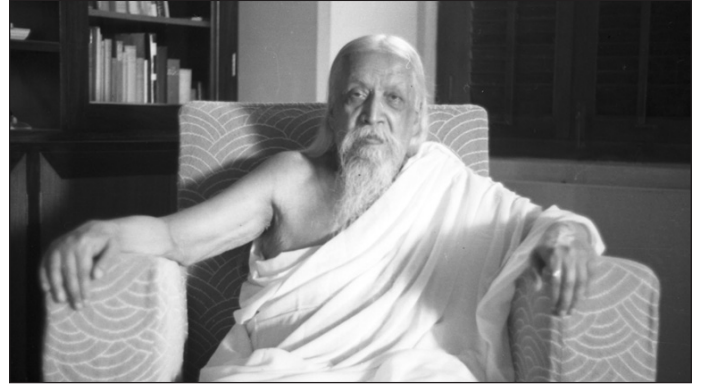


## Source Material

### The overmind aesthesis

by Sri Aurobindo

Let us ... come back to the overmind aesthesis. By aesthesis is meant a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, which receives a certain element in things, something that can be called their taste, Rasa, which, passing through the mind or sense or both, awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, Bhoga, and this can again awaken us, awaken even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of the spirit's delight of existence, Ananda. Poetry, like all art, serves the seeking for these things, this aesthesis, this Rasa, Bhoga, Ananda; it brings us a Rasa of word and sound but also of the idea and, through the idea, of the things expressed by the word and sound and thought, a mental or vital or some-times the spiritual image of their form, quality, impact upon us or even, if the poet is strong enough, of their world-essence, their cosmic reality, the very soul of them, the spirit that resides in them as it resides in all things. Poetry may do more than this, but this at least it must do to however small an extent or it is not poetry. Aesthesis therefore is of the very essence of poetry, as it is of all art. But it is not the sole element and aesthesis too is not confined to a reception of poetry and art; it extends to everything in the world: there is nothing we can sense, think or in any way experience to which there cannot be an aesthetic reaction of our conscious being. Ordinarily, we suppose that aesthesis is concerned with beauty, and that indeed is its most prominent concern: but it is concerned with many other things also. It is the universal Ananda that is the parent of aesthesis and the universal Ananda takes three major and original forms, beauty, love and delight, the delight of all existence, the delight in things, in all things. Universal Ananda is the artist and creator of the universe witnessing, experiencing and taking joy in its creation. In the lower conscious-ness it creates its opposites, the sense of ugliness as well as the sense of beauty, hate and repulsion and dislike as well as love and attraction and liking, grief and pain as well as joy and delight; and between these dualities or as a grey tint in the background there is a general tone of neutrality and indifference born from the universal insensibility into which the Ananda sinks in its dark negation in the Inconscient. All this is the sphere of aesthesis, its dullest reaction is indifference, its highest is ecstasy. Ecstasy is a sign of a return towards the original or supreme Ananda: that art or poetry is supreme which can bring us something of the supreme tone of ecstasy. For as the consciousness sinks from the supreme levels through various degrees towards the Inconscience the general sign of this



Cartier-Bresson's 1950 photo of Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

descent is an always diminishing power of its intensity, intensity of being, intensity of consciousness, intensity of feeling, intensity of the delight in things and the delight of existence. So too as we ascend towards the supreme level, these intensities increase. As we climb beyond Mind, higher and wider values replace the values of our limited mind, life and bodily consciousness. Aesthesis shares in this intensification of capacity. The capacity for pleasure and pain, for liking and disliking is comparatively poor on the level of our mind and life; our capacity for ecstasy is brief and limited; these tones arise from a general ground of neutrality which is always dragging them back towards itself. As it enters the Overhead planes the ordinary aesthesis turns into a pure delight and becomes capable of a high, a large or a deep abiding ecstasy. The ground is no longer a general neutrality, but a pure spiritual ease and happiness upon which the special tones of the aesthetic consciousness come out or from which they arise. This is the first fundamental change.

Another change in this transition is a turn towards universality in place of the isolations, the conflicting generalities, the mutually opposing dualities of the lower consciousness. In the Overmind we have a first firm foundation of the experience of a universal beauty, a universal love, a universal delight. These things can come on the mental and vital plane even before those planes are directly touched or influenced by the spiritual consciousness; but they are there a temporary experience and not permanent or they are limited in their field and do not touch the whole being. They are a glimpse and not a change of vision or a change of nature. The artist for instance can look at things only plain or shabby or ugly or even repulsive to the ordinary sense and see in them and bring out of them beauty and the delight that goes with beauty. But this is a sort of special grace for the artistic consciousness and is limited within the field of his art. In the Overhead consciousness, especially in the Overmind, these things become more and more the law of the vision and the law of the nature. Wherever the Overmind spiritual man turns he sees a universal beauty touching and uplifting all things, expressing itself through them, moulding them into a field or objects of its divine aesthesis; a universal



love goes out from him to all beings; he feels the Bliss which has created the worlds and upholds them and all that is expresses to him the universal delight, is made of it, is a manifestation of it and moulded into its image. This universal aesthesis of beauty and delight does not ignore or fail to understand the differences and oppositions, the gradations, the harmony and disharmony obvious to the ordinary consciousness; but, first of all, it draws a Rasa from them and with that comes the enjoyment, *Bhoga*, and the touch or the mass of the Ananda. It sees that all things have their meaning, their value, their deeper or total significance which the mind does not see, for the mind is only concerned with a surface vision, surface contacts and its own surface reactions. When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty. Even in form itself, apart from the significance, the Overmind consciousness sees the object with a totality which changes its effect on the percipient even while it remains the same thing. It sees lines and masses and

an underlying design which the physical eye does not see and which escapes even the keenest mental vision. Every form becomes beautiful to it in a deeper and larger sense of beauty than that commonly known to us. The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the thing but the delight of it. It sees also the one spirit in all, the face of the Divine everywhere and there can be no greater Ananda than that; it feels oneness with all, sympathy, love, the bliss of the Brahman. In a highest, a most integral experience it sees all things as if made of existence, consciousness, power, bliss, every atom of them charged with and constituted of Sachchidananda. In all this the overmind aesthesis takes its share and gives its response; for these things come not merely as an idea in the mind or a truth-seeing but as an experience of the whole being and a total response is not only possible but above a certain level imperative.

I have said that aesthesis responds not only to what we call beauty and beautiful things but to all things. We make a distinction between truth and beauty; but there can be an aesthetic response to truth also, a joy in its beauty, a love created by its charm, a rapture in the finding, a passion in the embrace, an aesthetic joy in its expression, a satisfaction of love in the giving of it to others. Truth is not merely a dry statement of facts or ideas to or by the intellect; it can be a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation, a thing of beauty that is a joy for ever. The poet also can be a seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty. He can

feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of the true as well as in the expression of the beautiful. He does not make a mere intellectual or philosophical statement of the truth; it is his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm. If he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light, beauty. On certain levels of the Overmind, where the mind element predominates over the element of gnosis, the distinction between truth and beauty is still valid. It is indeed one of the chief functions of the Overmind to separate the main powers of the consciousness and give to each its full separate development and satisfaction, bring out its utmost potency and meaning, its own soul and significant body and take it on its own way as far as it can go. It can take up each power of man and give it its full potentiality, its highest characteristic development. It can give to intellect its austere intellectuality and to logic its most sheer unsparing logicity. It can give to beauty its most splendid passion of lu-

minous form and the consciousness that receives it a supreme height and depth of ecstasy. It can create a sheer and pure poetry impossible for the intellect to sound

*The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the thing but the delight of it.*

to its depths or wholly grasp, much less to mentalise and analyse. It is the function of Overmind to give to every possibility its full potential, its own separate kingdom. But also there is another action of Overmind which sees and thinks and creates in masses, which reunites separated things, which reconciles opposites. On that level truth and beauty not only become constant companions but become one, involved in each other, inseparable: on that level the true is always beautiful and the beautiful is always true. Their highest fusion perhaps only takes place in the Supermind; but Overmind on its summits draws enough of the supramental light to see what the Supermind sees and do what the Supermind does though in a lower key and with a less absolute truth and power. On an inferior level Overmind may use the language of the intellect to convey as far as that language can do it its own greater meaning and message but on its summits Overmind uses its own native language and gives to its truths their own supreme utterance, and no intellectual speech, no mentalised poetry can equal or even come near to that power and beauty. Here your intellectual dictum that poetry lives by its aesthetic quality alone and has no need of truth or that truth must depend upon aesthetics to become poetic at all, has no longer any meaning. For there truth itself is highest poetry and has only to appear to be utterly beautiful to the vision, the hearing, the sensibility of the soul. There dwells and from there springs the mystery of the in-avoidable word, the supreme immortal rhythm, the absolute significance and the absolute utterance. ("Letters on Savitri," in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 809-813)



## On several interesting passages

*The Mother*

*(Mother shows a sketch she has just drawn to illustrate the passage in "Savitri" in which Sri Aurobindo speaks of the "sardonic rictus on God's face.")*

I wanted to see this "sardonic laugh" of the Lord! So I looked, and instead of a sardonic laugh, I saw a face ... with such a deep sorrow—so deep, so grave—and full of such compassion.... It's after that that I said (you remember, it was over there, [In the music room, on December 31, 1963.] I was seeing that): "Falsehood is the sorrow of the Lord." It was naturally based on the experience that everything is the Lord—there is nothing that cannot be the Lord. So what is this "sardonic" smile? ... I was looking at that, and then I saw this face.

So, as I am supposed to do sketches for H.'s paintings, I did the sketch: Falsehood is the sorrow of the Lord.

(Mother shows the sketch representing the Lord's sorrowful face. Long silence)

Sri Aurobindo had the feeling or the sensation that what was farthest from the Lord (I always base myself now on that experience, which is very concrete in its sensation, of the "nearness" or "farness"—it isn't a farness in feelings, not that, it's like a material fact; yet it isn't located in space), well, Sri Aurobindo, for his part, felt that the farthest was cruelty. That's what he felt farthest from; that vibration seemed to him the farthest from that of the Lord.

And yet, it sounds bizarre but in cruelty one can still feel, distorted, the vibration of Love; far behind or deep within that vibration of cruelty, there is still, distorted, the vibration of Love. And Falsehood—the real Falsehood that doesn't arise from fear or anything of the sort, that has no reason behind it—real Falsehood, the negation of Truth (the WILLED negation of Truth), is, to me, something completely black and inert. That's the feeling it gives me. It is black, blacker than the blackest coal, and inert—inert, without any response.

When I read that description in *Savitri*, ["A tract he reached unbuilt and owned by none...." II.VII.206 (See conversation of December 31, 1963.)] I felt a sorrow which I thought I had been unable to feel for a long time—a long time. I thought I was (how shall I put it?) cured of that possibility. And last time, when I saw that, I saw it was still there; and while I was looking, I saw this same sorrow in the Lord, in His face, His expression.

The deliberate negation of all that is divine—of all that we call divine.

The Divine, for us, is always the perfection not yet manifested, all the marvels not yet manifested, and which must keep on growing, of course.

The far end of the Manifestation (assuming that there was a



*Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram*

progressive descent ... there may have been one, I don't know—there have been so many perceptions of what happened, sometimes contradictory, always incomplete and humanized), but if you consider the aspect of evolution, you tend to consider a far end from which you proceed to another far end (it's obviously childish, but anyway ...), or an extreme way of being that grows towards the opposite Extreme Way of Being; well, what seems to me the blackest and most inert, the total negation of "that" to which we aspire, is what constitutes Falsehood.

In other words, this is perhaps what I call Falsehood; because falsehood in the human way is always mixed with all kinds of things—but Falsehood proper is this. It is the assertion that the Divine does not exist, Life does not exist, Light does not exist, Love does not exist, Progress does not exist—Light, Life, Love do not exist. [Mother is not referring to an intellectual and human negation, but to a material fact that one finds at the very roots of life, in the most material consciousness, and which shows itself as an abyss of black and stifling basalt. It is intimately linked with death. It is the very secret of death.] A negative nothingness, a dark nothingness. And it may be this that clung to evolution and made Darkness, which denied Light, Death, which denied Life, and Hatred, Cruelty and all that, which denied Love—but this is already diluted, it's already in a diluted state, there has already been a mixture.

Oh, if we wanted to make poetry (it's no longer a philosophical or spiritual way of seeing, but a pictorial way), we could imagine a Lord who is a totality of all the possible and impossible possibilities, in quest of a Purity and Perfection that can never be reached and are ever progressive ... and the Lord would get rid of all in the Manifestation that weighs down His unfolding—He would begin with the nastiest. You see it?... Total Night, total Unconsciousness, total Hatred (no, hatred still implies that Love exists), the incapacity to feel. Nothingness.

We're on the way. I still have a little bit of it [that total Unconsciousness] left.

Ah, let's get to work. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 5, January 8, 1964, pp. 22-24)



(Mother reads a few lines from “Savitri” which she prepares to translate into French. It is Savitri’s heart that speaks:)

The great stars burn with my unceasing fire  
And life and death are both its fuel made.  
Life only was my blind attempt to love:  
Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory. (X. III . 638)

She says, Life and death are the fuel, then, In my blind attempt LIFE ONLY was my attempt to love. [Mother later stressed again, “It’s not Life was only, but Life only.”] Because my attempt to love was blind, I limited it to life—but I won the victory in death.  
It’s very interesting. (Mother repeats:)

Earth saw my struggle, heaven my victory.

Yet, earth should see the victory? The victory should be on earth, shouldn’t it?

Yes, but she couldn’t win the victory on earth because she lacked heaven—she couldn’t win the victory in life because she lacked death and she had to conquer death in order to conquer life.

That’s the idea. Unless we conquer Death, the victory isn’t won. Death must be vanquished, there must be no more death.

That’s very clear.  
(silence)

According to what he says here, it is the principle of Love that is transformed into flame and finally into light. It isn’t the principle of Light that is transformed into flame when it materializes: it’s the flame that is transformed into light.

The great stars give light because they burn; they burn because they are under the effect of Love.

Love would be the original Principle?  
That seems to be what he is saying.

I didn’t remember this passage. But I told you, my experience [The experience of the “great pulsations” of divine Love (in April, 1962).] is that the last thing as one rises—the last thing beyond light, beyond consciousness, beyond ... —the last thing one reaches is love. “One,” this “one” is ... it’s the “I”—I don’t know. According to the experience, it’s the last thing to manifest now in its purity, and it is the one that has the transforming power.

That’s what he appears to be saying here: the victory of Love seems to be the final victory.

(silence)

He said, Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol; it’s he who made it a symbol. It’s the story of the encounter of Savitri, the principle of Love, with Death; and it’s over Death that she won the victory, not in life. She could not win the victory in life without winning the victory over Death.

I didn’t know it was put so clearly here. I had read it, but only once.

It’s very interesting. (*Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 6, September 8, 1965, pp. 235-238)

(Regarding a passage in “Savitri” in which Sri Aurobindo describes the universe as a play between He and She. “This whole wide world is only he and she,” He, the Supreme in love with her, her servitor; She, the creative Force.)

As one too great for him he worships her;  
He adores her as his regent of desire,  
He yields to her as the mover of his will,  
He burns the incense of his nights and days  
Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice....  
In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;  
He makes the hours pivot around her will,  
Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:  
This whole wide world is only he and she. (I.IV. 62)

What a marvelous work!

He goes into a completely different region, so much above thought! It’s constant vision, it isn’t something thought out—with thought everything becomes flat, hollow, empty, empty, just like a leaf; while this is full, the full content is there, alive.

It’s an explanation of why the world is as it is. At the start he says, He worships her (here again, there are no words in French: *Il lui rend un culte*, but that makes a whole sentence). He worships her as something far greater than Himself. And then you are almost a spectator of the Supreme projecting Himself to take on this creative aspect (necessarily, otherwise it couldn’t be done!), the Witness watching His own work of creation and falling in love with this power of manifestation—you see it all. And ... oh, He wants to give Her her fullest chance and see, watch all that is going to happen, all that can happen with this divine Power thrust free into the world. And Sri Aurobindo expresses it as though he had absolutely fallen in love with Her: whatever She wants, whatever She does, whatever She thinks, whatever She wills, all of it—it’s all wonderful! All is wonderful. It’s so lovely!

And, I must say, I was observing this because, originally, the first time I heard of it, this conception shocked me, in the sense that ... (I don’t know, it wasn’t an idea, it was a feeling), as though it meant lending reality to something which in my consciousness, for a very long time (at least ... millennia perhaps, I don’t know), had been the Falsehood to be conquered. The Falsehood that must cease to exist. It’s the aspect of Truth that must manifest itself, it’s not all that: doing anything whatsoever just for the fun of it, simply because you have the full power.... You have the power to do everything, so you do everything, and knowing that there is a Truth behind, you don’t give a damn about consequences. That was something ... something which, as far back as I can remember, I have fought against. I have known it, but it seems to me it was such a long, long time ago and I rejected it so strongly, saying, “No, no!” and implored the Lord so intensely that things may be otherwise, beseeched Him that his all-powerful Truth, his all-powerful Purity and his all-powerful Beauty may manifest and put an end to all that mess. And at first I was shocked when Sri Aurobindo told me that; previously, in this life, it hadn’t even



crossed my mind. In that sense Theon's explanation had been much more (what should I say?) useful to me from the standpoint of action: the origin of disorder being the separation of the primal Powers—but that's not it! HE is there, blissfully worshipping all this confusion!

And naturally this time around, when I started translating it came back. At first there was a shudder (Mother makes a gesture of stiffening). Then I told myself, "Haven't you got beyond that!" And I let myself flow into the thing. Then I had a series of nights with Sri Aurobindo ... so marvelous! You understand, I see him constantly and I go into that subtle physical world where he has his abode; the contact is almost permanent (at any rate, that's how I spend all my nights: he shows me the work, everything), but still, after this translation of *Savitri* he seemed to be smiling at me and telling me, "At last you have understood!" (Mother laughs) I said, "It isn't that I didn't understand, it's that I didn't want it!" I didn't want, I don't WANT things to be like that any more, for thousands of years I have wanted things to be otherwise!

The night before last, he had put on a sari of mine. He told me (laughing), "Why not? Don't you find it suits me!" I answered, "It suits you beautifully!" A sari of brown georgette, lustrous bronze, with big golden braid! It was a very beautiful sari (I used to have it, it was one of my saris), and he was wearing it. Then he asked me to do his hair. I remember seeing that the nape of his neck and his hair had become almost luminous—his hair was never quite white, there was an auburn shimmer to it, it was almost golden, and it stayed that way, very fine, not at all like the hair people have here. His hair was almost like mine. So while I was doing his hair, I saw the luminous nape of his neck, and his hair, so luminous! And he said to me, "Why shouldn't I wear a sari!"

That opened up a whole new horizon.... We're always so closed, you know.

Of course, it [this vision or conception] isn't allowed into action, because when you start accepting everything and loving everything and seeing Glory everywhere—why change!? This is why the Force that had been in me for so long for the world to progress further made me reject precisely all that legitimized things as they are by putting you into contact with the inner joy of living—as he puts it, His Joy is there, everywhere, so nobody wants to leave the world....

In short, I was able to see the situation from above, a little higher than the creative Force—from the other side. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 4, February 15, 1963, pp. 45-47)

*Savitri*: the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision

- 1) The daily record of the spiritual experiences of the individual who has written.
- 2) A complete system of yoga which can serve as a guide for those who want to follow the integral sadhana.
- 3) The yoga of the Earth in its ascension towards the Divine.
- 4) The experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated. —The Mother

## The poetry room

### From *Savitri*, "The yoga of the king: The yoga of the soul's release"

Thus came his soul's release from Ignorance,  
His mind and body's first spiritual change.  
A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,  
A new world-knowledge broadened from within:  
His daily thoughts looked up to the True and One,  
His commonest doings welled from an inner Light.  
Awakened to the lines that Nature hides,  
Attuned to her movements that exceed our ken,  
He grew one with a covert universe.  
His grasp surprised her mightiest energies' springs;  
He spoke with the unknown Guardians of the worlds,  
Forms he descried our mortal eyes see not.  
His wide eyes bodied viewless entities,  
He saw the cosmic forces at their work  
And felt the occult impulse behind man's will.  
Time's secrets were to him an oft-read book;  
The records of the future and the past  
Outlined their excerpts on the etheric page.  
One and harmonious by the Maker's skill,  
The human in him paced with the divine;  
His acts betrayed not the interior flame.  
This forged the greatness of his front to earth.  
A genius heightened in his body's cells  
That knew the meaning of his fate-hedged works  
Akin to the march of unaccomplished Powers  
Beyond life's arc in spirit's immensities.  
Apart he lived in his mind's solitude,  
A demigod shaping the lives of men:  
One soul's ambition lifted up the race;  
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.  
The universal strengths were linked with his;  
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,  
He drew the energies that transmute an age.  
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. (pp. 44-45)

### From *Savitri*, "The secret Knowledge"

The master of existence lurks in us  
And plays at hide-and-seek with his own Force;  
In Nature's instrument loiters secret God.  
The Immanent lives in man as in his house;  
He has made the universe his pastime's field,



A vast gymnasium of his works of might.  
All-knowing he accepts our darkened state,  
Divine, wears shapes of animal or man;  
Eternal, he assents to Fate and Time,  
Immortal, dallies with mortality.  
The All-Conscious ventured into Ignorance,  
The All-Blissful bore to be insensible.  
Incarnate in a world of strife and pain,  
He puts on joy and sorrow like a robe  
And drinks experience like a strengthening wine.  
He whose transcendence rules the pregnant Vasts,  
Prescient now dwells in our subliminal depths,  
A luminous individual Power, alone.  
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.  
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.  
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,  
His image in the human measure cast  
That to his divine measure we might rise;  
Then in a figure of divinity  
The Maker shall recast us and impose  
A plan of godhead on the mortal's mould  
Lifting our finite minds to his infinite,  
Touching the moment with eternity.  
This transfiguration is earth's due to heaven:  
A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:  
His nature we must put on as he put ours;  
We are sons of God and must be even as he:  
His human portion, we must grow divine.  
Our life is a paradox with God for key. (pp. 66-67)

### **From Savitri, "The descent into Night"**

Out of the chill steppes of a bleak Unseen  
Invisible, wearing the Night's grey mask,  
Arrived the shadowy dreadful messengers,  
Invaders from a dangerous world of power,  
Ambassadors of evil's absolute.  
In silence the inaudible voices spoke,  
Hands that none saw planted the fatal grain,  
No form was seen, yet a dire work was done,

An iron decree in crooked uncials written  
Imposed a law of sin and adverse fate.  
Life looked at him with changed and sombre eyes:  
Her beauty he saw and the yearning heart in things  
That with a little happiness is content,  
Answering to a small ray of truth or love;  
He saw her gold sunlight and her far blue sky,  
Her green of leaves and hue and scent of flowers  
And the charm of children and the love of friends  
And the beauty of women and kindly hearts of men,  
But saw too the dreadful Powers that drive her moods  
And the anguish she has strewn upon her ways,  
Fate waiting on the unseen steps of men  
And her evil and sorrow and last gift of death.  
A breath of disillusion and decadence  
Corrupting watched for Life's maturity  
And made to rot the full grain of the soul:  
Progress became a purveyor of Death.  
A world that clung to the law of a slain Light  
Cherished the putrid corpses of dead truths,  
Hailed twisted forms as things free, new and true,  
Beauty from ugliness and evil drank  
Feeling themselves guests at a banquet of the gods  
And tasted corruption like a high-spiced food.  
A darkness settled on the heavy air;  
It hunted the bright smile from Nature's lips  
And slew the native confidence in her heart  
And put fear's crooked look into her eyes.  
The lust that warps the spirit's natural good  
Replaced by a manufactured virtue and vice  
The frank spontaneous impulse of the soul:  
Afflicting Nature with the dual's lie,  
Their twin values whetted a forbidden zest,  
Made evil a relief from spurious good,  
The ego batted on righteousness and sin  
And each became an instrument of Hell.  
In rejected heaps by a monotonous road  
The old simple delights were left to lie  
On the wasteland of life's descent to Night.  
All glory of life was dimmed, tarnished with doubt;  
All beauty ended in an aging face;  
All power was dubbed a tyranny cursed by God  
And Truth a fiction needed by the mind:  
The chase of joy was now a tired hunt;  
All knowledge was left a questioning Ignorance. (pp. 203-205)

### **From Savitri, "The gospel of Death and vanity of the Ideal"**

Then pealed the calm inexorable voice:  
Abolishing hope, cancelling life's golden truths,  
Fatal its accents smote the trembling air.  
That lovely world swam thin and frail, most like





Some pearly evanescent farewell gleam  
On the faint verge of dusk in moonless eves.  
"Prisoner of Nature, many-visioned spirit,  
Thought's creature in the ideal's realm enjoying  
Thy unsubstantial immortality  
The subtle marvellous mind of man has feigned,  
This is the world from which thy yearnings came.  
When it would build eternity from the dust,  
Man's thought paints images illusion rounds;  
Prophesying glories it shall never see,  
It labours delicately among its dreams.  
Behold this fleeing of light-tasselled shapes,  
Aerial raiment of unbodied gods;  
A rapture of things that never can be born,  
Hope chants to hope a bright immortal choir;  
Cloud satisfies cloud, phantom to longing phantom  
Leans sweetly, sweetly is clasped or sweetly chased.  
This is the stuff from which the ideal is formed:  
Its builder is thought, its base the heart's desire,  
But nothing real answers to their call.  
The ideal dwells not in heaven, nor on the earth,  
A bright delirium of man's ardour of hope  
Drunk with the wine of its own fantasy.  
It is a brilliant shadow's dreamy trail.  
Thy vision's error builds the azure skies,  
Thy vision's error drew the rainbow's arch;  
Thy mortal longing made for thee a soul.  
This angel in thy body thou callst love,  
Who shapes his wings from thy emotion's hues,  
In a ferment of thy body has been born  
And with the body that housed it it must die..." (pp. 607-608)

#### **From *Savitri*, "The debate of Love and Death"**

"O Death, I have triumphed over thee within;  
I quiver no more with the assault of grief;  
A mighty calmness seated deep within  
Has occupied my body and my sense:  
It takes the world's grief and transmutes to strength,  
It makes the world's joy one with the joy of God.  
My love eternal sits throned on God's calm;  
For Love must soar beyond the very heavens  
And find its secret sense ineffable;  
It must change its human ways to ways divine,  
Yet keep its sovereignty of earthly bliss.  
O Death, not for my heart's sweet poignancy  
Nor for my happy body's bliss alone  
I have claimed from thee the living Satyavan,  
But for his work and mine, our sacred charge.  
Our lives are God's messengers beneath the stars;  
To dwell under death's shadow they have come  
Tempting God's light to earth for the ignorant race,  
His love to fill the hollow in men's hearts,

His bliss to heal the unhappiness of the world.  
For I, the woman, am the force of God,  
He the Eternal's delegate soul in man.  
My will is greater than thy law, O Death;  
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:  
Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme.  
I guard that seal against thy rending hands.  
Love must not cease to live upon the earth;  
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,  
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here;  
Love is man's lien on the Absolute." (p. 633)

#### **From *Savitri*, "The eternal day: The soul's choice and the supreme consummation"**

"O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,  
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.  
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose:  
All thou hast asked I give to earth and men.  
All shall be written out in destiny's book  
By my trustee of thought and plan and act,  
The executor of my will, eternal Time...  
Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,  
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and fate  
And leaned in pity over earth-bound men  
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,  
I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine  
And lay my splendid yoke upon thy soul.  
Now will I do in thee my marvellous works.  
I will fasten thy nature with my cords of strength,  
Subdue to my delight thy spirit's limbs  
And make thee a vivid knot of all my bliss  
And build in thee my proud and crystal home.  
Thy days shall be my shafts of power and light,  
Thy nights my starry mysteries of joy  
And all my clouds lie tangled in thy hair  
And all my springtides marry in thy mouth.  
O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light  
And bring down God into the lives of men;  
Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,  
My garden of life to plant a seed divine.  
When all thy work in human time is done  
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,  
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,  
The body of earth a tabernacle of God.  
Awakened from the mortal's ignorance  
Men shall be lit with the Eternal's ray  
And the glory of my sun-lift in their thoughts  
And feel in their hearts the sweetness of my love  
And in their acts my Power's miraculous drive.  
My will shall be the meaning of their days;  
Living for me, by me, in me they shall live...." (pp. 698-99)



## Apropos

Time's message of brief light was not for her. (*Savitri*, p. 6)

All came back to her: Earth and Love and Doom,  
The ancient disputants, encircled her  
Like giant figures wrestling in the night;  
(p. 9)

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)

A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks  
Empowered to force the door denied and closed  
Smote from death's visage its dumb absolute  
And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time. (p. 21)

A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,  
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;  
His human self like a translucent cloak  
Covered the All-wise who leads the unseeing world. (p. 22)

Thus taken was God's plunge into the Night  
This fallen world became a nurse of souls  
Inhabited by concealed divinity. (p. 107)

The light of God she has parted from his dark  
To test the savour of bare opposites. (p. 122)

This huge world unintelligibly turns  
In the shadow of mused Inconscience;  
It hides a key to inner meanings missed,  
It locks in our hearts a voice we cannot hear. (p. 160)

Out of the sorrow and darkness of the world,  
Out of the depths where life and thought are tombed,  
Lonely mounts up to heaven the deathless Flame. (p. 279)

He stood on a wide arc of summit Space  
Alone with an enormous Self of Mind  
Which held all life in a corner of its vasts.  
(p. 283)

In God's supreme withdrawn and timeless hush  
A seeing Self and potent Energy met;  
The Silence knew itself and thought took form:  
Self-made from the dual power creation rose. (p. 284)

For I know now why my spirit came on earth  
And who I am and who he is I love. (p. 435)

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?  
Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives:  
He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,  
A light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross. (p. 442)

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break  
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,  
His slow inertia as of living stone.  
(p. 443)

This hidden foe lodged in the human breast  
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.  
This is the inner war without escape.  
(p. 448)

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;  
The world itself becomes his adversary,  
His enemies are the beings he came to save. (p. 448)

All the world's possibilities in man  
Are waiting as the tree waits in the seed:  
His past lives in him; it drives his future's pace;  
His present's acts fashion his coming fate.  
(p. 482)

Thus man in his little house made of earth's dust  
Grew towards an unseen heaven of thought and dream  
Looking into the vast vistas of his mind  
On a small globe dotting infinity. (p. 486)

Her spirit saw the world as living God;  
It saw the One and knew that all was He.  
(p. 556)

Easy the heavens were to build for God.  
Earth was his difficult matter, earth the glory  
Gave of the problem and the race and strife. (p. 653)

A Truth supreme has forced the world to be;  
It has wrapped itself in Matter as in a shroud,  
A shroud of Death, a shroud of Ignorance. (p. 658)

Around her lived the children of God's day  
In an unspeakable felicity,  
A happiness never lost, the immortal's ease,  
A glad eternity's blissful multitude. (p. 673)

Heaven in its rapture dreams of perfect earth,  
Earth in its sorrow dreams of perfect heaven. (p. 684)

Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home.  
(p. 685)

All grace and glory and all divinity  
Were here collected in a single form;  
All worshipped eyes looked through his from one face;  
He bore all godheads in his grandiose limbs. (p. 680)

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!  
O lasso of my rapture's widening noose,  
Become my cord of universal love. (p. 702)

O Savitri, thou art my spirit's Power,  
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,  
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time  
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God. (p. 703)

But when the hour of the Divine draws near,  
The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time  
And God be born into the human clay  
In forms made ready by your human lives.  
Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men. (p. 705)