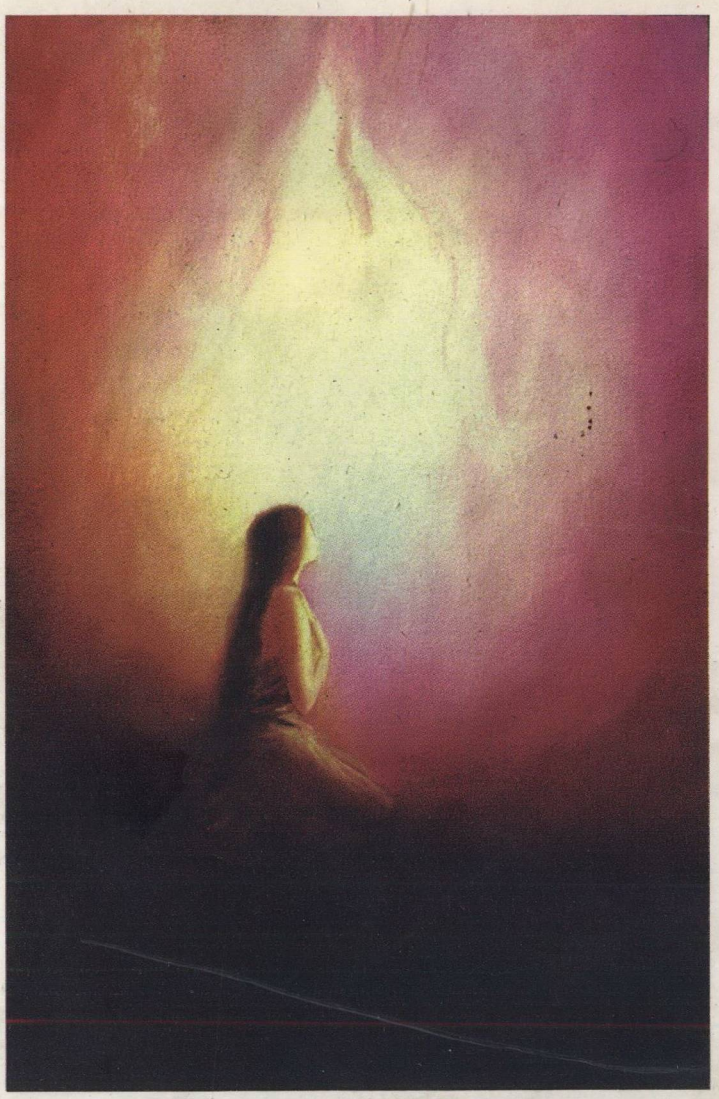


On "Savitri"

Nolini Kanta Gupta

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Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry

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Compiler's Note

This volume was originally conceived to be a comprehensive volume including all the articles of Nolinikanta Gupta on ''Savitri'' in both English and Bengali. But Jayantilal Parekh wanted it to be a booklet in English only and containing the articles written by Nolinida exclusively on ''Savitri''. Hence it had to be reduced to only these six articles contained in this volume. I also told Jayantilalda that I am going to request Dr. M. V. Nadkarni to write a preface for this book. But inspite of Dr. Nadkarni's willingness and best of efforts the preface could not be completed and shown to Jayantilalda since he passed away.

The blessings of the Avatar of the Supreme – Sri Aurobindo – has been invoked by adding as an appendix what he himself has said in his author's note on ''Savitri'' to make this volume complete in all respects.

This will hopefully be a very popular volume and will get a wide circulation and then I shall expect someone to come forward and take up the compilation in Bengali of Nolinida's articles on ''Savitri'' for publication.

Dated Pondicherry
the 24th November, 2000

SATADAL

Preface

Nolini Kanta Gupta's *Collected Works* in English (1970) is a veritable treasure of seminal ideas, insights, and flashes of intuitive perception that illumine like flares in the nightly sky many a recondite terrain of intellectual discourse. In his writings we come across a sweep and a depth of thinking which has a freshness and wholesomeness unusual to the mental stratosphere. At the same time they have a texture of thought more finely woven than is possible on the loom of the human intellect. The word ''global'' most aptly characterises his thought. It is global in the sense of not being the view from a single angle or from a few closely related angles. The mental standpoint aspects only one side of the object in view, and to our anti-spiritual age this one-track mentality itself seems to be its greatest virtue. The global view which is the hallmark of a mind illumined by spiritual consciousness transcends this one-trackedness of the intellect. It gets behind all opposing views and standpoints and tries to see what is the underlying truth that seeks to manifest in each. Thus in Nolini Kanta Gupta's writings we very often stumble upon that dynamic truth which at the mental level manifests itself in multiple standpoints and modes and angles of vision.

Nolinida, as Nolini Kanta Gupta was universally known in his life-time, had that rare gift of getting at the heart of a problem and of seizing immediately the truth of things. As Deshpande puts it (in his ''Nolini Kanta Gupta's Perceptions of Poetry'' in *Tributes to Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry, 1988): ''There is a catholicity of outlook, a way of seeing God's world in its many moods of joy, an intimacy, even an identity, with the hidden divinity in the grain and in the star, an appreciation leaping over all conventionality, of the bright as well as the obscure, but it is always with the lamp of the spirit that he moves around.''

Nevertheless, he respected the demands and norms of the age in which he was writing. He expresses the truth that he has perceived in cogent intellectual terms and not dogmatically. As a

result, no matter what the topic is, whether it be the still-vexing problem of Hindu-Muslim unity in India, or the meaning of Indian culture, or Modernist poetry, or Shakespeare or T.S. Eliot, or Sartrean Freedom, or the bypaths of the spiritual journey or the interpretation of the Veda or the Upanishads, I have never taken a dip into his writings without being able to come up with a dazzling diamond of an idea or a viewpoint.

It is unfortunate, however, that the work of Nolinida, 10 volumes in Bengali and 8 volumes in English, has remained comparatively inaccessible and unknown to the intelligentsia of this country. This can be attributed to two reasons. First, most of what he wrote was published in the journals of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or of related institutions; this effectively put him out of bounds for academia since we live in an age in which the so-called custodians of our intellectual realm have little understanding of or sympathy for things spiritual. They have yet to realise that genuine spirituality is not anti-intellectual but is marked, in Sri Aurobindo's words, by a fearless will that dares to erase "The lines of safety reason draws that bar / Mind's soar, soul's dive into the Infinite." (*Savitri*: page 26) And in this respect, things have not changed much, at least in India, although elsewhere in the world there is a greater opening for and receptivity to matters spiritual. We in India still seem to be living in a period marked by a hangover from the antiquated anti-spiritual intellectual phase.

The second reason why Nolinida's writings are not as widely known as they deserve to be is that he lived too close to Sri Aurobindo, the blazing sun who made it difficult for the other stars in the firmament to be noticed. But that does not make these writings either redundant or entirely derivative. His writings are not a mere exegesis or elucidation of his Master's works, and even when he takes a seed-idea from Sri Aurobindo, he develops it in his own way. For in a truly spiritual relationship, the Guru never takes away from any disciple his real individuality. Spiritual discipleship only enhances it. Like an ill-hewn block of marble that comes under the chisel of an inspired sculptor, the disciple's individuality becomes more well-defined, for, after all,

spirituality is the sculpture of one's inner being. Nolinida was a creative thinker in his own right and the corpus of his writings (in English and Bengali) is one of the finest produced by any writer in our age. His writings on Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and on *Savitri* are some of the most lucid on these subjects.

On Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, Nolinida was undoubtedly one of the most perceptive writers as can be seen from his extensive writings on the subject. (*Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, which is in 12 parts. See *Collected Works*, Vols. 3 and 4.) Even as a practitioner of this Yoga, his pre-eminence was universally acknowledged. As regards *Savitri*, his association with the book was very intimate. He came to be associated with it even as it was being composed and getting ready for publication. "Until the mid-1940s, Sri Aurobindo continued to write out version after version of *Savitri* in his own hand, tirelessly expanding and perfecting it. But when he began to prepare the poem for publication, he could no longer do all the work unaided. He took the assistance of two disciples, one of whom, Nirodbaran, made the final hand-written copies and the other, Nolini Kanta Gupta, the typescripts." (Editor's Note: Supplement to the Revised edition of *Savitri*.) It is these typescripts which Nolinida had prepared that used to go to the press and the proofs of which were again read out to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo took this opportunity to look once more at the text and add lines or change lines or punctuation marks. Again, when Nolinida started editing the *Advent*, he brought out many cantos of *Savitri* for the first time in this journal. During the period 1946-51, parts of *Savitri* came out in the Pathmandir Annuals under the advice or guidance of Nolinida. He also translated *Savitri* into Bengali. As Nirodbaran puts it, "As *Savitri* was Sri Aurobindo's last composition, its translation was Nolinida's last composition. And I can affirm that the masterly translation has added a large dimension to the Bengali language." (*Tributes to Nolini Kanta Gupta*, p. 14)

I am happy that the Sri Aurobindo Aurobindo Ashram is bringing out, in this slender volume, six of his essays on *Savitri*. These are by no means the only writings of his which have a bearing on *Savitri*; there are many more which are a great aid to

the student of the poem, although the reference to the epic is not central to these other essays. I would have loved to see at least his essay entitled "Mystic Poetry" (*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*: Vol. II, pp. 64-81) included in this volume, for it clarifies the distinction between different kinds of mystic poetry and also the distinction between mystic poetry, spiritual poetry, philosophic poetry and religious poetry. This is a distinction very much needed today, since a failure to perceive it has led to a lot of confusion among the critics of Indian writing in English. For one thing, some of them tend to lump together as spiritual poetry all outpourings in verse on any "spiritual" theme or topic. Thus, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramatirtha, Swami Shivanand, J. Krishnamurthy, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, are all categorised as "spiritual" poets by virtue of the themes of their poetic compositions. The epithet "spiritual" in the term "spiritual poetry", as Nolinida uses it, does not refer to the theme of the composition but to the plane of inspiration from which the poem has been derived, and to the quality of poetry in it. And secondly, such a distinction enables us to see a number of puzzling sections of a poem like *Savitri* in a new light; we begin to see that in many of these sections we have spiritual poetry where the Spirit speaks its own language, describes a direct vision or a revelation.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is too unique a literary work both in scope and value to find a readership ready to receive it. It was not written to satisfy the established taste and standard of the critics of our time and that explains why even now most literary critics are baffled by it. As K.D. Sethna has emphasised, *Savitri* was not intended to be merely good poetry. "The poetry has to be good by an ascension in poetic quality to the highest spiritual plane possible: this plane has to be creative in terms of poetic values. *Savitri* should express poetically the ever-higher peak reached by Sri Aurobindo's progressive spiritual ascension. Therefore we cannot consider it either as sheer poetry or as sheer spirituality. It must help us at the same time to ascend to Sri Aurobindo's own peak and do so with the full awareness of the poetic way in which that peak has become communicative of its truth, its power, its

delight. *Savitri* has to be taken as Sri Aurobindo's spiritual autobiography which is meant to make us re-live his inner life of both poetic creativity and creative spirituality.'' (Amal Kiran [K.D. Sethna] ''Questions and Answers on *Savitri*'' in *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, The Integral Life Foundation, USA 1995.) In fact, to enter the portals of any of Sri Aurobindo's major works such as *The Life Divine, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, The Synthesis of Yoga, Savitri, The Essays on the Gita, The Foundations of Indian Culture, On the Veda* or *The Future Poetry*, one needs to be equipped with much more than a well-trained, logical and philosophic intellect. One needs a certain spiritual sensitivity and opening. Many an erudite and intellectually trained reader has returned baffled by Sri Aurobindo and has complained that he found little in his writings but vagueness and a fatiguing plethora of words. It is indeed true that, as Jesse Roarke once put it, Sri Aurobindo except for a few is too vast to see and too much to believe.

This is particularly true of *Savitri*. Most people need some help in their study of it. Some people maintain that it is not a book meant for what is normally regarded as ''study'' and one does not need any outside help in reading it since a ''mantramandala'' like *Savitri* opens its heart to all those who approach it with an attitude which is best characterised by the following words of Arjuna in the Gita: *''śiṣyaste'haṁ, śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam''* – ''I take refuge as a disciple with thee, enlighten me.'' I have no quarrel with this view except that there are several sincere readers who would be grateful for some help in preparing themselves to take this approach. And for such people Nolinida, in my view, is the best help I can recommend.

The story of Satyavan and Savitri is at least as old as the Mahabharata; in fact, it first appeared many thousand years earlier as a Vedic myth. Sri Aurobindo's main intention in taking up the story of Satyavan and Savitri was to use it as a framework for projecting his view of man's evolutionary journey on earth and of his future. As an introduction to the thematic richness and complexity of *Savitri*, there is, in my view, no finer piece of writing than Nolinida's article entitled ''Savitri'' included in this

volume (*Collected Works*, Vol. 4). It is also a very good example of Nolinida's expository prose at its best, compact, economical and yet so lucid.

Most readers of *Savitri* are often bewildered by Part I (Books 1, 2, and 3, pages 1 to 348) of *Savitri* which extends almost over half the length of the epic and deals with Aswapathi's yoga. What corresponds to this in Vyasa's narration in the Mahabharata is the description of Aswapathi's sacrifice, described in 10 verses! Particularly Book II, which describes Aswapathi's exploration of the various worlds of consciousness, is probably the hardest part of the whole epic. Nolinida's article goes to the heart of this part of *Savitri* and in about less than 5 pages, he gives us an insight into what Aswapathi's yoga is about and why Sri Aurobindo gives so much prominence to it. What is more important is that he makes us realise that this is not the yoga of some king of a bygone age that is being described here but a yoga that is crucial to you and me and to the world's future. The link between the first 3 Books is made clear and we see the unique place Book III has in Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future of man.

Nolinida does not pay in this article much attention to Books IV, V and VI of the epic, which are probably the most accessible part of the epic to even an uninitiated reader. But the reader needs help with the rest of the book. Nolinida begins the second section of this essay by telling us who Savitri really is: the Divine Mother come down upon earth as a human creature "to change the mortal earth into an immortal paradise". Then he goes on to describe Savitri's mission in its two phases. The first phase, that of preparation, is described in Book VII; The Book of Yoga. In the second phase, which is described in Books IX, X and XI, Savitri follows the God of Death and discovers his true personality and mission on earth. When finally she finds herself and Satyavan in the deathless, luminous world of faultless beauty and stainless delight, she rejects this everlasting day and chooses the light of this earth. This is what she wants to transform so that deathless perfection can dwell here. Once again, Nolinida has very briefly delineated here the inner theme of the latter half of *Savitri* in a few pages.

This is not all that Nolinida has to offer us in this wonderful piece; in the last 3 sections he also gives a most illuminating explication of an episode in Savitri's Yoga, entitled ''The Triple Soul-Forces''. (Book VII, Canto 4) Here Savitri meets the three Madonnas and their asuric perversions that spoil their work. What they signify and how the whole episode reenacts the drama of one of the central themes of *Savitri*, namely, man's refusal of the Divine Grace, is most brilliantly brought out here. One wonders how much we all lovers of *Savitri* would have benefited if Nolinida had been persuaded to write on each canto of the poem in this inimitable fashion. Furthermore, he relates this episode in Savitri's Yoga to an experience which the Mother has described in her *Prayers and Meditations*. The Mother once seems to have remarked that Sri Aurobindo had lain bare in *Savitri* quite a few secrets of her inner spiritual life. Nolinida helps us to understand what the Mother must have meant by this revelation of hers.

There are in this selection of Nolinida's writings two pieces on the opening canto of the epic, namely, ''The Opening Scene of *Savitri*'' and ''Readings in *Savitri*''. In the former, he explains the inner significance of this dawn of which there are a succession according to the Vedic Rishis.

''Readings in *Savitri*'' is a commentary on three excerpts from the same opening scene. The first of these refers to the Inconscient Godhead that is the transformation of the Divine Being into Matter who is always driven by the secret urge to be itself once again. The second set of passages brings up the theme of the Avatar, of the Divine Grace taking human form so that the lower animal nature in man can be persuaded to change into the divine nature. But it is hard to persuade human nature to change; mortality does not take kindly to the eternal's touch and fights against it, until finally it is vanquished and transformed by the Grace.

''Notes on Savitri'' is a miscellany of different things. It begins with a brief comment on the first few lines of Book VI, Canto I which describe Narad's journey through the sky as he descends on earth to visit Aswapathi. This piece is followed by an

explication of the symbolic meaning of the griffin which is mentioned as the guardian God of the borderland between the lower and upper hemispheres. Then we have a brief note on the nature of the overmind vision as it is described in a few lines in Book X, Canto 4, pp. 660-61 of *Savitri*. Finally, there is a brief comment on a passage in Book III, Canto 4 which describes the New Creation coming down from above.

"God's Debt" is a most lucid exposition of a concept repeatedly made use of in the poem by Sri Aurobindo, as for example in the line: "A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme". (*Savitri*, p. 67)

"The Human Divine" elucidates another important concept. People tend to regard the Divine as something which lacks the warmth, the colour and the zest of the human, and tend to look upon it as something cold, sanitised and impersonal. But Nolinida corrects this misconception: the embodied Divine does not discard or even minimise the human, but on the contrary, only greatens this earthly being and lifts the merely earthly to a great height of exquisiteness.

I am grateful to Sri Satadal and all the others who are responsible for this publication for the opportunity they have given me to pay my respects to the memory of Nolinida through this brief Preface.

Secunderabad MANGESH NADKARNI

(1)

"Savitri", the poem, the word of Sri Aurobindo is the cosmic Answer to the cosmic Question. And Savitri, the person, the Godhead, the Divine Woman is the Divine's response to the human aspiration.

The world is a great question mark. It is a riddle, eternal and ever-recurring. Man has faced the riddle and sought to arrive at a solution since he has been given a mind to seek and interrogate.

What is this universe? From where has it come? Whither is it going? What is the purpose of it all? Why is man here? What is the object of his existence?

Such is the mode of human aspiration. And Ashwapati in his quest begins to explore the world and see what it is, the way it is built up. He observes it rising tier upon tier, level upon level of consciousness. He mounts these stairs, takes cognisance of the modes and functions of each and passes on enriched by the experiences that each contributes to his developing consciousness. The ascent he finds is from ignorance to knowledge. The human being starts from the darkest bed of ignorance, the solid basis of rock as it were, the body, the material existence. Ignorance here is absolute inconscience. Out of the total absence of consciousness, the being begins to awake and rise to a gradually developing – widening, deepening and heightening – consciousness. That is how Ashwapati advances, ascends from a purely bodily life and consciousness, to the next rung of the ladder, the first appearance and expression of life-force, the vital consciousness – energies and forms of the small lower vital. He moves on, moves upward, there is a growing light in and mixed with the obscurity; ignorance begins to shed its hard and dark coatings one by one and gives place to directed and motivated energies. He meets beings and creatures appropriate to those levels crawling and stirring and climbing, moved by the laws governing the respective regions. In this way Ashwapati passes

on into the higher vital, into the border of the mental.

Ashwapati now observes with a clear vividness that all these worlds and the beings and forces that inhabit them are stricken as it were with a bar sinister branded upon their bodies. In spite of an inherent urge of ascension the way is not a straight road but devious and crooked breaking into by-lanes and blind alleys. There is a great corruption and perversion of natural movements towards Truth: falsehoods and pretensions, arrogance of blindness reign here in various degrees. Ashwapati sought to know the wherefore of it all. So he goes behind, dives down and comes into a region that seems to be the source and basis of all ignorance and obscurity and falsehood. He comes into the very heart of the Night, the abyss of consciousness. He meets there the Mother of Evil and the sons of darkness. He stands before

> ...the gate of a false Infinite,
> An eternity of disastrous absolutes...[1]

Here are the forces that pull down and lure away to perdition all that man's aspirations and the world's urge seek to express and build of Divine things. It is the world in which the forces of the original inconscience find their primitive play. They are dark and dangerous: they prey upon earth's creatures who are not content with being vassals of darkness but try to move to the Light.

Dangerous is this passage for the celestial aspirant:

> Where the red Wolf waits by the fordless stream
> And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice...[2]

He must be absolutely vigilant, absolutely on his guard, absolutely sincere.

> Here must the traveller of the upward way –
> For daring Hell's kingdoms winds the heavenly route –

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 221.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Pause or pass slowly through that perilous space,
A prayer upon his lips and the great Name.[3]

But there is no escape. The divine traveller has to pass through this region. For it lies athwart his path to the goal. Not only so, it is necessary to go through this Night. For Ashwapati

Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,
In destruction felt creation's hasty pace,
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain
And hell as a short cut to heaven's gates.[4]

Ashwapati now passes into the higher luminous regions. He enters regions of larger breath and wider movement – the higher vital and then into the yet more luminous region of the higher mind. He reaches the heavens where immortal sages and the divinities and the gods themselves dwell. Even these Ashwapati finds to be only partial truths, various aspects, true but limited, of the One Reality beyond. Thus he leaves all behind and reaches into the single sole Reality, the transcendental Truth of things, the status vast and infinite and eternal, immutable existence and consciousness and bliss.

A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space,
An Everlastingness cut off from Time...
A stillness absolute, incommunicable ...[5]

Here seems to be the end of the quest, and one would fain stay there ever and ever in that status

...occult, impenetrable, –
Infinite, eternal, unthinkable, alone.[6]

3. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 210.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 310.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

Ashwapati was perhaps about to be lured into that Bliss but suddenly a doubt enters into him – there is a hesitation, a questioning; he hears a voice:

> The ego is dead; we are free from being and care,
> We have done with birth and death and work and fate.
> O soul, it is too early to rejoice!
> Thou hast reached the boundless silence of the Self,
> Thou hast leaped into a glad divine abyss;
> But where hast thou thrown self's mission and
> self's power?
> On what dead bank on the Eternal's road?[7]

Ashwapati veers round. A new perception, a new consciousness begins to open within him. A new urge moves him. He has to start on a new journey, a new quest and achievement. The world exists neither as a Truth nor as an illusion in itself. It exists in and through the Mother of the worlds. There is a motive in its existence and it is her will that is being worked out in that existence. The world moves for the fulfilment of a purpose that is being evolved through earth-life and human-life. The ignorant incomplete human life upon earth is not the be-all and end-all of the life here. That life has to evolve into a life of light and love and joy perfect here below. Nature as it is now will be transmuted into a new pure and radiant substance. Ashwapati is filled with this new urge and inspired by this new vision. He sees and understands now the truth of his life, the goal that has to be achieved, the great dream that has to be realised here upon earth in and through matter. He sees how nature has been labouring ceaselessly and tirelessly through aeons through eternity onward. He is now almost impatient to see the consummation here and now. The divine Voice however shows him the wisdom of working patiently, hastening slowly. The Voice admonishes him:

> I ask thee not to merge thy heart of flame
> In the Immobile's wide uncaring bliss...

7. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 310

Thy soul was born to share the laden Force;
Obey thy nature and fulfil thy fate:
Accept the difficulty and godlike toil,
For the slow-paced omniscient purpose live....
All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.[8]

But the human flame once kindled is hard to put down. It seeks an immediate result. It does not understand the fullness of time. So Ashwapati cries out:

Heavy and long are the years our labour counts
And still the seals are firm upon man's soul
And weary is the ancient Mother's heart....
Linger not long with thy transmuting hand
Pressed vainly on one golden bar of Time...
Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.[9]

This great cry of the human soul moved the Divine Mother and she granted at last its prayer. She answered by bestowing of her motherly comfort on the yearning thirsty soul:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron Law...
A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.[10]

And She herself came down upon earth as Ashwapati's daughter to undertake the human labour and accomplish the Divine work.

(2)

The Divine Mother is upon earth as a human creature. She is to

8. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, pp. 335-336, 341.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

change the mortal earth into an immortal paradise. Earth at present is a bundle of material inconscience. The Supreme Consciousness has manifested itself as supreme unconsciousness. The Divine has lost itself in pulverising itself, scattering itself abroad. Immortality is thus entombed here below in death. The task of the incarnate Supreme Consciousness is to revive the death-bound divinity, to free the human consciousness in its earthly life from the obscurity of the material unconsciousness, re-install it in its original radiant status of the Divine Consciousness.

Such is Savitri's mission. This mission has two sessions or periods. The first, that of preparation; the second, that of fulfilment. Savitri, the human embodiment was given only twelve months out of her earthly life and in that short space of time she had to do all the preparation. She knew her work from her very birth, she was conscious of her nature and the mission she was entrusted with. Now she is facing the crisis. Death is there standing in front. What is to be done, how is she to proceed? She was told she is to conquer Death, she is to establish immortal life upon mortal earth. The Divine Voice rings out:

> Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death.[11]

Yes, she is ready to do it, but not for herself, but for her Love, the being who was the life of her life. Savitri is the Divine Consciousness but here in the mortal body she is clothed in the human consciousness; it is the human consciousness that she is to lead upward and beyond and it is in and through the human consciousness that the Divine Realisation has to be expressed and established. The human Savitri declares: If Death is conquered, it is for the sake of Satyavan living eternally with her. She seems to say: What I wish to see is the living Satyavan and I united with him for ever. I do not need an earthly life without him; with him I prefer to be in another world if necessary away from the obscurity and turmoil of this earth here.

11. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 474.

My strength is taken from me and given to Death,
Why should I lift my hands to the shut heavens...
Why should I strive with earth's unyielding laws
Or stave off death's inevitable hour?
This surely is best to pactise with my fate
And follow close behind my lover's steps
And pass through night from twilight to the sun...[12]

But a thunderous voice descends from above shaking Savitri to the very basis of her existence.

And what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows
The work was left undone for which it came?[13]

Thus a crisis very similar to that which Ashwapati had to face now confronts Savitri also. Both of them were at the crossroads away from the earth in the pure delights of the heavens or in the world labouring on earth's soil. Savitri's soul was now revealed to her in its fullness. She viewed the mighty destiny for which she had come down and the great work she had to achieve here upon earth, not any personal or individual human satisfaction or achievement but a cosmic fulfilment, a global human realisation. The godhead in Savitri is now fully awake, established in its plenitude – the Divinity incarnate in the human frame. All the godheads, all the goddess-emanations now entered into her and moulded the totality of her mighty stature.

Here begins then the second stage of her mission, – her work and achievement, the conquest of Death. Only the Divine human being can conquer Death. Savitri follows Death step by step revealing gradually the mystery of death, his personality and his true mission, although the dark God thinks that it is he who is taking away Satyavan and Savitri along with him, to his own home, his black annihilation. For Death is that in its first appearance, it is utter destruction, nothing-ness, non-existence. So the mighty Godhead declares in an imperious tone to the mortal woman Savitri:

12. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 474-475.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

This is my silent dark immensity,
This is the home of everlasting Night,
This is the secrecy of Nothingness
Entombing the vanity of life's desires....
Hopest thou still always to last and love?[14]

Indeed Death is not merely a destruction of the body, it is in reality nothingness, non-being. The moment being, existence, reality manifested itself, established itself as a material fact, simultaneously there came out and stood against it, its opposite non-being, non-existence, non-reality; against an everlasting 'yes' there was posited an everlasting 'no'. And in fact, this everlasting No proves to be a greater effective reality, it has wound itself around every constituent atom of the universe. That is what has expressed itself in the material domain as the irreversible degradation of energy and in the mortal world it is denial and doubt and falsehood – it is that which brings about failure in life, and frustration, misery and grief. But then Savitri's vision penetrated beyond and she saw, Death is a way of achieving the end more swiftly and more completely. The negation is an apparent obstacle in order to increase, to purify and intensify the speed of the process by which the world and humanity is being remodelled and recreated. This terrible Godhead pursues the human endeavour till the end; until he finds that nothing more is to be done; then his mission too is fulfilled.* So a last cry, the cry of a desperate dying Death, pierces the universe and throws the final challenge to Savitri:

O human claimant to immortality,
Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force,

14. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 586.

* We are reminded here of a parallelism in Goethe's conception of the role of Satan (the Negative Principle) in human affairs. Satan is not merely a destroying devil, he is a constructive angel. For it is he

Who must goad and lease
And toil to serve creation.

whenever

Man's efforts sink below his proper level.

Then will I give back to thee Satyavan.
Or if the Mighty Mother is with thee,
Show me her face that I may worship her;
Let deathless eyes look into the eyes of Death...[15]

Death's desire, his prayer too is fulfilled. He faces Savitri but this is not the Savitri against whom he fought. Whose is this voice?

I hail thee almighty and victorious Death,
Thou grandiose Darkness of the Infinite....
I have given thee thy awful shape of dread
And thy sharp sword of terror and grief and pain
To force the soul of man to struggle for light...[16]

What happens thereafter is something strange and tremendous and miraculous. Light flashed all around, a leaping tongue of fire spread out and the dark form of Death was burnt – not to ashes but to blazing sparks of light:

His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.[17]

Thus Death came to his death – not to death in reality but to a new incarnation. Death returned to his original divine Reality, an emanation of the Divine Mother.

A secret splendour rose revealed to sight
Where once the vast embodied Void had stood.
Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.[18]

In that domain of pure transcendent light stood face to face the human Savitri and the transformed Satyavan.

15. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29. p. 664.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 666.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 667.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 679.

(3)

Savitri has entered into the deathless luminous world where there is only faultless beauty, stainless delight and an unmeasured self-gathered strength. Saviri heard the melodious voice of the Divine:

You have now left earth's miseries and its impossible conditions, you have reached the domain of unalloyed felicity and you need not go back to the old turbulent life: dwell here both of you and enjoy eternal bliss.

But Savitri answered firm and moveless:

> I climb not to thy everlasting Day,
> Even as I have shunned thy eternal Night....
> Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
> Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield...
> Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,
> Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.[19]

Once more Savitri, even like Ashwapati, has to make a choice between two destinies, two soul-movements – although the choice is already made even before it is offered to her. Ashwapati had to abandon, we know, the silent immutable transcendent status of pure light in order to bathe in this lower earthly light. Savitri too as the prototype of human consciousness chose and turned to this light of the earth.

The Rishi of the Upanishad declared: they who worship only Ignorance enter into darkness, but they who worship knowledge alone enter into a still darker darkness. This world of absolute light which Savitri names 'everlasting day' is what the Upanishadic Rishi sees and describes as the golden lid upon the face of the Sun. The Sun is the complete integral light of the Truth in its fullness. The golden covering has to be removed if one is to see the Sun itself – to live the integral life, one has to possess the integral truth.

So it is that Savitri comes down upon earth and standing upon

19. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 686.

its welcoming soil speaks to Satyavan as though consoling him for having abandoned their own abode in heaven to dwell among mortal men:

> Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth...
> Still am I she who came to thee mid the murmur
> Of sunlit leaves upon this forest verge...
> All that I was before, I am to thee still...[20]

Voicing Satyavan's thought and feeling, all humanity, the whole world in joy and gratefulness, utters this *mantra* of thanksgiving:

> If this is she of whom the world has heard,
> Wonder no more at any happy change.[21]

(4)

In her *Prayers and Meditations* the Mother says:

> *Comme l'homme n'a pas voulu du repas que j'avais préparé avec tant d'amour et de soin, alors j'ai invité le Dieu à le prendre.*
>
> *Et mon Dieu, Tu as accepté mon invitation et Tu es venu t'asseoir à ma table; et en échange de ma pauvre et humble offrande Tu m'as octroyé la finale libération!**

What is this banquet that she prepared for man and which man refused? It is nothing else than the Life Divine here below – the life of the Gods enjoying immortality, full of the supreme light and power, love and delight. Man refused because for him it

20. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 719.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 723.

* "Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoked the God to take it.

My God, Thou hast accepted my invitation, Thou hast come to sit at my table, and in exchange for my poor and humble offering Thou hast granted to me the last liberation."

is something too high, too great. Being a creature earth-bound and of small dimensions he can seize and appreciate only small things, little specks of a material world. He refused, first of all, because of his ignorance; he does not know, nor is he capable of conceiving that there are such things as immortal life, divinity, unobscured light, griefless love, or a radiant, tranquil, invisible energy. He does not know and yet he is arrogant, arrogant in his little knowledge, his petty power, in his blind self-sufficiency. Furthermore, besides ignorance and arrogance there is an element of revolt in him, for in his half-wakefulness with his rudimentary consciousness, if ever he came in contact with something that is above and beyond him, if a shadow of another world happens to cross his threshold, he is not at peace, does not want to recognise but denies and even curses it.

The Divine Mother brings solace and salvation. For the Grace it is such a small and easy thing, it is a wonder how even such a simple, natural, inconspicuous thing could be refused by anybody.

If man finds no use for the gift she has brought down for him, naturally she will take it back and return it to Him to whom it belongs, for all things belong to the Supreme Lord, even She belongs to Him, as She is one with Him. The Gita says: there is nothing else than the Brahman in the creation – the doer, the doing and the deed, all are essentially He. In the sacrifice that is this moving, acting universe, the offerer, the offering and the offered, each and every element is the Brahman – *brahmārpanam brahma haviḥ*.

This gesture of the Divine Mother teaches us also what should be the approach and attitude of human beings in all their activities. In all our movements we should always remember Him, refer to Him, consider that in the last analysis each and every movement comes from Him and we must always offer them to Him, return them to the parent-source from where they come, therein lies freedom, the divine detachment which the individual must possess always in order to be one with Him, feel one's identity with Him.

(5)

Man's refusal of the Divine Grace has been depicted very beautifully and graphically in a perfect dramatic form by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. The refusal comes one by one from the three constituent parts of the human being. First of all man is a material being, a bodily creature, as such he is a being of ignorance and misery, of brutish blindness. He does not know that there is something other than his present state of misfortune and dark fate. He is not even aware that there may be anything higher or nobler than the ugliness he is steeped in. He lives on earth-life with an earth-consciousness, moves mechanically and helplessly through vicissitudes over which he has no control. Even so the material life is not a mere despicable thing; behind its darkness, behind its sadness, behind all its infirmities, the Divine Mother is there upholding it and infusing into it her grace and beauty. Indeed, she is one with this world of sorrows, she has in effect become it in her infinite pity and love so that this material body of hers may become conscious of its divine substance and manifest her true form. But the human being individualised and separated in egoistic consciousness has lost the sense of its inner reality and is vocal only in regard to its outward formulation. It is natural for physical man therefore to reject and deny the physical Godhead in him, he even curses it and wants to continue as he is. He yells therefore in ignorance and anguish:

> I am the Man of Sorrows, I am he
> Who is nailed on the wide cross of the Universe...
> I toil like the animal, like the animal die.
> I am man the rebel, man the helpless serf...
> I know my fate will ever be the same,
> It is my Nature's work that cannot change...
> I was made for evil, evil is my lot;
> Evil I must be and by evil live;
> Nought other can I do but be myself;
> What Nature made, that I must remain.[22]

22. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 505-507.

The Divine glory manifests itself for a moment to the earthly consciousness but man refuses to be pulled out of its pigsty. The Grace withdraws but in its Supreme Consciousness of unity and love consoles the fallen creature and gives it the assurance:

> One day I will return, a bringer of strength...
> Misery shall pass abolished from the earth;
> The world shall be freed from the anger of the Beast...[23]

The basic status or foundation of Man, in fact of creation, is earth, the material organisation. After the body, next comes the life and Life-power. Here man attains a larger dynamic being of energy and creative activity. Here too, on this level, what man is or what he achieves is only a reflection, a shadow, but mostly a misshapen resemblance, an aberration of the divine reality that hides behind, and yet half-reveals itself. That Godhead is the Mother's form of Might, we name it variously, Kali and Durga and Lakshmi, for it is Her Grace that is ultimately expressed and fulfilled in this world of vital power. It is because of this realising power of the Mother that

> Slowly the Light grows greater in the East,
> Slowly the world progresses on God's road.
> His seal is on my task, it cannot fail;
> I shall hear the silver swing of heaven's gates
> When God comes out to meet the soul of the world.[24]

But man in the strength of his ignorance and arrogance does not recognise this Goddess. Human power, we have said, is a reflection, a shadow of the Divine Power but most often it is a deformed, a perverted Divine Power. Man is full of his egoistic vital self-confidence: he believes it is his own will that is realising all, all which is achieved here; whatever he has created, it is through the might of his own merit and whatever new

23. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 507.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 510.

creations will be done in the future will be through the Grace of his own genius. A mighty vital selfhood obscures his consciousness and he sees nothing else, understands nothing else beyond the reach of that limited vision. This is the Rakshasa, this is the Asura in man. Here is his philosophy of life:

> I climb, a claimant to the throne of heaven.
> The last-born of the earth I stand the first...
> I am God still unevolved in human form;
> Even if he is not, he becomes in me....
> No magic can surpass my magic's skill.
> There is no miracle I shall not achieve.[25]

So this vital being in man in his Rakshasic hunger and Asuric self-conceit rejects the Divine Power that is in fact behind him too, supporting him. The Goddess, in the wake of her predecessor, goes back from where she came, leaving however a consoling word, assuring that one day she will return; she will bide her time. For one day,

> The cry of the ego shall be hushed within,
> Its lion-roar that claims the world as food,
> All shall be might and bliss and happy force.[26]

In his body man is the beast, in the vital he is the Rakshasa and the Asura, he rises now into the mind. And in the mind he is the human being proper, he has attained his own humanity. Here he has received the light of knowledge, a wider and deeper consciousness, he has unveiled the secret mysteries of Nature, brought to play hidden forces that were unknown and untapped. All these achievements have been possible for man because it is the Mother of Light that is behind and has come forward to shed something of her luminous presence around. But man has no inkling of the presence of this luminous Deity, his own light has been a screen in front of the inner divine light. It is not possible

25. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 511-512.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

for the human mind to seize the higher light: his consciousness, his knowledge is too narrow, too superficial, too dull to comprehend what is beyond. This Divine Light is also a thing of delight, the consciousness it possesses is also the very essence of Joy and Felicity. But all that is occult to the human knowledge. Man considers Truth is his property, whatever truth is there his understanding can grasp it and bring it to play: Truth and Reality are commensurate with his own consciousness, his mental comprehension. What others speak of as realities of the spirit, truths transcendental, are an illusion and delusion. This is what is usually known as the scientific mind, the rational consciousness. An orthodox scientific mentality is in the first instance a thing of overweening self-confidence, of arrogant self-assertion. It declares in its formidable pride:

> I have seized the cosmic energies for my use.
> I have pored on her infinitesimal elements
> And her invisible atoms have unmasked...
> If God is at work, his secrets I have found.[27]

This imperiousness in man seems however to be a sheer imperviousness: it is a mask, a hollow appearance; for with all his knowledge, at the end he has attained no certainty, no absoluteness. There is something behind, all the outer bravado he flourishes has a sense of helplessness, at times almost as pitiable as that of a child; for he finds at last

> All is a speculation or a dream.
> In the end the world itself becomes a doubt...[28]

It is true his survey of the universe, his knowledge of boundless Nature and the inexhaustible multiplicities of creation have given him a sense of the endless and the infinite but he has not the necessary light or capacity to follow those lines of infinity, on the contrary, there is a shrinking in him at the touch of

27. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 518-519.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 519.

such vastnesses; his small humanity makes him desperately earth-bound, his aspiration follows the lines of least resistance:

> Our smallness saves us from the Infinite.
> In a frozen grandeur lone and desolate
> Call me not to die the great eternal Death...
> Human I am, human let me remain
> Till in the Inconscient I fall dumb and sleep.[29]

Thus, this Goddess too, is rejected like her previous comrades, the Mother of Light, the Deity who is properly the guide and ruler of man's own destiny. Even she is refused but hers is not to complain, in tranquil quietness she brings comfort and hope to the troubled human mind and says she goes to come back in the fullness of her incarnation. She utters divinely:

> One day I shall return, His hands in mine,
> And thou shalt see the face of the Absolute.
> Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
> Then shall the divine family be born.[30]

(6)

To the inconscient and ignorant human nature, Savitri, the Divine's delegate presents the powers and personalities that are behind man's present infirmities – these broken images of true realities lying scattered about in the front of existence. Man will be made conscious, he is being made conscious step by step precisely by such relations from time to time. The Vedic image is that of the eternal succession of dawns whose beginning no one knows, nor the end, that creation proceeds from light to light, from consciousness to higher reaches of consciousness. From the material life through the vital and the mental life he first reaches the spiritual life and finally the Life Divine. From the animal he rises to manhood, and in the end to Godhood.

29. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 520.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 521.

But there are intermediaries. The fullness of the realisation depends on the fullness of the incarnation. The Evil in the body, the Evil in the vital, the Evil in the mind are, whatever their virulence and intransigence, subsidiary agents, for they serve only a mightier Lord. The first original Sin is Death, the God of Denial, of non-existence. That is the very source – *fons et origo* – the fount and origin of all the misfortune, the fate that terrestrial life involves. This demon, this anti-Divine has to be tracked and destroyed or dissolved into its original origin. This is the Nihil that negates the Divine – *Asat* that seeks to nullify *Sat* and that has created this world of ignorance and misery, that is to say, in its outward pragmatic form. So Saviri sees the one source and knows the remedy. Therefore she pursues Death, pursues him to the end, that is, to the end of death. The luminous energy of the Supreme faces now its own shadow and blazes it up. The flaming Light corrodes into the substance of the darkness and makes of it her own transfigured substance. This then is the gift that Savitri brings to man, the Divine's own immortality, transfusing the mortality that reigns now upon earth.

In view of the necessity of the age, for the crucial, critical and, in a way, final consummation of Nature's evolutionary urge, the Divine Himself has to come down in the fullness of His divinity; for only then can the earth be radically changed and wholly transformed. In the beginning the Divine once came down, but by sacrificing Himself, being pulverised, scattered and lost in the infinitesimals of a universal, material, unconsciousness. Once again He has to come down, but this time in the supreme glory of His victorious Luminosity.

This then is the occult, the symbolic sense of the Mother's gesture turning away from man with her gifts and returning to the Divine Himself, and inviting Him as the chief guest of honour upon this earth. Or, in the Vedic image, He is to come as the flaming front and leader of the journeying sacrifice that is this universal existence.

God's Debt

Here is a line from *Savitri*:

> And paying here God's debt to earth and man...

What is this debt that God owes to earth and man? We understand the debt that man and earth owe to God, their creator. But how is God indebted to his creation? Besides we learn that God pays his debt through his representative, his protagonist upon earth, the aspiring human being.

First let us understand the mystery of God's debt to man. We know, in ordinary life a subordinate has a duty towards his superior, the lesser owes a debt to the greater. That is easily understood. Likewise the superior also has a duty to his subordinate, the greater has his duty to the smaller. The child owes a debt to his parents; no less is the debt that the parents owe to the child. The parents not only bring forth the child, but they have to bring him up, nourish, foster, educate and settle him in life. We know also, as the scriptures tell us, that there is a debt man owes to the gods. The paying of the debt is described in the institution of the sacrifice (*yajña*). It is through his sacrifice that man achieves what he has to acheive upon earth. It is the giving – of what one is and what one has – to the gods – the sacrifice mounts carrying the offering to the gods. But the sacrifice is not a mere one-sided movement, the sacrifice brings from the gods gifts for the man – material prosperity and spiritual fulfilment. Man increases himself in this way, but thereby increases the gods also. The offering that man brings in his sacrifice – all his possessions – his earthly possessions, but chiefly his possessions of the inner world, the wealth of his spirit, the virtues of his consciousness – all go to the gods and increase them, that is to say, they become more manifest and more powerful upon earth and in earthly existence and in the service of man.

The sacrifice going up to the gods as offered by man means the sadhana, the inner discipline that he follows by which he lifts

up his being with its mental and vital and physical formulations to their higher and higher potencies upon earth. The dedication of the normal powers and faculties to the gods means purification and release from the bondages of ignorance and egoism. This serves to make the gods living to us, bring them near to our terrestrial life, to our normal consciousness. This is what is meant by increasing the gods – man's duty or debt to the gods. In answer there is a corresponding gesture from the gods, with their immortalising reality they dwell in us and fill our being with their godlike qualities, their light, their energy, their delight, their very immortality. Man increases the gods and the gods increase man and by their mutual increasing they attain the supreme increment, the Divine status, so says the Gita.

Now, we go beyond the gods, to the very origin, God himself, the Supreme. What is the debt that God, the Supreme, the Divine, owes to us human beings? We owe to God everything, our life, our very existence, our soul and substance given to us by him, then how is he indebted to us? What kind of debt he has incurred which he has to pay to his creature, the human being? Primarily because he is the Divine Father, he has to take charge of his own crèation, see to its growth and fruition and fulfilment. Indeed that is the role of the Divine in us (and above us and around us): that is his work, the Divine Work. Since he has put us out of his consciousness (for a special experience of growth and development), it is also his work (and duty) to bring us back to him: after a process of self-separation a process of self-integration. Man, so long as he is a separate consciousness has to dedicate, lift up and unify this separative conscious being to the whole being and consciousness. This is how he discharges his debt to the Divine, and the answering grace of the Divine is the clearing of the debt which He owes to His creatures.

What has been said of man is equally applicable to earth. The destiny of man is the destiny of earth as also the destiny of earth is the destiny of man. For man is an earthly creature, is born out of earth and he grows with the growth of the earth; equally the earth grows with the growth of man.

In reality it is God's growth in man and earth that is reflected

and embodied in the growth of man and earth. The debt spoken of is the debt of God himself to himself. In other words, it is a work, a mission that he has himself taken upon himself for his own mysterious delight of existence.

Earth moves forward through man who is its flowering and man moves forward through his representative, the higher man, who reveals and embodies still greater potentialities of God's creation, having the privilege of being so conscious as to contact the gods and God Himself – he is master of life-force (*aśwapati*); he climbs to the summits and brings down upon earth the heavenly riches and the Divine Grace, which fulfils, transmuting all debits into credits.

(1)

A guardian of the unconsoled abyss
Inheriting the long agony of the globe,
A stone-still figure of high and godlike Pain
Stared into space with fixed regardless eyes
That saw grief's timeless depths but not life's goal.
Afflicted by his harsh divinity,
Bound to his throne, he waited unappeased
The daily oblation of her unwept tears.[1]

The deepest and the most fundamental mystery of the human consciousness (and in fact of the earth consciousness) is not that there is an unregenerate aboriginal being there as its bed-rock, a being made of the very stuff of ignorance and inconscience and inertia that is Matter: it is this that the submerged being is not merely dead matter, but a concentrated, a solidified flame, as it were, a suppressed aspiration that burns inwardly, all the more violent because it is not articulate and in the open. The aboriginal is that which harbours in its womb the original being. That is the Inconscient Godhead, the Divinity in pain – *Mater Dolorosa* – the Divine Being who lost himself totally when transmuted into Matter and yet is harassed always by the oestrus of a secret flame driving it to know itself, to find itself, to be itself again. It is Rudra, the Energy coiled up in Matter and forging ahead towards a progressive evolution in light and consciousness. That is what Savitri, the universal Divine Grace become material and human, finds at the core of her being, the field and centre of concentrated struggle, a millennial aspiration petrified, a grief of ages congealed, a divinity lone and benumbed in a trance. This divinity has to awake and labour. The god has to be cruel to himself, for his divinity demands that he must surpass himself, he cannot

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 10.

abdicate, let Nature go her own way, the inferior path of ease and escape. The godhead must exercise its full authority, exert all its pressure upon itself – *tapas taptvā* – and by this heat of incubation release the energy that leads towards the light and the high fulfilment. In the meanwhile, the task is not easy. The divine sweetness and solicitude lights upon this hardened divinity: but the inertia of the Inconscient, the 'Pani', hides still the light within its rocky cave and would not deliver it. The Divine Grace, mellow with all the tears of love and sympathy and tenderness she has gathered for the labouring godhead, has pity for the hard lot of a humanity stone-bound to the material life, yet yearning and surging towards freedom. The godhead is not consoled or appeased until that freedom is achieved and light and immortality released. The Grace is working slowly, laboriously perhaps but surely to that end: the stone will wear down and melt one day. Is that fateful day come?

That is the meaning of human life, the significance of even the very ordinary human life. It is the field of a "dire debate", "a fierce question", a constant struggle between the two opposing or rather polar forces, the will or aspiration "to be" and the will of inertia "not to be" – the friction, to use a Vedic image, of the two batons of the holy sacrificial wood, *araṇi* out of which the flame is to leap forth. The pain and suffering men are subject to in this unhappy vale of tears – physical illness and incapacity, vital frustration or mental confusion – are symbols and expressions of a deeper fundamental Pain. That pain is the pain of labour, the travail for the birth and incarnation of a godhead asleep or dead. Indeed, the sufferings and ills of life are themselves powerful instruments. They inevitably lead to the Bliss, they are the fuel that kindles, quickens and increases the Fire of Ecstasy that is to blaze up on the day of victory in the full and integral spiritual consciousness. The round of ordinary life is not vain or meaningless: its petty innocent-looking moments and events are the steps of the marching Divinity. Even the commonest life is the holy sacrificial rite progressing through the oblations of our experiences, bitter or sweet, towards the revelation and establishment of the immortal godhead in man.

(2)

Savitri, the Divine Grace in human form, is upon earth. The Divine Consciousness has abandoned its own supreme transcendental status to enter into the human consciousness and partake of the earthly life: it has taken up a mortal frame, to live and dwell here below. Only thus she can transform the lower animal nature into the divine nature, raise man to godhead, make of earth heaven itself:

> A prodigal of her rich divinity,
> Her self and all she was she had lent to men,
> Hoping her greater being to implant
> That heaven might native grow on mortal soil.[2]

But the task is not easy. The flesh is weak: it is incapable of holding or receiving the breath of immortality. Not only so, it has a positive aversion, a bad will: it is refractory, antipathetic to the touch of the spirit. Matter is dull and dumb, dark and obdurate: mortality loves and clings jealously and exclusively to its mortal home. The earthly being does not know, cannot appreciate the gift, the boon that is brought to him, to his very door: he has only to receive and accept in order to be saved out of all ignorance and grief, impotence and death. The Divine Mother has forgotten herself, has made herself as small and as close and native to earth as any earthly creature, like any one of us, taken upon herself all limitations and indignities, the entire burden of an earthly life, graced with her presence this mortal atmosphere. But

> Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
> Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:
> It fears the pure divine intolerance
> Of that assault of ether and of fire;
> It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,
> Almost with hate repels the light it brings;...[3]

2. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 7.
3. *Ibid.*

As, however, "mortality bears ill the eternal's touch", the eternal too is intolerant of the mortal nature – only it is intolerant not in the ignorant blind squeamish weak human way, but in a divine way, for it is armed with weapons of light and knowledge, it assaults with its luminous force, the energy of ether and fire, the higher and nobler elements as against the dense dark dumb earth, the lowest element that clothes the human consciousness. Indeed, mortality is enamoured of the tangled beam of joy and sorrow, of laughter and tears, of light and shadow and cannot contemplate the unalloyed sheer delight in Eternity. It is out of breath in the serene rarefied air of immortality; it pines for the *terra firma*, the mud and slime. The human consciousness has been fleeing the Hound of Heaven down the corridors of Time, and yet it will be caught in the end and wholly transmuted in the divine embrace into the substance of the Divine Himself. All the unwillingness and protestation and revolt are meant to forge and hammer the final union into something perfect, faultless, absolute.

NARAD'S VISIT TO KING ASWAPATHY[1]

Devarshi Narad, as usual, was sailing through the spaces, with his Vina, singing songs of innocence and joy. He was in the higher luminous heavens, the world of happiness, of light and delight, his heart full of divine felicity and his music echoing the music of his heart. Now he thought of coming down, into the lower spaces, regions nearer to the earth. And as he entered the earth atmosphere a change came over the tone and temper of his music. With the thickening of earthly shade, a darkness stole into the clear range of his music and consciousness. Instead of peace and love and joy his music turned to themes of sadness and struggle and battle and doom – of great heroism and conquest and of the supreme fulfilment of human destiny. In and through this dark passage, there emerged slowly a new radiance, the advent of a new conquest for the human consciousness – the possibility of man rising from the animal to divinity.

Narad himself represents a divine consummation of the human being. He is a devarshi, that is to say, he has by his tapasya and spiritual growth surpassed his humanity and developed into a divine immortal being. Now his special work is to be a wandering angel – surveying the world, help it in its onward march, bring to mankind the aid for its forward march, so that it may battle successfully with the hostiles, overpower the hostiles and win the glory of divine immortality.

LINES FROM *Savitri*:

(1)

A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time.
For him mind's limiting firmament ceased above,

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 415.

In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day
A gap was rent in the all-concealing vault;
The conscious ends of being went rolling back:
The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent:
Overpassed was this world of rigid limiting forms:
Life's barriers opened into the Unknown.[2]

Notes:

Griffin = Golden Hawk
+
Winged Lion
——
The piercing eye of soaring aspiration
+
Upsurging energy of the pure vital
——
Remember Vishnu's Garuda
+
Durga's lion
——

With these twin powers you cross safely the borderland between the lower and the upper hemisphere – the twilight world (Night and Day) – Griffin is the guardian God of this passage – *Dvārapālaka*.

(2)

Then stretches the boundless finite's last expanse,
The cosmic empire of the Overmind,
Time's buffer state bordering Eternity,
Too vast for the experience of man's soul:
All here gathers beneath one golden sky:
The Powers that build the cosmos station take
In its house of infinite possibility;

2. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 25.

Each god from there builds his own nature's world;
Ideas are phalanxed like a group of sums;
Thought crowds in masses seized by one regard;
All Time is one body, Space a single book:
There is the Godhead's universal gaze
And there the boundaries of immortal Mind:
The line that parts and joins the hemispheres
Closes in on the labour of the Gods
Fencing Eternity from the toil of Time.[3]

Notes:

Ideas are phalanxed like a group of sums;
Thought crowds in masses seized by one regard...

The image is that of the composition of an army or that of a mathematical series (e.g., arithmetical or geometrical progression). It is composed of regularised units of different values (*group of sums*), but all measured and definite and precise – e.g., in the case of an army – company, brigade, battalion, army – an ascending scale, the whole also forming one big unit, taken in at a glance – that is the nature of overmind vision.

Note, a unit is a summation of sub-units – even the ultimate units are composites (*masses*, in case of bigger units) – e.g., molecule, atom, particle (nucleon), point.

(3)

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.[4]

3. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*. SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 660-61.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 343.

Notes:

The whole thing refers to the New Creation coming down from above – now down into the psycho-vital or physico-vital or even the subtle physical plane. This New Creation is the creation of the Divine Love – the Mother's Love.

Morning Star – Venus, Goddess of Love – embodying New Creation.

Amber colour representing a particular plane of consciousness. Yellow+red+a touch of brown – physico-vital or even subtle physical plane – the New Creation come down on that plane.

"It was the hour before the Gods awake". Only when the Gods awake, does the light begin to appear on earth. Otherwise it is all night here, black, impenetrable and unfathomable. Indeed the very creation begins with the awakening of the Gods. When the Gods are asleep, it is the non-existence – *tama āsīt tamasā gūḍhamagre* – 'in the beginning darkness was engulfed in darkness'. This is the *asat*, non-being, this is the *acit*, the inconscience, this is the blackest night. The Bible also speaks of a similar darkness – Job's terrible vision: "A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order and where the light is as darkness."[1] The lamp of consciousness is not yet lit. The dark vacancy stretches across the path of creation yet to be, the light that is to come. This shadow is the negation of the light behind, it is the original of the creation. It is presented as the mere material universe apparently dead and dry, the utter inconscience with no sign of consciousness anywhere. And earth seems to be there part of it, a shadow within the shadow, a dark spot wheeling in a dark mass.

It is the pre-creation, one might say, the creation before the creation – the shadow creation. We know coming events cast their shadow before, as a kind of forewarning, foreboding: that is the dark messenger, the bright messenger will follow. For after all, it is His shadow – "And into the midnight his shadow is thrown."

The original inconscience is a non-existence, a nihil in which all existence is rolled up and dissolved, an infinite non-entity or zero. This is the zero here below, on the reverse side of the reality. But there is another zero up above and beyond, beyond the superconsciousness, the *Sunya*, beyond Sachchidananda. In between is the world of night, the world of gestation where the Gods are asleep. When the Divine, the One indivisible existence felt the first stirring and was moved to create, he divided himself

1. *Book of Job*. 10.21.

and cast himself as it were out of himself. And the Light and Consciousness of his Being forthwith leaped into darkness and inconscience. That is the involution of the Supreme into material existence.

This original darkness is the womb of creation, it is something akin to Hiranyagarbha of Indian tradition. The fiat has gone from the Supreme to resurrect this darkness – his alter-ego – and he sends down the messenger-light. So the Gods are about to wake, there is a stir in their slumber. The creation as manifestation begins when the first ray of light strikes the darkness. That is when the Gods open their eyes. But the spell of darkness returns and swallows up the light.

The earth too, one with the surrounding mass of darkness and inconscience is asleep and insentient. She has to wake up and start on her journey moving forward, unveiling her secret mysteries towards the supreme revelation, the Divine incarnation in matter. The Gods are awake, in order to awaken the earth. A first ray is sent down and it touches as it were the sleeping Mother. The Divine Ray is just like a finger of a child touching her mother trying, as it were, to persuade her to open her eyes and look at her child. The first ray, however, comes not as a caress to the inert being of darkness, it is a sharp prick, even a hard blow. Such is the first impact of light upon dead matter; and the light is thrown back, as an unwelcome intruder, into what it came from; and the darkness grovels in its old groove. The second stage comes when the impact is not felt as a pain or something totally foreign and strange; its touch is felt as something soothing, something that heals an eternal sore. But this too was not suffered long and the light has to go back again.

These are the successive dawns of which the Vedic Rishis speak, through which the light and consciousness in the dark inconscience gradually grows, increases in volume and strength. The continued descent of the light into earth brings about the change upon earth, that is called evolution, that is to say, the transformation of the dark inconscience here below into the original Super-Light of which it was the shadow cast out because of the original separation from the Source.

Savitri represents one such divine dawn at a crucial moment of earth-life. She embodies creation's entire past and shows in her life how that past is transformed through the alchemy of Divine Grace to a glorious future – the inevitable destiny that awaits man and earth.

(1)

THE PASSING OF SATYAVAN

This was the day when Satyavan must die.

The day is come, the fateful day, the last day of the twelve happy months that they have passed together. She knew it, it was foretold, it was foreseen. And she was preparing herself for it all the while, harbouring a pain deep-seated within the heart, revealed to none, not even to her mother, not even to Satyavan. Satyavan was innocent like a child, oblivious of the fate that was coming upon him. The two went out of the hermitage into the forest; for she wished to move about in the company of Satyavan in the midst of the happy greeneries where Satyavan had passed his boyhood, his youth. She was watching Satyavan at every step, she did not want to be caught unawares:

> Love in her bosom hurt with jagged edges
> Of anguish moaned at every step with pain
> Crying, "Now, now perhaps his voice will cease
> For ever."...[1]

She was on tip-toe as it were, almost breathless, the end must be coming on fast.

> Her life was now in seconds, not in hours,
> And every moment she economised...[2]

Satyavan in playfulness was cutting the branch of a tree with a joyous axe and on his lips:

> ...high snatches of a sage's chant
> That pealed of conquered death and demons slain,[3]

1. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 563.
2. *Ibid.* 3. *Ibid.*

All of a sudden the doom came upon him, he felt a biting pain through his body and an invading suffocation besieged him. He threw away the axe and cried out to Savitri:

> "Savitri, a pang
> Cleaves through my head and breast...
> Such agony rends me...
> Awhile let me lay my head upon thy lap..."[4]

Savitri saw the end coming and she was ready:

> All grief and fear were dead within her now
> And a great calm had fallen.[5]

His life was ebbing away and

> He cried out in a clinging last despair,
> "Savitri, Savitri, O Savitri,
> Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die."...
> His cheek pressed down her golden arm. She sought
> His mouth still with her living mouth, as if
> She could persuade his soul back with her kiss;
> Then grew aware they were no more alone.
> Something had come there conscious, vast and dire.
> Near her she felt a silent shade immense...[6]

Death is come claiming his prey, Satyavan must go and leave Savitri.

(2)

THE INTER-ZONE

Death is carrying away Satyavan, the luminous soul of

4. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 564.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

Satyavan. The Great Shadow is leading the way, Satyavan following and Savitri clinging to his steps. Death saw Savitri pursuing, he turned and tried to dissuade her from the pursuit. Savitri refused to turn back. Death warned her, it was already a wrong and anomalous act that she has done to have crossed over to his sphere in her earthly personal being. It is time now to go back. Savitri answered that she would go back only with Satyavan in his earthly body. Death became impatient and answered: "You ask for the impossible. You want to go back to earth for earthly happiness. You can have that in plenty without Satyavan. Satyavan has passed beyond and there is no return for him." But Savitri was firm in her resolution:

"I claim back Satyavan as he was, my happiness is with him alone."

As they proceeded, they mounted higher and higher regions of being. And a change was coming on visibly on Savitri. Death was explaining to her that happiness on earth or in earthly life is not the supremely desirable thing. The supreme desirable thing is to discard the *maya* of earthly life, that vale of tears and rise into the very source, the origin of creation, the infinite peace and silence. As Death was receding towards that ultimate Nothingness, the Divinity that Savitri was, the mighty Godhead that took a human shape, manifested itself more and more shedding all around her a great effulgence, a mighty power. She had entered into Death's own lair and identified herself with Death's self which is the Divine Himself. In that great burning Light Death was consumed and dissolved.

> The dire universal Shadow disappeared
> Vanishing into the Void from which it came....
> And Satyavan and Savitri were alone.[7]

They stand face to face with the supreme Divine alone.

There is yet a last choice to make. Death has been annihilated and immortality attained. One can rest there and enjoy immor-

7. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL. Vol. 29, p. 668.

tality eternally beyond the mortal creation. But there is a greater destiny for the human soul. Ignorance is darkness indeed but to enter into Light alone is to enter into a greater darkness. And Savitri has attained the immortality as a human being, as human personality. She is to bring down that immortality into the human creature upon earth. She refuses the everlasting day and turns to come down again into the twilight mortality with all her immortal stature so that human beings may be rebuilt in that mould.

So they come down, Satyavan and Savitri, from the Supreme heavens, rushing down as heaven's blessing as it were, through ethereal atmospheres, gradually re-assuming the texture of earthly form till they found their material body again upon this concrete earth.

> A power leaned down, a happiness found its home.
> Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss.[8].

(3)

THE RETURN

Satyavan lay on the green sward, over him and around green branches spread their peaceful felicity. His head reposed upon the lap of Savitri – exactly as he lay at the last fateful hour confronting the mighty shadow – as if there were no gap or hiatus in between, the great intervening experience was just a momentary vision and not the ageless Calvary that it seemed to be in the other sphere. But now

> The waking gladness of her members felt
> The weight of heaven in his limbs...
> And all her life was conscious of his life...
> Human she was once more, earth's Savitri,
> Yet felt in her illimitable change.[9]

8. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 712.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 715.

Satyavan's being was there:

> Pure, passionate with the passion of the gods.
> Desire stirred not its wings; for all was made
> An overarching of celestial rays
> Like the absorbed control of sky on plain,
> Heaven's leaning down to embrace from all sides
> earth...[10]

Satyavan now turned to Savitri, vague recollections rose in him and he cried out in wonder:

> "Whence hast thou brought me captive back,
> love-chained,
> To thee and sunlight's walls, O golden beam
> And casket of all sweetness, Savitri,
> Godhead and woman, moonlight of my soul?"[11]

As he gazed upon her, his wonder grew more and more with a new flame of worship in his eyes and he exclaimed once more:

> "What high change is in thee, O Savitri? Bright
> Ever thou wast, a goddess still and pure,
> Yet dearer to me by thy sweet human parts
> Earth gave thee making thee yet more divine."[12]

The embodied Divine does not discard or even minimise the human; on the contrary greatens and heightens this earthly being. It is a sea-change that is wrought in the content and in a certain modality of the form, but the essential form and content remain – somewhat like the process of fossilisation – mortality is squeezed out and all is moulded in immortality; the Divinity is there in all its fullness but there is added to it the exquisiteness that earth brings to the human.

10. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 716.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 717.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 718.

And so Savitri says:

> "We have borne identity with the Supreme
> And known his meaning in our mortal lives...
> Yet nothing is lost of mortal love's delight.
> Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth...
> Still am I she who came to thee mid the murmur
> Of sunlit leaves upon this forest verge;
> I am the Madran, I am Savitri."[13]

This is human as human can be, the quintessence of humanity; for it is human divinely.

13. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 719.

Appendix

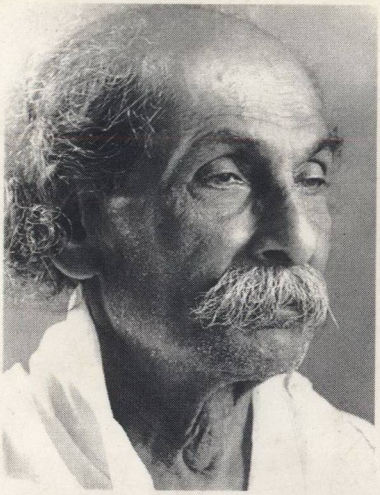
The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended 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

* Written as *Author's Note* for "Savitri".

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Nolini Kanta Gupta

Dreamer and revolutionary, linguist, scholar, critic, poet, philosopher and man of deep spiritual realisation, Nolini Kanta Gupta stands foremost among the men of this century who are destined to leave their mark on generations to come. Born on 13 January 1889 of a cultured and well-to-do family in Bengal, he came early in his teens under the influence of Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary par excellence, and "a mighty prophet of Indian Nationalism" of the age. After having spent a year in jail as an under-trial prisoner in the historic Alipore Bomb Case, he was taken in hand by Sri Aurobindo and with him he remained ever since. He passed away at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 7 February 1984.