

SAVITRI

Its Profound and Magnificent Significance

Volume One

Book I

The Book of Beginnings

Canto I: The Symbol Dawn

Canto II: The Issue

V. Ananda Reddy



Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research
Puducherry

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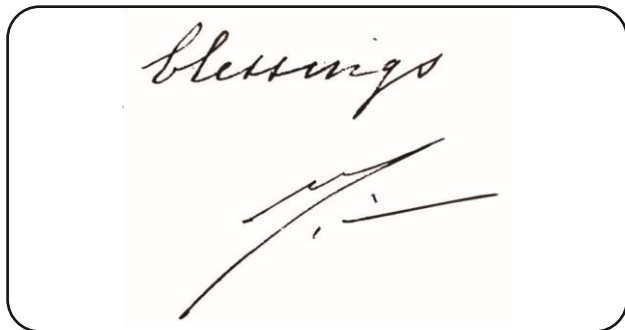
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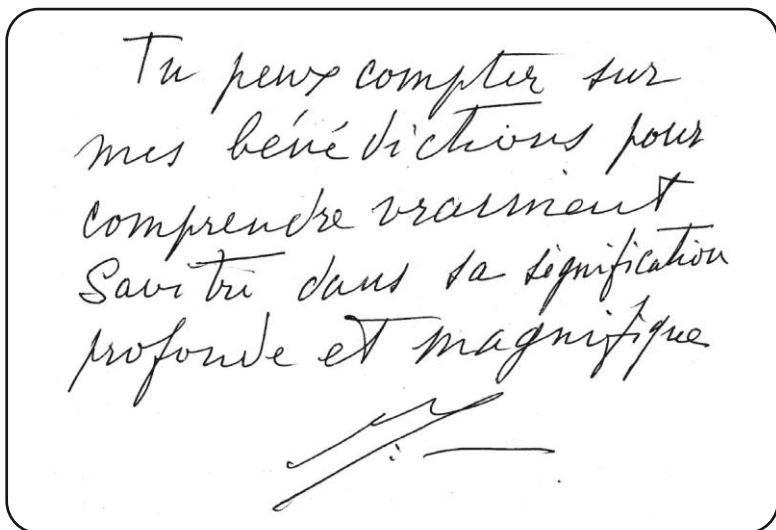
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The Mother's blessings to V. Ananda Reddy on his personal copy of Savitri on 10th February 1964



You can count on my blessings for truly understanding Savitri in its profound and magnificent significance.

(The Mother's Blessings to V. Ananda Reddy on 14-09-1964)

Preface

Savitri is the incarnate Word of Sri Aurobindo. It is the body of his consciousness, a document of his and the Mother's tapasya for the earth. No doubt it is fascinating and attracts those who revere him. But it is increasingly attracting even those who do not know much about Sri Aurobindo. The rhythm and force of *Savitri* as if, casts a lasso on the seeker and the lover – that one is almost compelled to return to its mantric power again and again. One who has read and admired *Savitri* becomes an eternal chanter of this poetic Word of the seer-poet.

This attraction to Sri Aurobindo's Word always draws me to *Savitri*. To read it is a delight, to bathe in its light enlightens and chanting it reverberates my entire being. *Savitri* has been the guiding light of many people and my life. I took up the study of *Savitri* with the Mother's blessings which she bestowed on me in one of her letters.

This volume consists of Book I Cantos I and II. They have been extremely interesting and intriguing. It has for its premise Sri Aurobindo's concept of Involution and therefore starts with the very beginning of evolution. The evolutionary march of this creation is presented in its subtlest details. The stages are marked clearly and their description presented vividly. The coming of all the ancient dawns from the beginning of this manifestation become the backdrop, the prelude, to the present dawn on which Savitri conquers Death and Satyavan comes back to life. To our good fortune, we have the Mother's explanations of many of these lines and Sri Aurobindo's clarification on revising this canto more than twenty times becomes amply clear in his correspondences with Amal Kiran. Interestingly, Savitri is introduced to us in this very canto in the most non-dramatic and matter-of-fact manner. A quick flashback in her mind before she opens her eyes is relatable to every human being. However, her memories go back to the very creation of earth unlike ours. At Sri Aurobindo's hand Savitri assumes a human-divine aspect and he has masterfully put forth her human portion hiding the divine. Yet her strength and poise are such that no human form can contain. She is divine in her human form.

Canto II deals with the issues of death and life, the purpose of human birth, and of the apparent repetitiveness of human life which slowly

leads us to the discovery of the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo's critical eye catches

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the human frailty but does not demean his stature. He finds the future potentialities waiting in human form. The psychic being is that which can take man to the divine. This being is most vividly and graphically described by the poet in this canto. If logically seen, we can perhaps understand that the emphasis Sri Aurobindo and the Mother laid on the finding of the psychic being as the basis of integral yoga gets established in the very second canto. It is perhaps a logical necessity of the epic to speak about the psychic being before the entire drama of Savitri's and Satyavan's life unfolds before us. It is the cornerstone on which the rest of their yoga stands. Therefore, the poet has dedicated many lines to the nature and purpose of the psychic being. In the next three cantos, he elaborates upon contacting the psychic and the impact of the psychic being on other parts of the being as experienced by Aswapati.

I have elaborated on these two cantos relying on the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works. Wherever possible I have quoted from them to keep things closer to their explanations. Each of these cantos was covered as two different workshops in Nainital in the year 2000 and 2001. I had mostly chosen some highlights of each of the cantos and deliberated on them. There is much that can be further discovered in these unfathomable lines of the seer poet and it is in no way exhaustible.

I am grateful to my wife Deepshikha and my friend Mirajyoti from Auroville who meticulously edited the content of these cantos. Dr. Larry Seidlitz and Shruti Bidwaikar have further polished the language and content and made it easy to read. My gratitude to them for their detailed work. My loving thanks to Miresh and Vipul who have inserted the corrections from hard copy to the soft copy, checked the references and paginated the book to give it the current form.

I dedicate this volume to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on his 150th Birth Anniversary. It is their inspiration which has kept me afloat.

V. Ananda Reddy

Note on Documentation

All quotes of *Savitri* have been taken from Volumes 33 & 34 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA). Page numbers are mentioned after each citation taken from these volumes. Other references are mentioned with the quote itself.

Many of the chapter titles have been taken from the lines and phrases from *Savitri*.

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1 *Savitri*: Its Beginnings

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* has the subtitle – "A Legend and a Symbol." Before we discuss the text, it is important to know the significance of the subtitle.

In his answer to Amal Kiran's queries, Sri Aurobindo justified the subtitle of *Savitri* without which it would have remained only a legend and a story, thereby losing much of its importance. For us Indians, the legend of Savitri could be mistaken for the original story in the Mahabharata.

A.B. Purani, who was a Sanskrit scholar, in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, gives us the etymological meaning of the word *Savitri*. He says,

The word "Savitri" is derived from the word "Savitru" which in its turn is derived from the root "su" = "to give birth to". The word "Soma" which indicates an "exhilarating drink", symbolising spiritual ecstasy or delight, is also derived from the same root "su". It links therefore the creation and the delight of creation. Savitru, therefore, means the Divine Creator, One who gives birth to, or brings forth from himself into existence, the creation. In the Veda, Savita is the God of illumination, the God of creation. Usually, he is represented by the material sun which also illuminates the solar system and is its creator and sustainer in the material sense. Savitri therefore would mean etymologically "someone descended from the Sun", "one belonging to the Sun", "an energy derived from the Sun, the Divine Creator". (*Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Approach and a Study*: 2-3)

These etymological meanings are of great significance for us. We are discussing the reason why Sri Aurobindo might have chosen this title. Now let us take the words "descending from the Sun" and assume that for Sri Aurobindo, Sun is the symbol of the

Supermind. Here Savitri is the daughter of the incarnated Savitru, who is the immediate symbol of the Supermind. For us, what is important is the Supermind, this entire journey, or stupendous effort of Savitri is only to bring down and manifest Supermind. Therefore, here, we have to look at Savitri as one who is bringing the supramental light to humanity upon earth.

The title of the book has perhaps been chosen by Sri Aurobindo primarily to symbolise this immortal event by Savitri herself. The Mother says that *Savitri* is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo. This entire revelation is symbolised by the single word "Savitri". At once, we come to know the direction Sri Aurobindo will take: to move towards the Sun, the supramental Sun. It looks as if the whole theme is borne by the title itself. The subtitle has been added only to bring forth this symbolism. Unfortunately, the 1954 edition, brought out by the Ashram School, did not carry the subtitle. I myself used that copy as the Mother gave it to me with her gracious signature. After noticing this lapse I went and asked Amal Kiran how they could let out that edition without the subtitle. Amal Kiran replied that it was a major mistake to have overlooked the subtitle given by Sri Aurobindo. Later, he referred to the letters in which Sri Aurobindo explained the importance of this subtitle.

Almost, all Indians are aware of the legend of Satyavan and Savitri. However, for those who do not know, I shall narrate the story briefly. For all those who already know it, it will refresh their memories. This story appears in the *Aranya Parva* of the Mahabharata and is narrated by Rishi Markandeya to the Pandavas.

Aswapati was the King of the kingdom of Madra and Malavi was his wife. Dyumatsena was the King of the kingdom of Salwa with his wife named Shibya. Aswapati and Malavi had no children to inherit the kingdom. It is to beget a child that

Aswapati undertook the askesis (*tapasya*) for 18 long years during which he performed hours of rituals and yajnas to please the God of creation, Brahma. In the original Mahabharata, this *tapasya* of Aswapati was not described in length. When Brahma appeared at the end of eighteen years, Aswapati asked him for a boon and Brahma granted him the boon of a daughter as a gift from the Goddess Savitri.

Normally, one always imagines a gift like that to be of a son and not a daughter. However, this beautiful little daughter was named Savitri after the Goddess Savitri. Neither the childhood of Savitri nor her growth were given much importance in the original legend. Rather, the story suddenly “wakes up”, as though in a scenario where this daughter turns into a young maiden. She grew up to be so brilliant and intelligent with such a charming personality that she was known as being rather too strong and brilliant for a common princess. Therefore, no ordinary prince dared approach her and ask for her hand in *swayamvara* – an ancient Indian custom where a princess was given the liberty to choose her husband among many eligible princes proving their valour in an assembly in the court.

It was then that one day Aswapati called her young marriageable daughter and told her to go outside the kingdom to look for her companion. Obeying her father, Savitri went out in the world and chose her soulmate. When she returned home, it so happened that Devarishi Narada was present in the palace. We know that Rishi Narada does not visit anyone without a purpose. In this case, he knew the future of Savitri. After coming to the court she declared that she had chosen Satyavan, son of Dyumatsena and shall marry him.

Now, who was Dyumatsena? He was the blind king of Salwa who, at that time, had been ousted from his kingdom. As he was blind, his enemies overpowered him and he had to take refuge in

the forest. When Savitri expressed her choice of Satyavan, her parents seemed happy. But Rishi Narada immediately said, rather solemnly, that Satyavan would die exactly twelve months after the day of his wedding. His life would end within just a year from his marriage.

To tell you the story in brief, fully aware of the impending danger over Satyavan's life, Savitri still chose him for her husband. As per the prophesy, exactly twelve months after, while Satyavan was cutting wood in the forest, he suddenly felt a tremendous headache and collapsed right in front of helpless Savitri. In the story, Yama, the God of Death, came there to take away the soul of Satyavan. But Savitri resisted and there ensued a great and mysteriously difficult dialogue with Yama which ended with the surrender of Yama. Savitri succeeded in getting back Satyavan alive. This is the legend that most of us know.

It has been entirely transformed by Sri Aurobindo. As we go along the text, we study the text, we will notice the transformation and the deviations made by him. Here I will cite a couple of examples. I will give you an example or two. Aswapati's *tapasya* of eighteen years, which only briefly mentioned in the legend has been transformed into a spiritual journey. It is the journey of the human soul, who has descended on this earth from divine heights, and endeavours to acquire knowledge of the Self and the world. Please note, the whole perspective has changed. In the Mahabharata, Aswapati was doing *tapasya* for his personal gain, to beget a child whereas in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, Aswapati's yoga is on the cosmic level. He represents the human soul aspiring for the next step in evolution.

Another example is that in the ancient story, Aswapati asked for the boon of an heir for his kingdom whereas in this epic Aswapati asks not for his own kingdom, but for entire mankind. Here Aswapati realised that this world is full of sorrow and suffering. It

has to be transformed, and such a change cannot be brought about by any human being individually. Therefore, he asked for the incarnation of Savitri herself. It is God alone who can come down and transform the world. And not just any god but an Avatar in the form of Savitri's descent itself. Goddess Savitri is endowed with the power of Supermind and Aswapati wants the incarnation of the supramental power which alone can transform the world, not any other power on earth. Therefore, we see another immediate difference between the individual daughter Savitri and the Avatar Savitri.

Another instance I can mention here is the remarkable difference between the return of Satyavan in the English epic and the story of Mahabharata. In the latter, we see that Satyavan, after regaining his life, returns to his kingdom along with Savitri. But in Sri Aurobindo's epic, Satyavan and Savitri return to the earth *only* after they have been in the region of the Eternal Day under the Sun of Truth that never sets. To put it very briefly, the symbolism is that they go into the world of Supermind and from there they descend back to the earth. It means that they bring with them the supramental Force which can transform this earth. Here, getting back Satyavan's life is not the whole purpose of Savitri's encounter with Death. Sri Aurobindo slowly introduced the change that enlarges the entire theme of the original legend. In his hands, it becomes a universal symbolism.

Here, in his own words, Sri Aurobindo gives us the essential symbolism of these personalities:

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 himself 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 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 kingdom of celestial 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. (CWSA 33: Author's Note)

Sri Aurobindo tells us that even now "we can enter into concrete touch" with the incarnations or emanations of these living and conscious Forces. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo has chosen these characters not because they are imaginary ones like we have in Shakespeare. For that matter, Shakespeare's characters such as Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello or King Lear were not merely figments of imagination. They are all forms of human nature. He has just given a body and a name to such human characteristics. But for Sri Aurobindo, these are not mere human characters or characteristics. They are, as he says, "conscious Forces with whom we can enter into contact". This means that Savitri, Satyavan, Aswapati, Dyumatsena and Rishi Narada are eternal spiritual presences. They have been given a name and a form, but in fact they are spiritual forces which have always existed. It is not that Savitri has been created now or in the Mahabharata. These are the eternal forces right from the time of creation itself. Of course, these forces, like the force of Savitri, the force of Supermind, are invoked now even though they have been there all along. We will

see more of this when we get into the symbolism of each character. It is only later that we will go deeper into the text.

This explanation of the characters gives us the central idea or theme of the work, so that we do not entertain any imaginary conjecture in our minds. Knowing this will facilitate our reading the text, for then while studying we will bear in mind the eternal spiritual forces present in this creation. *Savitri* has a universal appeal and this truth is now being realised worldwide gradually. The main reason for this is that although the legend is of Indian origin, the forces are universal and they can be contacted anywhere, in any culture, by any individual in the world.

We should not keep Savitri and Satyavan within an Indian context of a conjugal love bringing back the life of the husband from the grip of death. In case of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, we have to go beyond to the meanings of the names of Savitri, Satyavan and Aswapati. These names are symbolic personalities to make us understand something far deeper. To reach that feeling, we have to try to tune ourselves to that mind and energy which are cosmic in their nature. Invoking these eternal cosmic presences, with this brief background, let us take up the reading of this sacred text.

Let us read Book One Canto I, "The Symbol Dawn"

In a huge forest where the listening Night
Heard lonely voices, and in the large hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things
That have no sound for the rich heart of day.

(Nirodbaran, "*Savitri*—A factual account of its composition",
Perspectives of Savitri, Vol. 1: 71)

We do not have these lines in the current version. These are the first lines of the first version of *Savitri* which were later rewritten. In the second version the opening verses are:

The boundless spirit of Night dreamless, alone

In the unlit temple of immensity Waiting
 upon the marge of silence sat
 Mute with an expectation of her change.

The hour was near of the transfiguring gods. (72) In
 the third version it was:

It was an hour of the transfiguring Gods.
 The huge unbound spirit of Night, alone
 In her unlit temple of immensity
 Waited immobile upon Silence' marge...
 Mute with the expectation of her change. (72)

In the fourth version there is no change except for the spelling of "*Savitri*". Until the third version *Savitri* was spelt "*Savithri*". In the fourth version the "h" was dropped. It is in the fifth version that we get the verse "An hour was near of the transfiguring Gods" (Ibid) which was later changed to what we have now: "It was the hour before the Gods awake".

All these different versions are perhaps one of the major problems that led to some controversies later on. However in 1936, when Sri Aurobindo resumed rewriting *Savitri* he told the Mother:

I am impelled to launch a new adventure; I was hesitant at the beginning, but now I have decided. Still I do not know how far I shall succeed. I pray for help... I have launched myself in a rudderless boat upon the vastness of the Infinite. (*Perspectives of Savitri*, Vol. 1: 85)

This is what he had confided in the Mother. How very humbly he says here: "I do not know how far I shall succeed." We now know from the Mother the infinite value of *Savitri* – so we can call it a "success". Clearly, it was a spontaneous creation. It was not something that he had premeditated or even got his mind thinking as to how many books it would turn out to be or how many cantos would it have – nothing at all. It was an adventure.

Therefore, in an explanation to Amal Kiran regarding the different versions, Sri Aurobindo writes: "I have used Savitri as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental plane. Each time I could reach a higher level, I rewrote from that level" (CWSA 27: 272).

Let us read the first version once again:

In a huge forest where the listening Night,
Heard lonely voices and in the large hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things... (1st version)

These verses definitely lack the kind of absoluteness of word and phrase and vision that we find in Sri Aurobindo's final version. He rewrote *Savitri* each time he ascended in consciousness. It is not that Amal Kiran or anyone else suggested something or that he thought this verse or that rhythm is better than the other. For Sri Aurobindo it was an ascent of consciousness, and as he rose from the mental to the overmental, he kept on revising. From a higher level, the symbolism becomes much more intense and graphic. So too the images become more and more symbolic.

He says: "I have used it as a kind of ascension." Therefore, *Savitri* was a ladder for Sri Aurobindo's own ascent. Simultaneously, as if an eyewitness present during the experiences, he wrote or rewrote their description. There is a simultaneity of experience that manifests in the form of words along with a consciousness that is moving forward. As he says in a verse in *Savitri*, it was "adventure of consciousness and joy." This is what we have to understand. This is the explanation for the many versions and revisions that he made.

Now we shall read from the latest version of *Savitri*. It begins thus: It was the hour before the Gods awake. (1)

It is indeed a dramatic opening! It wakes us from a slumber of consciousness. This canto is read and reread by many people. I know quite many people who have memorised this canto and the

booklet *The Mother*. Of course, there are people who have memorised large portions of *Savitri* too.

What is Canto I about? I have always felt that Cantos I and II give us the entire vision of *Savitri*, and if we can unravel the symbolism in these two cantos, we can get perhaps the primary essence of *Savitri*. I found a wonderful synopsis written by Nolini Kanta Gupta which presents the real gist this canto.

"It was the hour before the Gods awake". Only when the Gods awake, does the light begin to appear on earth. Other wise 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 – *tamaasit tamasa gudhamagre* – '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." 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.

The original inconscience is a non-existence, a nihil in which all existence is rolled up and dissolved, an infinite nonentity 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.

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.

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 in carnation 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.

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... 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. (CWNKG 4: 305-307).

According to him, Canto I not only deals with the growth of consciousness, the bringer of light or the possibility of the future, but it is really a graphic description of that zero hour of evolution. You all are aware of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of involution and

evolution. Involution is a process in which the supreme Sachchidananda himself descends and the creation begins.

The creation becomes the very opposite of truth, bliss, light and consciousness. Now here lies the great mystery of evolution. In our creation the entire evolution begins from the very opposite qualities of Sachchidananda. The absolute opposite of Sat, Chit and Ananda is called the Inconscient.

It is that region and plane where consciousness is wrapped in darkness. So our epic *Savitri* begins at the level of absolute darkness, absolute Inconscience. It is that point from where the return journey begins. Sri Aurobindo has obviously chosen this moment of return because from the depths of the Inconscient he is going to take us to the supreme Superconscient. Now we can gauge the cosmic breadth, the enormous range of *Savitri*! What an infinite range of consciousness it expresses! He does not just tell us a story, but about the travail of consciousness. It is not only about Satyavan and Savitri, but of Consciousness itself from the very first moments of its awakening to the glorious moment of the Supermind's manifestation upon this blessed earth.

We must give a vast imaginative extension to our thoughts to grasp this stupendous theme of *Savitri*. The Mother, in one of her talks, says that *Savitri* contains the entire story of human creation, not only of human creation but the entire story of creation itself. Canto I is precisely that. Here he gives us the different phases of evolution as if with a snippets. In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo explains that he has resorted to this technique of snippets instead of giving a long narration of the evolution.

Canto I begins with the moment of the first birth of consciousness out of Inconscience until it reaches the stage of human consciousness, and there he catches up with the story of *Savitri*. It may be a bit difficult to follow his description as he does

not present it as a continuum. He follows it stage after stage. Let us see how he takes us through the “snap-images.”

The first verse: “It was the hour before the Gods awake” is the “cut and razor” of Sri Aurobindo’s vision. The single verse is so full of substance that we can’t ignore it. Do we suppose here that the Gods are asleep and that they need to be awakened? When were they asleep? Do they sleep every day? This issue seems to be a bit intriguing because how can we say that the Gods are asleep? On the contrary we always know men to be asleep and Gods to be eternally awake. Now we have to understand why Sri Aurobindo is referring to the Gods being asleep at that hour.

Let me explain that while reading Canto I, one of the first things we need to remember is that we have here not only snapshot situations but also a simultaneity of different levels. One of them is the D-day – the day Satyavan must die. The whole of *Savitri* consists of nearly 24,000 lines, but it is the description of one single day. The morning begins with this first verse and the day ends with Satyavan returning to the earth. So it was the story of that day when the Gods were awake. But then how is it that the Gods were awake on that single day? Were they asleep on the previous days? And this day was a normal common day like any day, as Sri Aurobindo will describe later when Savitri also awoke like anyone of us would awake in the morning. Therefore, we see that on one level it is contextually related to Savitri and Satyavan, on another it relates to the day itself and it still brings in another significance that relates to a yet higher cosmic level.

Let us take it up on the cosmic level to see what could be the meaning of the Gods waking up on the cosmic day. Let me tell you a story that the Mother once narrated in her class. She told that when the Supreme Lord decided to bring about the creation, he, out of his own Self, brought forth Knowledge, Will and Consciousness. Then he gave a command to these emanations of

Knowledge, Will and Consciousness to go forth and manifest themselves. Here, she put a parenthesis and said that this Knowledge, Will and Consciousness were the Mother herself. Therefore, the Supreme told the Creatrix to go and manifest herself. The Mother gives a wonderful narration here. Out of her own being, there manifested four emanations.

These four emanations were Consciousness, Truth, Bliss and Light. They were given the responsibility to create the universe. But unfortunately, these emanations went so far away from the Mother that they became separated. They snapped the link with the Supreme Origin thereby losing the sense and consciousness of Oneness. In fact, this is the meaning of ignorance. When one loses contact with the source one comes in Ignorance. We are not separated from the Divine; we are all in the womb of the Mother but it is just that we do not remember this, we are not conscious of it. The moment the sense of 'I am so and so' creeps in, instead of feeling that 'I am part of Mother's womb', we are in ignorance. This is what happened with these four emanations. Then they turned into the very opposite of what they originally were: Truth became Falsehood, Consciousness became Unconsciousness, Bliss became Suffering, and Light became Darkness and Death. (As narrated in CWM 9: 205-206)

Let us take up the first emanation which is Consciousness. By cutting itself from its origin, Consciousness slid down deeper and deeper towards unconsciousness, as it was with the other emanations too. You all know the famous mantra from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya*, which translated means, "Lead us from ignorance to Truth, Lead us from darkness to Light, Lead us from death to Immortality".

The Mother confirms what the Upanishads spoke of. They have caught this Truth. But what is interesting is that the Mother says

this was the first creation with the four original emanations. This background is necessary because when I come to the contextual lines, they will reflect this.

When this mishap happened with the first creation, this colossal disconnection with the Source (the Supreme), the Mother reported to the Supreme that the emanations had turned just the opposite of their ideal and asked what should She do next?

Then she was given the command to precipitate her Consciousness into this inconscience, her Love into this suffering, and her Truth into this falsehood. And a greater consciousness, a more total love, a more perfect truth than what had been emanated at first, plunged, so to say, into the horror of Matter in order to awaken in it consciousness, love and truth, and to begin the movement of Redemption which was to bring the material universe back to its supreme origin. (Ibid: 208)

We know that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, this orderly creation started with the Supermind, the Overmind, the different levels of mind, vital, matter and then the Inconscient. This is the second creation. Now, where do the Gods come according to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? They come on the level of the Overmind. So what could be the meaning of "before the Gods awake"? It means that we are at a point of time where even the Overmind had not yet come into existence, meaning that the Gods that we are aware of now were not even created. The Gods were created much later than when the four Falsehoods had established themselves. At this point they had not yet come into existence. Sri Aurobindo begins the epic with a cosmic description of when the Gods were awaking on the cosmic level because the overmental Godheads were not yet there. Once the Overmental creation came into existence, the Gods were born,

not prior to that. Therefore, the first verse: "It was the hour before the Gods awake," catches this moment.

On our day-to-day life level, we have the "*Brahmamuhurtam*" in our *shastras* which is the time when the Gods awake. In the temples, the Gods are given a bath and made ready for the early morning Darshan. Likewise, in some temples, the Gods are put to sleep at night and the door is closed till the morning.

On the individual level, it is the most important day in the life of Savitri and Satyavan. This is the day when darkness and light – life and death – are going to face each other. The death of Satyavan is decreed and a new life with a new dawn is arriving. These three levels are consistent throughout the canto. As we continue reading the canto, we will go back and forth between these levels.

The verb "it was" and "awake" do not go together grammatically. We never say "the glass was there when I come". The correct form would be "the glass was there when I came". But Sri Aurobindo uses opposite tenses, the past and the present. This is again an indication as to how he integrates the time frame in the epic. He is not speaking about the past referring to the beginning of evolution nor about that future which is to come. In one single verse he has wonderfully brought in the past and the present to note the happenings on two levels, that is, the cosmic one and the individual "D" day of Satyavan and Savitri. This is how wonderfully the verbs "was" and "awake" express the time frame of this canto.

The next verses:

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's marge. (1)

In the first line, please note that "E" is a capital letter. As pictured, the literal meaning unfolds on a path where the divine Event is going to take place. This divine Event is going on a path where night is stretching itself; it is lying immobile and a dark shadow obstructs the path. This is the simple meaning, but it is not the only one. The "divine Event" is Light overcoming Darkness, the manifestation of the Supermind, the conquest of Death. Right now we cannot go deep into the explanation of the conquest of Death. The most superficial meaning of this event is "light overtaking darkness"; Usha, the dawn, is coming to eliminate darkness. But another meaning is that evolution the awakening of consciousness has just begun.

That "divine Event" is basically this one single event – the descent of the Supermind or the manifestation of the Supermind. The preparation of that manifestation takes place from the zero hour. A single ray of light descending from above into the total darkness created a stir. But as it is rejected, it recedes. The next day again the ray touches, descends a little deeper and then withdraws. This is the meaning of Usha – the dawn each morning comes as a symbol of preparation. It is a harbinger of a new higher consciousness. That is why in India we have the Surya-namaskar not only to welcome the light of the sun but the new consciousness. From that angle, every sunrise brings along with it not only the past but the future potentiality for realisation. This is how the earth is being prepared with a ray of consciousness for the manifestation of the Supermind.

As Nolini-da has explained, the most important issue in this canto is the preparation of the earth. As he describes it, when the sun rises over the horizon we first see only the faint rays of the sun. It does not yet appear in its full brilliance, which would shock us in the early hours and blind us. We need a preparation of the darkness to accept the light and to recede slowly. Therefore, the

most important theme of this canto is the preparation of the earth to receive the manifestation of the supramental Light.

Thus, "Across the path of the divine Event", refers to the Event of the manifestation of the supramental Force, Light and Consciousness. Across the path of this event there is the night obstructing, as it were, this supreme manifestation. This points out how that darkness is very much in existence at the advent of the evolution.

The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone

In her unlit temple of eternity,... (1)

Night is once again represented as a Goddess, just as Usha is the dawn Goddess. This night Goddess is lying across the path with a foreboding mind, the ominous mind of Night was alone in her "unlit temple of eternity". Here there is the symbol of a temple with a spiritual consciousness lying deep within, and that represents the *antaratma* or soul. This description of the night in her unlit temple means that deep within it there is a spark of divinity – the hidden divine consciousness, which at present is unlit. Here, the awakening of the inner divinity has not yet taken place. This lighting is that of the inner divinity in Matter, in the Inconscient. Even millions of churches, temples, mosques and hospitals do not transform anyone. The progress in evolution so far seems to have come to a halt. Human beings have remained quite the same in terms of our innate nature for a long time. In certain areas we have progressed, whereas in most others we have become worse than our ancestors. It is this recalcitrant and obstinate nature that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have come to transform on this earth. In fact, it is work that the Avatarhood of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo graces our earth now – to light the Inconscient and awaken it with the magic touch of the supramental Consciousness. The work of our twin-Avatars has been not only to prepare the earth but the master act has been

to awaken the light that has been hidden since aeons, since the very beginning of manifestation itself! Until that light is lit, transformation cannot take place.

From the above verses we understand that another word for Death is Night; it is the Night which is foreboding and ominous, and yet the Night holding that lamp within it means that it carries that divinity within its womb. Therefore, one truth becomes clear to us. If Night is Death, then Death carries also the Divine within itself. In *Savitri* she is trying to bring forth that divine element in Death and says "Death, you do not exist at all." This is also to say that we also generally forget that the Divine is deep within us and an integral part of us. In fact, on the individual level of consciousness, all of us represent Death as much as we carry the Divine within us. Savitri keeps invoking the divinity, whereas we tend to think that we are separate individuals having nothing to do with the divinity. Savitri constantly makes Death aware of its inner truth, that it is an "unlit temple of eternity".

It is very significant that the last thing Sri Aurobindo spoke of, before his leaving the body was about the mind of Light. Please mark the connection between the mind of Night being transformed into "the mind of Light?" In "the mind of Light", there are layers and layers, tiers and tiers of meanings. What he has left us with is his entire life's tapasya, which has transformed that ominous foreboding mind of Night into the mind of Light. He left that mind of Light with the Mother, who said "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light, got realised in me" (CWM 13: 63).

What is this mind of Light? The Supermind had descended long before into the mind and it had been working also in the vital and the physical. But it was working indirectly through the intermediaries. The issue has been about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said that it could be

possible only if the physical mind received the supramental Light. It is the physical mind that is the instrument of direct action upon the most material, that is, upon matter. The changed physical mind receiving the supramental Light is what Sri Aurobindo called the "mind of Light". This connection with the supramental has to be continued from the mind into the vital and the physical too. These are the three levels into which the Supermind has to descend. But this material manifestation can take place only when the physical, the very cells of the brain, receive the Supermind then only it becomes possible for the Supermind to work upon the most material, that is, on the cells of the body, explained the Mother.

When the mind of Light was transferred to the Mother, the Mother could direct the supramental Light and Force into Matter. That is what she did until the end of her life. She was transforming the cells of her body. So *Savitri* is the story of evolution of the manifestation of Supermind beginning with the mind of Night and leading to the mind of Light.

In poetry, an image is the sign-language of the poet. He uses images to indicate certain thoughts. But when an image comes together with an experience behind it, it becomes a symbol. In *Savitri*, there are many images. But we shall study symbols. These are images supported by Sri Aurobindo's own experiences. A symbol, unlike an image, has a power of manifestation because it carries the consciousness of the poet. An image need not be so: usually it is used for clarifying a thought or a point.

A symbol such as AUM is not merely an image, it is a symbol carrying with it a power of manifestation. The Mother used it in her mantra *Om Namō Bhagavate*. With this clarification in mind, we should understand that this 'mind of Light' is not just an image. It is backed up by an experience.

The Mother once narrated an experience. In one of her classes she gave the students seven days to come up with questions. She was wondering why the students didn't have any questions to ask her. She narrates that while asking herself that question sitting on the chair, she felt that she suddenly dipped into a kind of a deep well. She said:

I went down into a fissure, as it were, between two steep rocks, rocks made of something harder than basalt, black, metallic at the same time, with edges so sharp that you had the impression that were you simply to touch them, you would be flayed. It was something that seemed to have no bottom and no end, and it became narrower and narrower like a funnel, so narrow that there was almost no room left even for the consciousness to pass. The bottom was invisible, a black hole, and that went down and down and down, without air, without light, only a kind of glimmer, like a reflection at the peak of the rocks, a glimmer that came from beyond, from something that could be the heavens, but something invisible. (CWM 15: 361-362)

In the thick of that darkness she was shot up back into the Superconscious where she experienced the Supermind. This incident is relevant here as they have seen and touched the Inconscient.

She clarified that it was the Inconscient of the mind. It is this that was characterised by the description of metallic black rocks with the sharp edges – something that resists transformation. She explained that there is a material Inconscient which is more malleable, pliable, more fluid and soft. This difference throws a lot of light on the nature of our mind which is usually rigid and mostly unprepared for any change whatsoever. This is the way the Mother compares the physical and mental Inconscient.

In another experience, she said that once when she went deep down into the Inconscient, she saw this "unlit temple of eternity" and a godhead sleeping therein. That godhead embedded within the Inconscient was none other than the supreme Sachchidananda, she said. The only difference was that this godhead possessed lustrous diamond luminosity, whereas the godhead of the Superconscient is golden in its brilliance. It is the same godhead down here and up there. So deep inside this "unlit temple", the Godhead is asleep as the consciousness is not yet alert and awake. There is a fullness not yet activated, not yet vibrant. It is the complete fullness of non-manifestation.

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. (1)
 Nothing was there but the pure simple Inconscient.
 A power of fallen boundless self awake
 Between the first and the last Nothingness,
 Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,
 Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth
 And the tardy process of mortality
 And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought. (1)

In his letters, Sri Aurobindo describes how in the opening of the poem he has used a series of rapidly changing images to describe the dawn, and symbolically, the coming of the higher Consciousness and Light:

...rapid transitions from one image to another are a constant feature in *Savitri* as in most mystic poetry. I am not here building a long sustained single picture of the Dawn with a single continuum image or variation of the same image. I am describing a rapid series of transitions, piling one suggestion upon another. There is first a black quietude, then

the persistent touch, then the first "beauty and wonder leading to the magical gate and the "lucent corner". Then comes the falling of the darkness, the simile used suggesting the rapidity of the change. Then as a result the change of what was once a rift into a wide luminous gap,—if you want to be logically consistent you look at the rift as a slit in the "cloak" which becomes a big tear. Then all changes into a "brief perpetual sign", the iridescence, then the blaze and the magnificent aura. (CWSA 27: 311)

Putting it into stages, we could say:

Stage one : Complete darkness of the Inconscient

Stage two : Higher light comes to prepare the Inconscient

Stage three : Consciousness where there is beauty and wonder

Stage four : Darkness is withdrawn – simile is the falling cloak from the body of God

Stage five : The light is now visible – the sun is not visible but the light is there.

Stage six : First glimpse of the morning sun

Along with the physical stages of the sunrise, Sri Aurobindo has described here the stages of the Inconscient preparing itself for the coming of Savitri. The Inconscient is thus described as a "Nothingness" when he says "Between the first and the last Nothingness". The last "Nothingness" is only in relation to our experience of the Unmanifest – that which has not come into manifestation. In the process of evolution Ignorance emerges from the Inconscient, the first "Nothingness". There is a verse in which something in the inscrutable darkness of the Inconscient stirred and teased it to wake Ignorance. It is at the level of Ignorance that Matter starts. This is how the evolution begins, from the Inconscient, to Matter to Life to Mind, to higher levels

of spiritual mind and then to Overmind, Supermind and Sachchidananda. This is the whole ladder of ascent.

Sri Aurobindo then describes this Ignorance which is waking up:

Between the first and the last Nothingness,

Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,

This power of darkness is "recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came. 'Tenebrous' is something gloomy. Please note that this power is like a child of the Inconscient. It is remembering the tenebrous womb that it came from.

Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth

And the tardy process of mortality (1)

There is a vague suggestion here that this process already has taken place before. "Recalling" indicates something that has happened before. It is perhaps recalling the tardy process of mortality because it has already gone through the whole process of creation. It may be intriguing for our limited minds to grasp that creation has taken place before. It is as if the power is tired of the tardy process that has to be repeated once again from the Inconscient upwards.

And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought. (1)

Of course, that vacant Nought is the Nothingness from which it came; it longed to go back into that state of sleep as before. In that Inconscient there is no birth, no death, no evolution nor any other complexity at all. This power of the Inconscient is beginning to feel in itself the first memory of creation.

As in a dark beginning of all things,

A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown

Repeating for ever the unconscious act,

Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,

Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force

Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns

And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl. (1)

"A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown" was there. This is the same spirit and form as the Godhead in the unlit temple of eternity. Here it is featureless, its form is very vague. It is repeating for ever the unconscious act, prolonging the unseeing will, cradling the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force.

Behind "Force" there is always the concept of power and consciousness. So, there has to be a power behind the force. Power and force are not the same thing. Force is dynamic and power is static. Power is also inseparable from consciousness; it cannot exist by itself. It is the power of the consciousness. But force is this power of consciousness actualising itself. We can say "Mother's Power" or "Mother's Consciousness", but Mother's Power can be of many types, for example, a power of might, a power of beauty, a power of knowledge, etc. Each power has a different force. When the Mother's Power of Love, Knowledge or Beauty moves into action, it becomes the Force of Knowledge, Love or Beauty. This distinction is brought in by this line which says that this ignorance Force started moving. Until then the Inconscient was static.

We can clarify this image with a mundane example to show how beautifully Sri Aurobindo is taking us through this. When we wake up in the morning and open our eyes, the first thing that comes to us is a memory. It may be that I am in my room or any particular work or anything. When the memory comes, we wake up and start moving. It is this waking up which is taking place with the memory of the creation that took place before and is going to happen again and again, repeating for ever the unconscious act. This repetition of the past has come as a memory and we know that memory is knowledge.

In this dynamism, a cosmic effect is taking place, a cosmos is being born out of this Inconscient. A cosmic drowse, a creative slumber, kindles the sun and carries our lives in its somnambulist

whirl. In this cosmic creation, a Force has created the suns of all the universes. To say that the creation has begun is symbolic. The simple meaning of "somnambulist" is sleepwalking. The person who is sleepwalking is not conscious of what he is doing but there is something which is guiding him. It can be called the subconscious. There is a hidden force guiding and protecting him. Similarly, our lives are being carried in our somnambulism, we are being guided unaware by a deeper consciousness. To be fully awake, I should know the purpose of my life. But how many of us truly know the aim of our life and are walking towards the fulfilment of that purpose? We are just moved on and on by circumstances. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo refers to it as a "somnambulist whirl".

Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,
 Its formless stupor without mind or life,
 A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,
 Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
 Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs
 Forgetful of her spirit and her fate. (1)

Now he has come directly to the creation of the earth. He is now drawing closer giving a backdrop of the day, the day Satyavan must die. Now the third level of the earth comes in. Earth is "A shadow spinning through a soulless Void". In this Void, there is no life, no plant, no man. Earth is like a shadow spinning in the hollow gulfs of the universe. It is "forgetful" of her spirit and her fate, suggesting that there has been a fall in her consciousness. The earth-consciousness is as though meandering about and unaware of its purpose. Earth symbolises the entire humanity, we too have forgotten to realise the purpose for which we were created.

The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.
 Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;

A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance. (1-2)

There is a letter from Sri Aurobindo to Amal referring to this passage.

...I come next to the passage which you so violently attack about the Inconscient waking Ignorance. In the first place, the word 'formless' is indeed defective, not so much because of any repetition but because it is not the right word or idea and I was not myself satisfied with it. I have changed the passage ... but the teasing of the Inconscient remains, and evidently you think that it is bad poetic taste to tease something so bodiless and unreal as the Inconscient. But several fundamental issues arise. First of all, are words like Inconscient and Ignorance necessarily an abstract technical jargon? If so do not words like consciousness, knowledge, etc., undergo the same law?

Is it meant that they are abstract philosophical terms and can have no real or concrete meaning, cannot represent things that one feels and senses or must often fight as one fights a visible foe? The Inconscient and irrelevant jargon if one has not come into collision with them or plunged into their dark and bottomless reality. But to me they are realities, concrete powers whose resistance is present everywhere and at all times in its tremendous and boundless mass. In fact in writing this line I had not intention of teaching philosophy or forcing in an irrelevant metaphysical idea, although the idea may be there in implication. I was presenting a happening that was to me something sensible and, as one might say, psychologically and spiritually concrete. The Inconscient

comes in persistently in the cantos of the First Book of *Savitri*... (CWSA 27: 314)

The objection was how can the Inconscient tease something as if it has a form? You see how Sri Aurobindo defends himself by saying that Inconscient and Ignorance may be mere mental conceptions for us, but for him teasing the Inconscient is not jargon; it is a concrete reality. These are not mere images, these are dynamic personal experiences of Sri Aurobindo, just as the Mother's experience of going into the mental Inconscient. They see it as having a form. It is the same idea Sri Aurobindo puts here:

The black Inconscient swung its dragon tail
Lashing a slumbrous Infinite by its force
Into the deep obscurities of form... (79)

This is what is going to happen here. Out of the Inconscient the Ignorance is brought forth and out of it other forms came. A similar experience of the Inconscient was expressed in one of Sri Aurobindo's sonnets called "The Inconscient":

Out of a seeming void and dark-winged sleep
Of dim inconscient infinity
A power arose from the insentient deep, A
flame-whirl of magician Energy.
Some huge somnambulist Intelligence
Devising without thought process and plan
Arrayed the burning stars magnificence,
The living bodies of beasts and the brain of man.
What stark Necessity or ordered Chance
Because alive to know the cosmic whole?
What magic of numbers, what mechanic dance
Developed consciousness, assumed a soul?
The darkness was the Omnipotent's abode,
Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God. (CWSA 2: 604)

Only one who has entered this region can write so vividly not only about its darkness but about it being a "Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God" and the "Omnipotent's abode". This is a living realisation of the Inconscient. Psychologists may understand this as subconscious darkness, but Sri Aurobindo has gone behind and beyond the darkness and discovered the Supreme sleeping there. That is why he could say that it is "the abode of the Omnipotent".

When in the Upanishads it is said that "all this is for habitation by the Lord" (CWSA 17: 16), they did not mean just the earth alone. Right from the Inconscient to the Superconscious, the Lord is present everywhere and is there in everything. This is the range of the Omnipotent's abode. This somnambulist world seems to be acting without process or plan but yet it appears so well organised. Who has done that? Where is that consciousness? It is there deep in the darkness and also in the Superconscious.

Regarding the difference between the Inconscient and the Ignorance, Sri Aurobindo explained that the difference is not a matter of philosophical terminology but of common sense and the understood meaning of English words. It is very simple to understand that the Inconscient and Ignorance are two different levels. One has dormant consciousness and the other has a limited consciousness.

2 The dark beginnings of all things

Coming back to the lines we were discussing – “The impassive skies... knew not how to be.” Something has started stirring in the Inconscient, because of the memory of the previous creation. “An unthought Idea” is the Real Idea; it is the working of the supramental Consciousness in the field of the Inconscient. In Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, “Real Idea” is another name for the Supermind. In this Inconscient, the supramental Idea is trying to manifest itself. It is insistent and dissatisfied, without an aim, as it is yet to find the right direction. It is trying to push the Inconscient with that unlit Godhead within, the supramental Force. It is like a seed trying to sprout from the earth. There is a persistence as in the process of germination. Reading the line, “Something that wished but knew not how to be”, we may wonder how Supermind does not know how to be! But at this level it is not yet fully awake; it is surrounded with the Inconscient. Yet, there is a deep desire in the evolution to manifest and to become the multiplicity, to burst into forms. This is the desire of the seed to blossom into a plant. But the earth resists. The seed must break through the crust of the earth to reach the light. This is the insistent desire. It teases the Inconscient to wake Ignorance. The coming of Ignorance is already a step forward in the evolution from the Inconscient. Ignorance is not wrong or bad. The Inconscient wants to wake Ignorance.

A throe that came and left a quivering trace,
Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,
At peace in its subconscious moonless cave
To raise its head and look for absent light,
Straining closed eyes of vanished memory,... (2)

This 'throe' is a birth pang, it comes with the first awakening of consciousness in the Inconscient. It gives space for the return of "an old tired want" that is still unfulfilled. In this birth of consciousness there is a memory of a previous life. This memory returns along with a desire for light: "To raise its head and look for absent light". This desire, this Supermind or Real Idea, is raising its head and "Straining closed eyes of vanished memory"; it is trying to recall the vanished memory of a previous creation which it very vaguely senses.

Like one who searches for a bygone self
And only meets the corpse of his desire. (2)

Sometimes this happens to us also. We try to remember something that keeps escaping us. Just on the fringe of the consciousness the memory is there – but it is just the corpse of a desire, only an external layer without details. This is what is happening to this power in the Inconscient.

It was as though even in this Nought's profound,
Even in this ultimate dissolution's core,
There lurked an unremembering entity,
Survivor of a slain and buried past
Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
Reviving in another frustrate world. (2)

Nought refers to the Inconscient. Please note the strong words Sri Aurobindo is using: Inconscient is the ultimate dissolution of Sachchidananda. It is in this Inconscient that Sachchidananda has lost himself completely. Now he is beginning to wake up, "Reviving in another frustrate world". These are symbols and images giving us a description of the first stages of this creation.

To put it briefly, what Sri Aurobindo is describing here is that in the very depth of the Inconscient there lies a sleeping entity which wakes up with a vague memory of a previous existence. In this waking there comes a desire to manifest itself, which puts

pressure on the Inconscient to evolve to the next level, that of Ignorance.

An unshaped consciousness desired light

And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change. (2)

"Prescience" means foreknowledge. This Real Idea, or the supramental Idea, has an inherent foreknowledge; it knows the future. "Unshaped consciousness" means it has yet to be formed. It is such a consciousness that desired light and wanted to move towards that.

As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek

Reminded of the endless need in things

The heedless Mother of the universe,

An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast. (2)

The external image can be compared to that of an infant child who goes to his sleeping Mother, wakes her up a little and asks for milk. The deeper meaning is given here in a letter:

Your objection to the "finger" and the "clutch" moves me only to change "reminding" to "reminded" in the second line. It is not intended that the two images "finger laid" and "clutch" should correspond exactly to each other; for the "void" and the "mother of the universe" are not the same thing. The "void" is only a mask covering the mother's cheek or face. What the "void" feels as a clutch is felt by the mother only as a reminding finger laid on our cheek. It is one advantage of the expression "as if" that it leaves the field open for such variation. It is intended to suggest without saying it that behind the sombre void is the face of a mother. The other two "as if" have the same motive and I do not find them jarring upon me. The second is at a sufficient distance from the first and it is not obtrusive enough to prejudice the third which more nearly followed ... your suggestion "as though" (for the third) does not appeal to me: it almost makes

a suggestion of falsity and in any case it makes no real difference as the expressions are too much kin to each other to repel the charge of reiteration. (CWSA 27: 310)

Sri Aurobindo says that the suggestion to use "as though" would appear to be a falsity but "as if" denotes comparative image. The consciousness deep in the Inconscient is being called as if a mother by a child. Until now it is nameless. Darkness and Night are the characters. Within the darkness, Night is the divinity whom he called the Mother. He called it the Mother for two reasons. It is the mother who gives birth, from the womb of the mother the child is born. This spirit in the Inconscient is a mother in the sense that it gives birth to the entire universe. Secondly, the mother image is needed because the trial of suffering and sorrow of the Ignorance can be borne only by a mother with the touch of her love and care. Owing to these two necessities behind this void, there is the mother. It is like someone asking the Mother, 'the time has come to fulfil my needs and necessities.' Sri Aurobindo defends his reason for giving the image of a childlike finger touching the mother, waking her to the need of taking birth in the consciousness or in the light. Next, we see the mother coming through as the darkness recedes.

Canto One is not all abstract thought and experience. Sri Aurobindo has concealed these aspects through different characters.

The first character we met is Night

The second is the Mother – in the darkness

The third is going to be Usha, the dawn

The fourth character is going to be that of grace

The fifth one will be that of Savitri.

To continue with the text:

Reminded of the endless need in things

The heedless Mother of the universe,

An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast.

Insensibly somewhere a breach began:... (2)

This simile carries the idea of a mother caring for her child. Once this need is there, the infant touched the sombre vast – due to the endless need in things. There is a kind of aspiration, a call, and in response to this first stirring and call, insensibly somewhere a breach began. Somewhere from above, a thin line, a break, a hair-like breach takes place. "A long lone line of hesitating hue." (2) This line is an experiential Truth and should be read slowly. Hue is colour. Hesitating applies to a being which in turn means that there is a consciousness. How can it be possible for a 'hue' to hesitate? The colour was not without the touch of consciousness, it vibrated with a particular consciousness.

Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart

Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep. (2)

"A desert heart" is like a dry heart. This line in the sky – a long line of hesitating hue, must be of the most beautiful colour that it can attract a dried up heart devoid of any love or emotion. The scene and the moment of utmost beauty is so tempting that a dried up heart can wonder, "Ah, how beautiful". This wonder troubled the rim of life's obscure sleep, that is, the Inconscious.

Arrived from the other side of boundlessness

An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps;...(2)

In response to this aspiration from the Inconscious, there Light immediately descends from above. That eye of deity is like the morning sun, the eye of the Godhead. The first rays of the dawn have come piercing the dumb deeps. The deeps refer to the Inconscious.

A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun,

It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,

The torpor of a sick and weary world,

To seek for a spirit sole and desolate
 Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss. (2)

Magnificent descriptions of dawn are there in other long poems of Sri Aurobindo such as 'Ahana' and 'Ilion' as well. "An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps" transforms the darkness into light. We may compare the images of dawn in *Ilion* and *Savitri*. In *Ilion*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,
 Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest
 or their ending,

Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the
 chill of the Euxine.

Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy
 vastness

Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and
 beauty, All on her bosom sustaining, the patient
 compassionate Mother.

...

Closer now gliding glimmered the golden feet of the
 goddess. Over the hills and the headlands spreading her
 garment

of splendour,
 Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,
 Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day
 of his downfall. (CWSA 2: 335)

This last line is also applicable to *Savitri*: "Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day of his downfall". We can understand that it is brilliant poetry, however, it lacks that mystic touch of *Savitri*.

In his introduction to the dawn in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says "An eye of deity pierced through the dumb deeps / A scout in a reconnaissance from the Sun". A scout moves ahead of an army

into the enemy terrain to gather information and then returns. Usha, the dawn, is called here a scout in a reconnaissance from the sun. It is as if the sun itself has sent his daughter Usha, to find out if the earth is still asleep or awake! 'Shall I come now or later?' It is that kind of a reconnaissance from the sun.

It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,
The torpor of a sick and weary world,
To seek for a spirit sole and desolate
Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss. (2)

This is what Usha finds there: this is the condition of the earth! It is too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss. It is so much immersed in its own darkness that it cannot lift its head to discover that bliss which is within itself. This was the condition of the earth when the first rays of the sun touched the earth!

Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy... (2)

Usha, the dawn, is intervening in a mindless universe. A universe without a mind – not an individual without a mind. We are now in that primordial situation where the element of mind has not yet entered. In that dawn the principle of mind has not as yet evolved. This "Reluctant hush" is coming from the Inconscient; it is not ready to accept Light, that is why it is reluctant. But the message comes and it is a clarion call for the adventure of consciousness and joy of the entire earth.

What Sri Aurobindo represents is this evolving spirit, this eternal consciousness which is moving from the lowest end of the Inconscient to the Superconscient. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo represent that evolutionary spirit which is calling for the adventure of consciousness and joy for the entire earth. They call the entire earth to move on. It is this consciousness that is hid in the Inconscient and urges it to take up the adventure. Why is

the word 'adventure' used? It is because this spirit does not know the specific steps or how long it will take. It has no idea of the struggle ahead. It is an adventure into the unknown.

There is an ancient story of Brahma. One day, feeling flattened out without any energy, he discovered that his Shakti – Brahmajaya – left him. He did not know where had she gone. Then he calls all the gods and goddesses to find her. Sarama first discovers that Brahmajaya, the Shakti of Brahma, went and hid herself deep into Matter. How do they call her back? First it is the goddess Soma who is sent to call her back. She tells her about the attraction of the adventure on the way to the return path. It is very significant that Sri Aurobindo talks about the very same principle in this story of evolution. This evolution is the return of Brahmajaya to Brahma from Matter to Life and Mind and so on and so forth.

After the first call comes Agni with the mantra of aspiration for the psychic love. Love is born here. He evokes in her that love for Brahma, saying 'he is waiting for you, please come back.' The invocation of love is the very first step in evolution. The symbolism of this story is present in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. That is where the first message of the Sun comes into matter, evoking and urging it to start the return journey to the Supreme Brahma. This is the adventure of joy. For us on the mental level it may be the adventure taken in joy and delight.

And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,

Compelled renewed consent to see and feel. (3)

"Renewed consent" is important because the first ray of dawn manages to get this consent – an agreement to return to the Superconscious. This "renewed consent to see and feel" means to renew the consent to become fully conscious or to have complete self-awareness. The ray of light entering into the Inconscious

makes it aware and calls it for the return journey – the beginning of evolution.

A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,
A sense was born within the darkness' depths,
A memory quivered in the heart of Time As
if a soul long dead were moved to live:
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more. (3)

Now, this is the second phase. The ray of light came and gave its message. In the unsounded Void of the Inconscient, "a thought was sown", "a sense was born", "a memory quivered". It was as if a soul that was dead or asleep wakes up and has the urge to live again. But after the fall of consciousness into the oblivion of the Inconscient, all the records of the past had been destroyed and everything had to be "rebuilt" and "laboured out once more". It suggests the Inconscient has given it its renewed consent to strive towards the light of consciousness once again.

3 All can be done if the god-touch is there

Now we shall read a line which comes as a surprise in the text: "All can be done if the god-touch is there." We see a memory coming back, a ray of light awaking the inconscient, and amidst this scenario suddenly this line appears, glorious and full of promise! The power of promise and hope that is packed into this line almost reveals a divine intervention. With God beside us, nothing is impossible: "All can be done if the god-touch is there." The line is mantric in its transforming power and elevating wisdom. Be it on the human or the cosmic level, in times of trouble, depression and desolation, if one can remember to repeat this line in the depths of one's being, surely it will change the circumstances and lead one out of the darkness.

The expression "god-touch" reminds us of the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, because they would bless us by touching our heads gently. With this god-touch which we enjoy as their blessing, nothing in the world can stand in our way. The word 'touch' is significant as it denotes something happening on the physical level. The touch of God refers to the touch of the Avatar. God descends as Avatars on this earth to lead man beyond his present incapacities and difficulties. He helps us to realise what looks apparently impossible to achieve.

The preposition 'if' adds another dimension of meaning to this sentence. In our shastras we often see that when a devotee is able to please the Lord by deep surrender he becomes worthy of the "god-touch". Therefore, a divine longing with intense aspiration in the heart of the devotee is almost a prerequisite for the "god-touch". The line has other dimensions of meaning also, but for me, personally, this line revives the memories of the Mother's

“god-touch” on me. Touch is one of the most concrete experiences of our senses. There are times when even though the eyes see, the mind does not fully believe things unless they are touched and confirmed. Touch brings self-confidence. Touch communicates a vibration of Love. The “god-touch” is important because the divine Hand passes its vibration to the individual human being. The Divine touching matter is the first connecting factor in our yoga of transformation. The god-touch assumes immense importance in the philosophy of transformation, as there is a definite need of the physical body of the Avatar to touch Matter.

We have different forms of *diksha* – initiation. It can be transmitted by a look or by a sound or an invisible influence or even by a flower. But *diksha* by the touch is considered the most sacred and that is why we have, in India, the tradition of touching the feet of the Lord or the Guru. This is the significance of the sentence (for me in the context of the Mother). Many people have had the touch of the Mother. Incidentally, I remember once my father requested Champaklal-ji to place a gold ring with the Mother’s symbol on it on the Mother’s chair for her blessings. Very spontaneously he said, rather disturbed, ‘Did not the Mother touch you hundreds of times? Why do you need this touch any more? Hasn’t her touch made your body so very protected and powerful? Why should you still cling on to this external symbolism?’ This god-touch of the Mother is very sacred to such devotees.

After Sri Aurobindo met with accident, Champaklal-ji would assist him by having him rest his hands on his shoulder while Sri Aurobindo walked. As Champaklal was wearing his sacred thread, *janeu* worn by Brahmins in India, Sri Aurobindo’s hand would rest on a portion of this thread. Champaklal would mark that portion and before the next time that Sri Aurobindo would place his

hands again Champaklal would turn and rotate it so a fresh portion of the thread would be touched by Sri Aurobindo. In this manner his entire thread was touched by the Lord. Then he took it off and kept it aside as a treasure. He never wore it again as he felt it was too sacred to be on his body. On the occult level, this act of Champaklal, which was done with such deep love and dedication for Sri Aurobindo, has a deep meaning, as was observed by a senior sadhak of the Ashram. He explained that the occult significance is that once and for all, this ritual of the sacred thread was as though absorbed by Sri Aurobindo, and henceforth the Brahmins need not wear it in times to come.

There is another anecdote regarding the Mother. When she came here in the early years, in 1920s a young disciple refused to do pranam to the Mother, that is, bow at her feet. One day she stood right in front of him and insisted that he did pranam to her. It was not out of ego that she asked him to touch her feet, but because through this touch she could transmit her power to the person. There is a miracle in this touch. While explaining the significance of her feet upon the earth, she said that since her childhood to her last days whenever she has walked upon the earth she helped the earth absorb the supramental Force into its atoms. Through her footsteps, she transferred her Power into the atoms of Matter.

Unfortunately, man's experiments with atomic bombs has disturbed the atoms of Matter so much that the earth is now taking revenge. The material consciousness itself is acutely disturbed. This transfer of the supramental consciousness through her feet helped to re-establish the equilibrium and peace in the very atoms. She always wanted to be close to the earth. Neither her walking was merely a fancy, nor was her playing tennis only an entertainment. They were helping its

transformation on the occult and spiritual levels. This is the labour of the god-touch.

A hope stole in that hardly dared to be
Amid the Night's forlorn indifference. (3)

Once Usha has come with her divinity and touched the Inconscient, suddenly, a hope sprang up that this darkness might be transformed. This hope came "amid the Night's forlorn indifference", suggesting that the Inconscient is so indifferent and insensitive that it seemed as if there was no possibility of an evolutionary advance. Now this first ray of light has appeared. A hope arises in the bosom of the Inconscient, which is now waking and becoming the Ignorance.

Let us read a letter from Amal Kiran from Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In early 1936, Amal wrote many letters to Sri Aurobindo regarding poetry. Amal would ask who are the great poets? What are their characteristics? What was their level of inspiration? He had heard some whispers in the Ashram about a great book in the making called *Savitri*. But this information had not yet been confirmed. So, Amal in his usual witty style, was trying to bring out some information from Sri Aurobindo but he did not succeed in the beginning. But, human mind can play tricks with the Divine. So he wrote to Sri Aurobindo that

I shall consider it a favour indeed if you will give me an instance in English of the inspiration of the pure Overmind.

...I want to steep my consciousness in its rhythm and its, revelation. It will be a most cherished possession. Please don't disappoint me by saying that, as no English writer has a passage of this kind, you cannot do anything for me. (*On Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*: 318)

So Sri Aurobindo was ultimately trapped. He sent to Amal the first 29 lines of *Savitri* – saying that "this is my first sample". That was the first time human eyes saw *Savitri* – the version that we

have now. And this brief trickle emerged into an outpouring of revelation and a flame. Once it was given to Amal, it meant that it became the property of the Ashram. People came to know that Sri Aurobindo had started an epic titled '*Savitri*'.

What happened after that is history – how it was written and rewritten and how Nirod-da was called in as a scribe, and canto by canto it came out from the Ashram press. Once it started being published, it was sent to critics across the world and Sri Aurobindo was criticised. That too was necessary or we would not have had letters on *Savitri*. We owe the best letters on *Savitri* and on overhead poetry to such criticism. In those letters Sri Aurobindo gave the genesis of Overhead Poetry. He had not described it in *The Future Poetry*. Here we got glimpses of what *Savitri* was meant to be. How much he worked again and again on it from this "overhead level" as he called it! It was not a mental exercise based on our human parameters.

In one of his letters he writes that by ordinary mental standards of aesthetics and poetry, repetition should be avoided, especially in close proximity, and that there should be a logical sequence of description, not a succession of images. But we will see that in the opening cantos of *Savitri* and in others these rules were broken. That is why many find *Savitri* difficult to understand, because we expect a logical sequence of events or descriptions, but Sri Aurobindo often springs sudden surprises, like the line: "All can be done if the god-touch is there".

Overhead poetry often does not follow a logical rule. It takes up one idea or image, develops it fully, and then leaves it to take up another idea or image. Ultimately it harmonises these images. This is the way the overmental consciousness works. It encourages individual separateness and then works to harmonise the different individualities. This is in contrast to the mind which takes up one idea and works out its logical consequences. The

Overmind develops different ideas, gives equal importance to each one of them, even though they may seem incompatible, and ultimately it harmonises them. In *Savitri*, says Sri Aurobindo,

I am not writing a scientific treatise, I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal. One who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is Night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness. (CWSA 27: 312)

Thanks to the critics, we learn that *Savitri* emphasises three major principles: Truth, Beauty and Life. We find truths of vision, experience, consciousness, existence. Secondly, Ananda brings together beauty and joy, and when we read *Savitri*, we experience a deep fountain of joy and beauty that envelops the being. And it deals with the whole field of human and cosmic life.

Now, coming back to the passage:

As if solicited in an alien world
With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,
Orphaned and driven out to seek a home,
An errant marvel with no place to live,
Into a far-off nook of heaven there came
A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal. (3)

Regarding the line, "A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal", this verse originally read as "A miraculous gesture dimly came". Amal had questioned the original line and cleverly wrote to Sri Aurobindo various alternatives:

1. Miraculous and dim a gesture came,
2. Miraculously dim a gesture came
3. Dimly miraculous a gesture came
4. Miraculous and slow a gesture came.

Responding to Amal's alternatives, Sri Aurobindo wrote,

Now as to the double adjectives—well, man alive, your proposed emendations are an admirable exposition of the art of bringing a line down the steps till my poor "slow miraculous" above-mind line meant to give or begin the concrete portrayal of an act of some hidden Godhead finally becomes a mere metaphor thrown out from its more facile mint by a brilliantly imaginative poetic intelligence. (CWSA 27: 281)

He further explained,

Do not forget that the *Savitri* is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. Done on this scale, it is really a new attempt and cannot be hampered by old ideas of technique except when they are assimilable. Least of all by standards proper to a mere intellectual and abstract poetry which makes "reason and taste" the supreme arbiters, aims at a harmonised poetic-intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration, a restrained emotive element etc. The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psycho-physical concreteness. (Ibid: 282)

Now continuing with the poem,

The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch

Persuaded the inert black quietude

And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God. (3)

It is an invitation into this alien world. It refers to the dawn again. Earlier we had the first hint of dawn in the Inconscient darkness: "Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred". Then there was "A throe that came and left a quivering trace". And now we see a third movement, in which he refers to as "The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch". The dawn keeps trying

again and again relentlessly, and finally it "Persuaded the inert black quietude". The expression "the inert black quietude" applies to the Inconscient, which is now waking up, "And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God".

The word "disturbed" here has a different meaning from what we usually think as negative and unwanted. It is here more a kind of persuasion of the transfiguring touch. In "god-touch" it was that "touch" which had the capacity of transformation by persuading the Inconscient to wake up. The "fields of God" are "the inert black quietude". The poet says that this "fields of God" get disturbed by the beauty and wonder of the transfiguring touch. Here the word "disturbed" is used in a positive manner, it becomes awakened and receptive to the higher light. It is kind of a quickening or stir of consciousness in which the dormant Inconscient becomes awakened or activated. "Wonder" is an expression of joy, the joy of discovery. Becoming aware of the beauty and joy of the light, the night opens up and a change sets in.

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. (3)

Now there is a slight opening, and in the next few lines he will refer to it as a "pallid rift". At this stage there comes a wandering hand of pale enchanted light. This hand, this magical touch, opens a gate in the darkness which is now "ajar", slightly open on "mystery's verge", on the edge of the darkness. And this gate is "fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge". This gate of dreams is colourful and beautiful.

One lucent corner windowing hidden things
Forced the world's blind immensity to sight. (3)
This opening of the Inconscient to the light forces it to see.

The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god. (3)

This image of darkness falling and slipping like a cloak / From the reclining body of a god seems almost taken from the Vedas. It makes room for more light to come in.

Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns
Outpoured the revelation and the flame. (3)

Out of this first small opening, the intense light of the sun pours into the darkness like a revelation and a flame. This is the contextual meaning of goddess Usha.

Now, to indicate as to how closely Sri Aurobindo paid attention to each word and comma, we can note a letter he wrote to someone who suggested that he substitute the word "barely" for the word "hardly". Sri Aurobindo wrote back:

Your "barely enough", instead of the finer and more suggestive "hardly", falls flat upon my ear; one cannot substitute one word for another in this kind of poetry merely because it means intellectually the same thing; "hardly" is the *mot juste* in this context and, repetition or not, it must remain unless a word not only *juste* but inevitable comes to replace it... On this point I may add that in certain contexts "barely" would be the right word, as for instance, "There is barely enough food left for two or three meals", where "hardly" would be adequate but is much less forceful. It is the other way about in this line. (CWSA 27: 311-322)

We should take note that Sri Aurobindo not only valued every word but also was looking for the inevitable word. Remember the word "inevitable". However good or appropriate it may look on the level of poetry or rhyme or imagery, he would not pass it unless and until he had the inevitable word.

The brief perpetual sign recurred above.

A glamour from unreach'd transcendences
 Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
 A message from the unknown immortal Light
 Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
 Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
 And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours. (3-4)

Now we see the dawn in its full luster and manifestation; it is no more just a ray. With its shimmering and lustrous colours it appears as though it is a message from the immortal Light of the Supermind. To help us appreciate the goddess Usha in her full brightness and symbolism, I will read a passage from *The Secret of the Veda*.

Throughout the Veda Usha, daughter of Heaven, has always the same function. She is the medium of the awakening, the activity and the growth of the other gods; she is the first condition of the Vedic realisation. By her increasing illumination the whole nature of man is clarified; through her he arrives at the Truth, through her he enjoys the Beatitude. The divine dawn of the Rishis is the advent of the divine Light throwing off veil after veil and revealing in man's activities the luminous godhead. In that light the Work is done, the sacrifice offered and its desirable fruits gathered by humanity. (CWSA 15: 295)

Sri Aurobindo starts *The Life Divine* with a Vedic hymn to Usha because she is the first condition of the Vedic realisation. She ignites in us the aspiration for the inner awakening. Later in the same passage as the one above, Sri Aurobindo says,

This dawn moves in her progression always according to the rule of a divine action; many are the thoughts she brings in that motion, but her steps are sure and all desirable things, all supreme boons, the boons of the Ananda, the blessings of the divine existence, – are in her hands. She is ancient and

eternal, the dawn of the Light that was from the beginning, *purānī*, but in her coming she is ever young and fresh to the soul that receives her. (Ibid: 295-296)

This is what is magnificent about Usha. She is the most ancient and she existed in the very beginning of the creation when the rhythm of night and day was harmonised. But that does not mean that she is an old goddess, she is ever young because she dawns every morning for us. This is not a youth pertaining to any age. Carrying all that has existed in the past, Usha opens new doors or possibilities every day in our life. Dawn is a strange combination of the past, the present and the future. In this way she is remarkable, and that is why we people in India perform Surya Namaskar every morning, bowing down to her so that she may bring divine boons, the blessings of the divine existence.

She is to shine wide, she that is the divine Dawn, as the light of the immortal existence bringing out in man the powers or the voices of Truth and Joy...

Divine Dawn comes thus to the soul with the light of her knowledge, *prajnāna*, – confronting all the worlds as field of that knowledge, – all provinces, that is to say, of our universal being, –mind, vitality, physical consciousness. She stands uplifted over them on our heights above mind, in the highest heaven... So exalted she stands prepared to effect the motion of the divine knowledge, progressing as a new revelation of the eternal truth, *navyasi*, in their harmonised and equalised activities like a wheel moving smoothly over a level field; for they now, their diversities and discords removed, offer no obstacle to that equal motion. (Ibid: 296)

What is important is that Usha not only brings the divine boons, the divine Ananda, she also brings the divine knowledge and light

into the mental, vital and physical levels of man. Human beings get recharged every morning on all these levels.

In her plenitude she separates, as it were, and casts down from her the elaborately sewn garment that covered the truth and moves as the wife of the Lover, the energy of her all-blissful Lord, *svasarasya patnī*. Full in her enjoyment of the felicity, full in her effectuation of all activities, *subhagā sudamśāḥ*, she brings into existence in us by her revelations Swar, the concealed luminous mind, our highest mental heaven; and thus from the farthest extremities of mental being extends herself over the physical consciousness. (Ibid: 296-297)

The first point is the elevation of man into his full force of Light which is bringing down the knowledge. The second part is the revelation of the Truth and the flame. This revelation pours down *Ananda*, the *Amrita*, the *Soma rasa*, the bliss of the immortal being into the bodily existence.

"The supramental world in us, foundation of the Truth, is the foundation of the Dawns". (Ibid: 297) The concluding thought in Sri Aurobindo's explanation is that it is the supramental sun, the supramental light, that is behind her and pushing her to awaken....

They are the descent upon mortal nature of the light of that immortal Truth, *ṛtam jyotis*. The Lord of the Dawns, Master of Truth, Illuminer, Creator, Organiser, putting forth in the foundation of Truth, above mind, the impulsion of his activities, enters with them by this goddess into a bodily and mental existence no longer obscured but released from their limits and capable of vastness, *mahī rodasī*. The Lord of Truth is the sole lord of things. He is Varuna, soul of vastness and purity; he is Mitra, source of love and light and harmony. His creative Wisdom, *mahī mitrasya varunasya māyā*, unlimited

in its scope, for he is Varuna,—appearing, *candрева*, as a light of bliss and joy,—for he is Mitra,—arranges, perfectly organises, in multitudinous forms, in the wideness of the liberated nature, the luminous expansions, the serene expressions of the Truth. He combines the various brilliancies with which his Dawn has entered our firmaments; he blends into one harmony her true and happy voices.

Dawn divine is the coming of the Godhead. She is the light of the Truth and the Felicity pouring on us from the Lord of Wisdom and Bliss, *amṛtasya ketuḥ, svasarasya patnī*. (Ibid: 297-298)

Now, coming back to the passage, Sri Aurobindo writes: "The brief perpetual sign recurred above. /A glamour from unreachd transcendences." (3) These "unreachd transcendences" are the supreme Sachchidananda and the truth of the Supermind. The Dawn has come from there. "Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen" (3), She is carrying the glory of the Unseen. This is the hope and joy signifying that the Unseen will manifest; the first indication of what is going to come after her.

"A message from the unknown immortal Light." (4) She is carrying a message of the unknown supramental manifestation. "Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge, / Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues" (4). We can see the difference from the earlier verse, "A long lone line of hesitating hue", which was the first introduction of the light; now it progressed to these "magnificent hues". "And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours" (4). This suggests that she has buried the seed in the subconscious so that it will grow and express itself into full blossom one day in later times, even though now things are not ready and welcoming. This "seed of grandeur" is the grandeur of the future that is yet to come. "An instant's visitor the godhead shone". (4) Usha is the instant's visitor. "On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood." (4)

Sri Aurobindo here calls Usha "a vision". Even on the physical level, when we look at the early morning sky with the glorious sunrise, we feel it is a marvellous vision from the gods. On the spiritual level, it is the vision of the supramental truth which stood awhile, "And bent over earth's pondering forehead curve". (Ibid.) In her love for our earth, she embraced the earth bending over it, giving light to it, and

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. (4)

It is a description of *Savitri* itself. This *Savitri* is nothing but a "significant myth" telling about the greatness of the supramental dawns yet to come, and it is indeed a brilliant code that we do not understand, it has such a universal theme or concept that the whole sky serves as a page for Sri Aurobindo.

Now, in its contextual meaning, it is the dawn who has written a significant myth. The simile of beauty and bliss refers to the dawn uniting these two together. "Hieroglyphs" is writing with images, such as used in the Egypt. The colours, forms and shapes in the sky have a mystical sense-meaning that is a kind of myth. What is this myth? Basically, a myth is an archetypal story which is relevant to all times. We have myths in India, in Greece, in China, in every country, but they are relevant to people everywhere in all times. Taking different forms and characters, depending upon the times and the cultures, it repeats itself endlessly in every individual person and every day. This is the greatness of a myth. Why I am discussing this is because this eternal battle between love and death, this eternal fight between light and darkness is like a myth. Every country has stories like this. And the eternal search for immortality is depicted through

the stories of Gilgamesh and Ruru and Pramadvava just as in *Savitri*. These myths are not simply created, they are eternal truths which different cultures have glimpsed and given different names and details. What is most important about a myth is that although it has been written long back, in times immemorial, it is still relevant to each individual every day. If we can understand this definition of myth, then we can understand the symbolism of *Savitri* in which characters are portrayed not out of imagination but out of spiritual truths.

Now, how is this legend of *Savitri* relevant to each one of us every day in our lives even today? Is it that we should be reading *Savitri* daily? Of course we should, but *Savitri* is relevant to us because it is a struggle between love and death. We in our everyday life face this issue of death and we want to know about it.

What is death? Is it just the cessation of a physical life in a physical body? Or is it something more and beyond? Later we will go into the details of death, but in short this myth portrays eternal truths which are relevant in our daily life. What the dawn is writing every day is meant for all of us. It is the message, the promise and the assurance of tomorrow.

Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
 Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;
 A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
 Almost was flung on the opaque Inane. (4)

One meaning of epiphany is the manifestation of the Divine, but it is also used more broadly to mean a moment of great revelation or realisation. At one level, when we think of that day, we think of Satyavan's death. But it is also the day where a new manifestation is disclosed.

Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;... (4)

Our thoughts and hopes look forward to their fulfilment; they are signs of this coming of Light from "the invisible goal". With the coming of the full Dawn, Light "was flung on the opaque Inane", signifying the Inconscient. "Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;" Mark how Sri Aurobindo uses these words "perturbed", "disturbed", "quivering" – he uses them in a unique way.

Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm

Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;... (4)

He comes out with a grand description! That beautiful dawn, Usha, is "Infinity's centre", "a Face of rapturous calm". Long back when I read these verses, I associated them with the Mother's face. Although Sri Aurobindo is speaking about Usha here, who do you think is this "Infinity's centre"? It is the Divine Mother herself! Not only does this description befit her, but metaphysically also she is "Infinity's centre".

Centre suggests a circle, but here it is not just the centre of a circle but the essence of the Infinite. The Infinite is that consciousness which is cosmic and transcendental, without a focal point; but with the incarnation of the Divine Mother, the Infinite has taken upon itself a special focal point. This is how I see this centre as being the Mother herself. There is a logical contextual meaning as well as a cosmic meaning. We have to jump to other levels of meaning that are hidden within the lines.

Here the invocation is not to the Mother but to Savitri, and even those who are not the devotees can enjoy *Savitri* because of its mantric power. Great poetry has its charm and a message for everyone, not only for devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.

Ambassadress twixt eternity and change,

The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths

That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars

And saw the spaces ready for her feet. (4)

This is the third character we are speaking about—the incarnation of Grace. We have seen the Night, we have seen Usha. And now comes the third personality 'Grace', about whom Sri Aurobindo has spoken in the book *The Mother*. Here also it fits very well. Just after the onset of Usha, this Form from far beatitudes comes close to the earth. The phrase "far beatitudes" suggest that it is a form that comes from the bliss of Sachchidananda. She comes because she is the manifestation of Love and Grace. She is the ambassadress twixt eternity and change.

Sri Aurobindo has written the same words for our Mother too, that she is the bridge between the transcendent and the individual which means the eternity and the change, between immortality and mortality. In fact, he goes further to state that the Mother is the bridge between the unknown and the known, between the unmanifest and the manifest. It is she who has brought forth the unknown into the fold of the known. Therefore, she is the bridge between the transcendental Sachchidananda and the individual multiplicity.

The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths

That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars (4)

The moment she leaned across the full universe and the worlds, she saw the spaces ready for her feet because Usha had done that work of preparing the earth, the consciousness, to receive the Goddess of Grace.

Once she half looked behind for her veiled sun,

Then, thoughtful, went to her immortal work. (4)

She is hesitant while coming to the earth to transform it. She takes a last lingering look behind to her veiled Sun – Surya Savitri – the Lord and the Creator. Then thoughtfully she "went to her immortal work".

"Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close:" (4) Sri Aurobindo is first telling us about the earth. Perhaps it is more prepared than man himself, perhaps man does not yet know about the coming of the Avatar! But Nature is aware of this great descent of the Goddess of Grace.

The waking ear of Nature heard her steps
 And wideness turned to her its limitless eye, And,
 scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile
 Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.
 All grew a consecration and a rite.
 Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
 The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
 Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
 The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky. (4)

Look at this magnificent outburst of Nature. Here Nature is alive. It is not the Jada-Prakriti or the Tamasic-Prakriti. Nature is conscious. Sri Aurobindo responded to a critic who argued that he had illegitimately transferred the epithet "wings" from the wind to the hymn of the wind.

The critic thinks that I imagined the wind as having a winged body and then took away the wings from its shoulders and clapped them on to its voice or hymn which could have no body. But I did nothing of the kind; I am not bound to give wings to the wind... The epithet "wide-winged" then does not belong to the wind and is not transferred from it, but is proper to the voice of the wind which takes the form of a conscious hymn of aspiration and rises ascending from the bosom of the great priest, as might a great-winged bird released into the sky and sinks and rises again, aspires and fails and aspires again on the "altar hills". One can surely speak of a voice or a chant of aspiration rising on wide wings and I do not see how this can be taxed as a false or unpoetic image. (CWSA 27: 337)

He is not depending upon logic or imagination, it is always a thing seen or experienced, just as he said about the Ignorance and the Inconscient. Here too it is his experience he is stating. He has seen it. "It is an essential and central feature of the things seen and omitting it would be to leave a gap in the middle of the picture by dropping out something which is indispensable to its totality". (Ibid: 338)

What marvellous letters defending the words he has written with detailed explanations so that we understand that these are pure experiences and not mere figments of the imaginative mind. Therefore, he can so forcefully utter the last sentence! It is as if we have a lovely painting of a sunrise and from the scene we take out the sun which is indispensable to its totality – the whole meaning is lost. Such is the inevitability and essentiality of his poetry.

To any mountainous terrain we can apply these descriptions. We can see the "altar hills", the breeze, the hymn of worship and the trees in prayer. The light that we see through these trees in the evenings looks like it is coming from some beyond which is the promise of the future.

Sri Aurobindo is not merely a poet; he is a Kavi, a poet-seer. A seer first sees, then he describes. So we call him a *drashtā*. Therefore he says:

At any rate this "picture" or rather this part of the vision is a complete rendering of what I saw in the light of the inspiration and the experience that came to me. I might indeed have elaborated more details, etched out at more length but that would have been superfluous and unnecessary; or I might have indulged in an ampler description, but this would have been appropriate only this part of the vision had been the whole. (Ibid: 338)

Please mark the balance of the poet! He is saying that this is only the part of the vision of the descent of Usha and coming of Savitri, and if he had described this in greater length then the balance would be gone. Regarding the last line he says,

This last line is an expression of an experience which I often had whether in the mountains or on the plains of Gujarat or looking from my window in Pondicherry not only in the dawn but at other times and I am unable to find any feebleness either in the experience or in the words that express it. If the critic or any reader does not feel or see what I so often felt and saw, that may be my fault, but that is not sure, for you and others have felt very differently about it; it may be a mental or a temperamental failure on their part and it will be then my or perhaps even the critic's or reader's misfortune.

I may refer here to Mendonça's disparaging characterisation of my epithets. He finds that their only merit is that they are good prose epithets, not otiose but right words in the right place and exactly descriptive but only descriptive without any suggestion of any poetic beauty or any kind of magic. Are there then prose epithets and poetic epithets and is the poet debarred from exact description using always the right word in the right place, the *mot juste*? I am under the impression that all poets, even the greatest, use as the bulk of their adjectives words that have merit, and the difference from prose is that a certain turn in the use of them accompanied by the power of that rhythm in which they are carried lifts to the poetic level... In more ordinary passages, such as the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, the epithet "forbidden tree" and "mortal taste" are of the same kind but can we say that they are merely prose epithets, good descriptive adjectives and have not other merit? If you take the lines about Nature's worship in *Savitri* I do not see how they can be described as prose epithets; at any rate I never

have dreamt of using in prose unless I wanted to write poetic prose such expressions as "wide-winged hymn" or "a great priestly wind" or "alter hills" or "revealing sky". These epithets belong in their very nature to poetry alone, whatever may be their other value or want of value. He says they are obvious and could have been supplied by any imaginative reader, well, so are Milton's in the passages quoted and perhaps there too the very remarkable imaginative reader whom Mendonça repeatedly brings in might have supplied them by his own unfailing poetic verve. Whether they or any of them prick a hidden beauty out of the picture is for each reader to feel or judge for himself; but perhaps he is thinking of such things as Keats' "magic casements" and "foam of perilous seas" and "fairy lands forlorn", but I do not think even in Keats the bulk of the epithets are of that unusual character. (Ibid: 338-340)

We shall read the remaining part of the letter in another context when he describes about the vision of Truth. Here Sri Aurobindo has given adequate explanation and I need not speak any further about it.

Let us reread the passage:

Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close:

The waking ear of Nature heard her steps

And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,

And, scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile

Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds. (4)

Who is this who has "scattered on the sealed depths her luminous smile"? It is this goddess of Grace. In Book III, there is a line: "Suffering was lost in her immortal smile" (314). This luminous smile is given by that goddess who "Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds".

There is a line from Shelley that is very similar: "That light whose smile kindles the universe." The poet Shelley caught the same

meaning. Here we have her smile which is so enchanting and so very transformative that it could bring forth a manifestation from the silence of the worlds. This "kindled to fire" is the manifestation into multiplicity. We should keep always the double meaning in our mind. In fact, Thompson, in one of his sonnets, writes that poetry always carries a double vision. It should never be read with a flat single vision. It is scientists who work with a single vision, not poets. The essence of poetry always mediates between the concrete and the subtle, between the mortal and the immortal, the transcendent and the individual. In this line, "Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds", at one level it refers to the manifestation, the creation, and at another level it relates to the awakening of nature in the morning. Then consider the next lines:

All grew a consecration and a rite.
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky. (4)

We can imagine one of these Vedic rites where Agni is in the centre and hymns are being chanted in praise of the gods. But here it is not simply a human religious rite; it is a universal and a cosmic rite of Nature. Sri Aurobindo is seeing the winds spreading hymns over the hills and mountains upward to heaven and the boughs of the trees praying to the sky that is revealing all.

4 The shadowy back of doubt

Now we get into a new phase. Sri Aurobindo writes:
Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,
Here where one knows not even the step in front
And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
On this anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Impartial witness of our joy and bale,
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray. (5)

Earlier we had a description of the response from Nature. In the entire *Savitri* we see Nature always responding to the divine touch, aware of the coming of the incarnation, whereas humanity is not conscious of the Divine's advent. In this passage we get a glimpse into the human situation. "Here" means on the earth. "Gulfs" mean the abyss. As we read along, the first three lines are understandable but on the fourth line the word 'doubt' is interesting. He says that "Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt". Doubt basically belongs to the level of mind. On the physical and vital levels there is no doubt. What we see here is man's pathetic condition, where he has no idea of the truth. He does not even know his very next step. In fact, it reminds me of a conversation between the Mother and one of the Ashram captains. In brief, the captain said to the Mother something like this: 'Mother, I am responsible for these persons'. The Ashram captains feel highly responsible for certain things. And the Mother said something to this effect – 'You are responsible? Who has given you the responsibility? How do you think you are capable of taking the responsibility for another person when you yourself do not even know what is in front of your nose? How much is man's knowledge that he thinks that he can take

responsibility for another person?' I remembered this when I read the verse: "where one knows not even the step in front". With such ignorance within us how dare we can think that we can take responsibility of others! Our condition is such that the truth we try to understand is always infested with doubt. Doubt is not only on the level of mind but it is a very potent force in the hands of the anti-divine forces, especially for those who take up sadhana.

It so happened that after Sri Aurobindo left his body, the Mother was approached by a form similar to that of Sri Aurobindo which had been taken up by the anti-divine force. That form came to her and said things to this effect that 'Now that Sri Aurobindo is gone, leaving the work incomplete, do you think you can continue without his help? Leave it now, it is not possible.' It came time and again but of course the Mother recognised this form as a false being. Still, each time this form would appear, it would put a doubt in her mind and she would think 'Will I really be able to achieve this task of transformation? Have I really got the strength without Sri Aurobindo?' This doubt is a virus that is infused in us and works its way through. Once this virus of doubt attacks our consciousness, all our capacities become incapacities, because doubt brings in fear which takes away not only all our strength but starts to affect our faith after a certain stage. We begin to ask questions like: 'Am I doing the right thing? Is he my right guru? Am I in the right place?' On an intellectual level, all such rational questioning may have a place, but in sadhana, once one is initiated, one is asked to have faith. An enlightened faith is better than a blind faith, but any faith is better than doubt which has no value. In answering to a letter of mine, she replied that "faith is no faith that changes with the circumstances". Even the Mother was attacked by doubt which is something that can become like a cancer in our consciousness.

An Avatar has to go through phases of doubt, even Christ did. He had to struggle for 40 days as he was tempted by the Devil in the desert. This kind of doubt may come at the instigation of an anti-divine force which is always there to mislead spiritual people. These forces always attack great sadhaks. Interestingly, one day there was a big storm in Pondicherry. On that night, an anti-divine force took the form of Sri Aurobindo and went to Nolini-da to give him Darshan. It truly looked like Sri Aurobindo. Its main aim was to swerve those who are on the path of Yoga. It wanted to win the allegiance of Nolini-da, but he himself had been a master in occultism. So, he looked first at his feet and saw that they were turned backwards. Only the upper external being could take the form of Sri Aurobindo – not the feet. Nolini-da instantly knew the Devil was behind the form and it had to flee.

On another violent stormy night an artist in the Ashram caught the vision of a devil. Being an artist he immediately drew the figure, the face of the Devil that he could manage to see through the flashes of lightning in the darkness. The next day he sent that sketch to Mother. The Mother confirmed that the night before it was he who had come and created that havoc in the Ashram.

These forces come also to other sadhaks, and may take upon themselves the form of Sri Aurobindo to pull them away from the path. People may get misled by seeing the form of Sri Aurobindo and may not be able to discriminate the true from the false. I was quite amazed that doubt also came to the Mother, but she relentlessly fought it back. Just imagine the Mother fighting out a tough battle with a strong anti-divine element!

And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
On this anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Impartial witness to our joy and bale,
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray. (5)

This is the earth and yonder is the witness-self who is gazing or looking at this world of joy and misery – the bale or the misery; he is an impartial witness of this world. Here, I have a little explanation from Sri Aurobindo regarding this last line. A critic once wrote to Sri Aurobindo, "I think you have miswritten, I think it should be "prostrate soul". And Sri Aurobindo replied....

I think you said in the letter that in the verse "Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray" "soil" was an error for "soul" but "soil" is correct for I am describing the revealing light falling upon the lower levels of the earth, not on the soul. No doubt, the whole thing is symbolic, but the symbol has to be kept in front and things symbolised have to be concealed or only peep out from behind, it cannot come openly in the front and push aside the symbol. (CWSA 27: 329)

The mental intelligence would tend to think this should be "our prostrate soul", so Sri Aurobindo had to defend this supposed 'misprint!' The dawn of knowledgge has come down to settle upon this prostrate soil – it has come to awaken the earth. The word "here" has come three times and again it means this earth.

Here too the vision and prophetic gleam
Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes;
Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range. (5)

Here on earth, Usha's wonderful light is spent illumining common meaningless shapes. What then can Usha do? 'Then the divine afflatus' – the supreme inspiration in the form of Usha, "spent, withdrew, Unwanted" – what a tragedy it is to be human! Nature always welcomes the new light and man always rejects it! The light withdrew "Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range". Our eternal tragedy has been that we have never accepted and recognised our own saviours. Unfortunately, the human consciousness has always been such that in spite of all his

aspiration and prayers for god-realisation, we have never accepted the god when he wanted to manifest himself.

A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
 The worship of a Presence and a Power
 Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
 The prescience of a marvellous birth to come. (5)

Here we have a new thought. 'In its trace' is referring to the trace of dawn. Each time dawn comes to prepare humanity with new hope and light, even though it is rejected, it eventually awakens an aspiration in man, a yearning that lingers, "The worship of a Presence and a Power". But this power is "Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts". Nature wants God. Man may worship God but man does not truly want God. Religions teach us to worship God only in temples. They never teach us how to establish that deity within the temple of our hearts. It prefers to keep God outside of us, safe and secure in the *garbhagriha*, within the seventh chamber of the temple. In brief, religion externalises God and spirituality internalises God.

Human being is death-bound. And until man is released from this binding by death, the new light, the higher Power and Presence cannot manifest. Again we get an indication of the supramental transformation here. Death-bound hearts can only pray; they cannot manifest the Divine. Mortality has its own traps. This means that Savitri has to come down to conquer death, to release us from the shackles of death so that the Supermind can descend and manifest itself as part of the earthatmosphere. Until then we have to wait for Savitri to be born.

The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
 Only a little the god-light can stay.
 Spiritual beauty illumining human sight
 Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask
 And squanders eternity on a beat of Time. (5)

I have picked up another similar verse that comes later in *Savitri*: "Heaven's greatness came, but was too great to stay". (431)

It is the same idea that the god-light, even when manifest in the Avatars and Vibhutis, cannot stay long. They are not given hermitage in our hearts, in our consciousness. The best we do is build temples and carve statues, write books or make speeches, and then we forget about them. Despite such a brief venture, the advent of the Divine is never a waste, because it illumines human sight and "Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask". Each time there is an advent of the Divine, in whatever name and form, he leaves behind a lining. You know what a lining is. In jewelery boxes there may be a velvet lining, or a voile lining in dresses. Similarly, the Divine leaves a kind of lining within matter. This is a lining of passion and mystery, meaning that they inject in matter their passionate aspiration to awaken. Each time, relentlessly, they leave behind this aspiration in Matter. This beautiful verse shows the eternal patience and perseverance of the higher spiritual truth.

As when a soul draws near the sill of birth,
 Adjoining mortal time to Timelessness,
 A spark of deity lost in Matter's crypt
 Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,
 That transitory glow of magic fire
 So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.
 The message ceased and waned the messenger. (5)

What a tragedy! Read the last verse. How many times the messenger has to return! As if to facilitate our understanding, this situation is being compared to the birth of a child. The line, "When a soul draws near the sill of birth" means when a soul comes into the womb of the mother to take birth upon the earth, it enters into the zone of time and space. As the soul descends

from timelessness, to take birth in a child, it links its timelessness with time.

"A spark of deity lost in Matter's crypt". But while doing so, once it enters time, it loses the memory of its timeless state. In 'mortal time' it loses its sense of immortality. 'Crypt' is an underground cell. Here, Sri Aurobindo is comparing the womb to matter's crypt after losing its own status of timelessness in matter,

Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,
That transitory glow of magic fire

So now dissolved in bright accustomed air. (5)

It loses its original resplendent lustre. This is what happened to the great message brought by Usha. Nolini-da has explained these lines quite aptly:

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. (CWNKG 3: 164).

In the Vedas, the Panis are cave-dwellers who steal the sun and keep it hidden in their caves. The caves represent the inconscient and the Light has been hidden inside the womb of the Inconscient. To recover this Light, the gods launch a hunt with the help of the cows that represent the Light of the Sun. This is the Truth hidden deep inside matter which has to be revealed. Then Nolini-da says,

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. (Ibid.)

This is from a longer essay by Nolini-da where he discusses that fateful day when there will be the delivery of the divine Light hidden in the Inconscient, what is called the "dark Sun". That is the day when the epiphany was revealed – the day "when Satyavan must die". So this is where "The message ceased and waned the messenger". It left its seed and met with the same resistance. Then,

The single Call, the uncompanied Power,
Drew back into some far-off secret world The
hue and marvel of the supernal beam:
She looked no more on our mortality. (5)

This single call of the Divine had to withdraw "into some faroff secret world" which is her own transcendental world.

The excess of beauty natural to god-kind
Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;... (5)

Here I quote the lines of the Mother from the *Prayers and Meditations* to which I was referring earlier:

Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoke 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. (CWM 1: 377)

In Cantos One and Two Sri Aurobindo has repeated this idea several times. Therefore, we must try to understand this in its depth. Nolini-da's article throws ample light on this. Why is man refusing each time the higher grace – this meal prepared by her?

What is this banquet that she prepared for man and which man refused? It is nothing else than the Life Divine here on earth—the life of the Gods enjoying immortality, full of the supreme light and power, love and delight. Man refused because for him it 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 selfsufficiency. (CWNKG 4: 247)

Through our small and limited consciousness we cannot appreciate divinity. In a way it can be said that we have a single line of aspiration for the Divine, but when the Divine pours down his light and bliss, our consciousness is too limited and narrow to hold it all and sustain it.

In the present century, we are so steeped in materialistic values that we do not even believe in the existence of such higher realities. *Savitri* gives us glimpses of these truths and lays down the steps as to how to approach and later manifest them. This is not known to man and yet he is so arrogant in his little knowledge, his petty power and his blind self-sufficiency. Let us accept in all humility that we do not know who God is, or what the spiritual reality is. On the contrary, in our blind mental arrogance of scientific power and technology, we refuse his very existence.

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. (Ibid)

How brilliantly it is brought out here! The first problem is ignorance, the second is arrogance, and the third is the feeling of uneasiness with the very thought of a divine existence. That is because mankind feels so cozy in its pettiness that the higher light always makes it feel uncomfortable. It is because of this love for pettiness that we put Jesus on the cross when he came to show us the higher light. This has been our perennial habit. We deny and curse all our saviours. Likewise, the Mother with her natural and spontaneous love for us, prepared the banquet, a banquet that brings us material well-being as well as spiritual wealth, and she had taken up that labour 'inconspicuously'. Avatars work inconspicuously for the good of humanity but we defy their efforts. There is a verse in *Savitri* which describe this: "The world unknowing, for the world she stood"(13). Avatars have come and gone, but did we really learn anything from them? Writing poetry and making sculptures, building temples and churches is all that we have done. The Mother says that each time a new Avatar comes, he meets with an equal resistance of the past. Man never welcomes the new light. But regarding Sri Aurobindo she also says: "But tomorrow will prove the truth of what he revealed and his work will be done" (CWM 13: 22).

Explaining the Mother's words from her Prayers, Nolini-da says,

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. (CWNKG 4: 247-248)

That was a marvellous lesson that Mother has given to humanity by returning the gifts to the Supreme Brahman. We also learn in life that we need to detach ourselves from all and surrender only to the Divine. Let us not expect anything from anyone else. Man not only betrays the Avatars, he betrays his

brethren too. Therefore, the Lord says in the Gita that we should contact Him in all our acts, thoughts and feelings. We have to learn to detach ourselves from the world and be more attached to the Divine alone, as he is our only Truth and bliss.

Now, to come back to our reading: "The excess of beauty natural to god-kind. / Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;" Time-born eyes are our mortal eyes. They cannot look too long on the excessive beauty that is natural to the Divine.

Too mystic-real for space-tenancy

Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:

The rarity and wonder lived no more. (5)

The glory of the dawn was not unreal, it was "mystic-real", a higher type of reality of the spiritual level. The next two lines describe the result of the mortal death-bound people rejecting the light:

There was the common light of earthly day.

Affranchised from the respite of fatigue

Once more the rumour of the speed of Life

Pursued the cycles of her blinded quest. (6)

After the divine withdrawal, we are left back in our common, normal existence. It seems that Sri Aurobindo, while writing this, might have foreseen the modern speed of life. In any case, the spiritual light dissipated and became the common light of day. Mankind was left in its ignorance.

All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;

The thousand peoples of the soil and tree

Obeded the unforeseeing instant's urge,

And, leader here with his uncertain mind,

Alone who stares at the future's covered face,

Man lifted up the burden of his fate. (6)

We are stuck in our "unvarying" daily acts. Everything in nature has resumed its regular activities of the day. Man, the leader of

this evolution, looks at the future with fear and anxiety rather than with an attitude of faith. Nature, the birds and the animals, live in the present. Only man has been given a sense of future, but the clarity of that sight is diffused with anxiety and uncertainty. This lack of trust in the Divine spoils everything and turns the future into a burden for man.

What is this burden of fate? What is it that this day is going to bring about for us? What is the fate of this day? This day has just begun. How is it going to end? To reveal this, there is the dramatic entrance of Savitri.

And Savitri too awoke among these tribes... (6)

When we talk about the future, this future is Savitri. It cannot either manifest or be revealed without her. Sri Aurobindo has changed the complete scenario.

5 Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch

The first section of the canto was occult and symbolic and dealt especially with the creation of the universe and the very beginning of evolution. In the second section we reach the point where the cosmic day joins with that particular fateful day when Satyavan must die.

And Savitri too awoke among these tribes

That hastened to join the brilliant Summoner's chant

And, lured by the beauty of the apparent ways,

Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy. (6)

Having heard so much about her, we might have expected a grandiose entry of Savitri in the book. On the contrary, it almost seems like an anti-climax; it is an unusually quiet and common introduction of Savitri. Perhaps this is because Sri Aurobindo wants us to see Savitri as the human embodiment of the supreme Mother. Later on we will have passages that extensively describe of her inner divinity. We have to understand and accept Savitri as a divine incarnation in a human body.

The Mother is divine and to realise her in her divine aspects is indeed great, but devotees in their adoration should not lose sight of her human aspect. Most of us think of her or believe and worship her as she is described in the booklet *The Mother*. At least that is so in India. How many have looked into the great struggle she waged for physical immortality which is recorded in the book *Notes on the Way*? We must not bypass her intense sadhana with the cells of the body facing deep suffering and pain in order to hew a new path towards a physical victory over death. We cannot disregard the human aspect of Savitri or the Mother. I think the right perspective to look at her is as the human-divine-Mother. This may save us from developing a creed of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Mother, who, along with Sri Aurobindo has taken

upon herself a tremendous adventure, altogether unknown and unheard of in human or spiritual history is absolutely true.

For our sadhana it is very important and necessary to look at the supreme divine aspect of the Mother, but to understand her vision and work upon earth we must understand her human side. Perhaps it is to bring forth this aspect that Sri Aurobindo introduces Savitri in such a simple manner. Just as all others, Savitri too woke up among the tribe on this morning. She is not in any big city. She is the daughter of Aswapati, the king of the Madra kingdom. Let us not imagine it was a huge palace where she lived. It was simple hermitage but elegant and more graceful than the ordinary royal habitation.

A common man takes up the activities and pursuits of the day – the beauty of the apparent ways – and not anything particularly deep or serious. We start our days in pursuit of some “ephemeral joy”. This is how we live our lives. Here Sri Aurobindo says that most outwardly or externally, Savitri was human like anyone else. She lives out her life very simply. Here he sketches Savitri in plain colours. Immediately thereafter he adds a deeper shade to her personality.

Akin to the eternity whence she came,
No part she took in this small happiness;
A mighty stranger in the human field,
The embodied Guest within made no response.
A mighty stranger in the human field,
The embodied guest within made no response. (6)

She has descended from eternity, the Supreme consciousness, so she took no part in this small happiness. It is not because she thought herself superior or that she could not bend down to the level of the common people around her, but unlike everyone else, this was not a common day for Savitri, so she could not participate in their common joys.

She did not express her inner problems, nor did she give vent to any of her secrets. She was indrawn into herself. It is as if there lay a veil of separation somewhere between Savitri and the others around her. As we go along we will see that after the *triratni vrata* (tapasya), externally she did all the household works after waking up in the morning, served her parents-in-law, took care of everything as if nothing was wrong; yet deep within her she bore a tremendous sorrow.

The embodied guest within made no response
 Its chequered eager motion of pursuit,
 Its fluttering-hued illusion of desire,
 Visited her heart like a sweet alien note. (6)

This is the description of a common man who follows his desires for ephemeral joy. The poet seems to compare it with a butterfly chasing fluttering hues. These desires are illusory because we think we will be happy by fulfilling them, but when they are fulfilled, we get no real satisfaction. It is like trying to hold air in the hands. It is never possible. Even the attempt is not going to give any true joy or peace. They merely give a temporary sense of excitement. These kinds of common desires were totally alien to Savitri's heart.

"Time's message of brief light was not for her". (6) In *Savitri* some of these single lines are strikingly brilliant for their utter purity and sincerity. It is a simple line, and it gives a kind of "break" to the reader from the heavy imagery. I will give you an example to make it a little clearer. In Shakespeare's drama, Lady Macbeth planned the murder of the king in precise detail and instigated Macbeth to kill him. But finally when she went to murder the sleeping king in his chamber, even after dragging the knife out of the scabbard, she could not kill him saying: "Had he not resembled my father, I would have done it" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act. II, Scene 2). It is a strikingly simple sentence and

rather unexpected of her temperament. It was as if her conscience had awakened and stopped her from performing the action. Instead, Macbeth was sent to do the job. He kills the king and returns. We can imagine the tension in the audience – a breathtaking moment just after the murder of the king!

Shakespeare then immediately brings a relief, a break introducing the sentry walking about in the palace crying out “is anyone out there”. It is an extraordinary psychological treatment of the audience in deep tension being relieved by the presence of the sentry so that they can get even more absorbed in the tragedy. This is the same technique of relief that Sri Aurobindo uses in *Savitri*.

Time’s message of brief light was not for her.

In her there was the anguish of the gods

Imprisoned in our transient human mould,

The deathless conquered by the death of things. (6)

Who is she? She is a person in whom “the anguish of the gods” is present. Mankind is bound by the anguish of his own heart and mind; we are always worried about our family and the future. We are petty human beings worrying about ourselves. But she carried the anguish of the Gods, suggesting that the anguish of the whole world is within her.

Imprisoned in our transient human mould,

The deathless conquered by the death of things. (6)

She carries this tremendous anguish imprisoned within herself, her physical human mould. What is “deathless” and how can it be conquered by the death of things? The “deathless” is Savitri herself in her divinity. Her divine personality has taken upon itself this human personality which is mortal and subject to death. Although she is ever deathless in her divinity, this divine personality is conquered in the sense that it is as yet veiled, it is

not manifest in the outer nature of her humanity. Her divinity is concealed by her human nature.

A vaster Nature's joy had once been hers,
But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue
Or stand upon this brittle earthly base. (6)

Savitri once had a vaster nature's joy. Sri Aurobindo implies that she belonged to the vaster nature, the Para-prakriti. She contained the stuff of supramental nature within herself and possessed the consciousness of Chit-shakti. But now she has incarnated as a human personality with a human nature.

But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue Or
stand upon this brittle earthly base.
A narrow movement on Time's deep abysm,
Life's fragile littleness denied the power,
The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss
She had brought with her into the human form,
The calm delight that weds one soul to all,
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy. (6)

Her divine nature was denied expression by her human form and thus could not be shared with anyone. What was it that she wanted to share and partake with all? The divine nature,

"The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss". Savitri carries within herself the bliss of Sachchidananda and the wideness of the Chit-Tapas (the Brihat). "The calm delight that weds one soul to all." This "calm delight" that unites us with others is something beyond our ken of experience. We normally experience vital pleasures, happiness and joy. As these have their source in the vital, they do not unite man to man. This 'calm delight' that Savitri has brought originates from that supreme Consciousness which is unitary in its substance. Not only does it unite but it is "The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy". Unfortunately, humanity is not open to this delight.

Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears
Rejected the undying rapture's boon:

Offered to the daughter of infinity

Her passion-flower of love and doom she gave. (7)

Spurning all the divine gifts, man craves for the sap of pleasure and tears. Earth cannot bear to hold the calm delight and ecstasy. It is used to its own pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows. The Mother mentions somewhere that earth is in love with its own sorrows. All our aspirations for delight and peace and true love may be sincere, but they are very transient and temporary. In times of agony and pain, we have moments of prayer and aspiration, but soon we find comfort in our ignorance and suffering. So earth "rejected the undying rapture's boon".

"In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice". It is a sad verse to read. The Supreme Mother, Aditi came down on our earth and embraced all the suffering and labour only to give man the splendours from above. Taking upon herself human nature, she confined her immense consciousness in a single human form of ignorance, this body. This was a great sacrifice she has made for humanity. But now it seems that even this sacrifice has gone in vain as there are no takers. Humanity has rejected the splendours brought by her.

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. (7)

She wanted to bring down the divinity so that she could transfer it to humanity and thereby transplant it onto the earth. She wanted to implant this rich divine substance of her greater being into this earth consciousness so that the earth life would be transformed and become heaven.

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;... (7)

In his poem "Ahana", Sri Aurobindo writes:

Heavy is godhead to bear with its mighty sun-burden of
lustre. (CWSA 2: 477)

Whatever is beyond his mental grasp, man rejects. Not only are we incapable of accepting the Avatar, we reject him consciously. Why do we do so? It is because we are afraid of the pure divine intolerance – the assault of ether and fire. The divine Avatar brings with him the pure divine consciousness with a tremendous power that does not tolerate human weaknesses. The Avatar is, as it were, a mirror to our mental arrogance. We see in the Avatar an ugly reflection of ourselves, and hence we smash the mirror and reject the Avatar. That is due to its pure divine intolerance.

It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,

Almost with hate repels the light it brings;

It trembles at its naked power of Truth

And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice. (7)

The power of truth is so great that it exposes the human nature to itself. It exposes it not to belittle us but only to show that these weaknesses must be and can be transformed. But do we want to be transformed?

Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law, It

sullies with its mire heaven's messengers:

Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence

It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;

It meets the sons of God with death and pain. (7)

This is a reference to the Avatar Jesus Christ who was met with death and pain as his reward. As we cannot obey the Divine, we hide behind our "thorns of fallen nature". We resist and defend

ourselves with our weaknesses. We curse and put on the cross the very hands that came to save us.

A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,
 Their sun-thoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds,
 Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,
 The cross their payment for the crown they gave,
 Only they leave behind a splendid Name. (7)

This is a depiction of the relation between man and their Avatars. These saviours come like lightning, that is, for a brief period. They recede fast like lightning; after giving their message, like the colorful dawn they fade away: "Their sunthoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds". We betray their works. Judas was not the only betrayer. We too are the same. Judas was just the symbol of our betrayal. Either we have put them on the cross, or in tombs or temples. We turn their good to evil, twist their teaching to suit our narrow mentality and then fight with each other in the name of *our* religion and saviour. Did any saviour want humanity to be in constant strife and bloodshed? Certainly not. Then we reward them with a cross for the luminous and dazzling crown of good and happiness that they brought to us. "Only they leave behind a splendid name" – nothing of their inner truth remains.

Here, I would like to clarify a little the nature of the Avatar as explained by Sri Aurobindo. In India, we have a firm concept that the Avatar is totally divine and comes upon the earth with all his powers and qualities. This means that being supernal they can do anything and everything. But Sri Aurobindo clarifies in *Essays on the Gita* that the Avatar is divine within himself, conscious of his supreme divinity, but externally he puts on a human nature similar to all of us.

This is a conscious and purposeful act because without the identification with human weaknesses and incapacities, he

cannot help humanity. In his external nature Sri Rama cried for his wife Sita, Sri Krishna loved many gopis, and it is said that even Sri Aurobindo wept when he heard about his wife's death. The Avatar's body can have all the weaknesses of the human body, including suffering, disease and death. On the subtle level, or on the occult level, there may be an aura around him, but on the outer physical we should not always expect a dazzling personality with miraculous powers. This was the same misunderstanding that Nirodbaran had about Sri Aurobindo. He would say: 'you are an Avatar, you can do all, you can have no pain'. Sri Aurobindo painstakingly explained to him that such assumptions were not true. An Avatar has to undergo the same human laws as any one else. These are established laws in humanity. The only difference is that an Avatar can bring about changes in two ways: an impact either on the outer or the inner field of mankind's experience. Generally, this comes in response to a crisis in man's evolution that necessitates a direct divine intervention.

We do not necessarily need a situation like Kurukshetra for the Avatar to descend. A divine personality comes down to resolve the inner crises of man too. He looks at the spiritual and psychological struggle in mankind. Sri Aurobindo said that Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ left behind an impact on the external body of mankind. The churches and monasteries that they created, the 'isms' that have been created in their name, the changes in social structure that they brought, the political thinking that they influenced were all on the outer body of mankind. But Sri Rama and Sri Krishna primarily influenced the inner psyche of mankind and left behind a higher consciousness that works in the inner being of man. Each Avatar comes for a specific purpose which is his mission on the earth. We should not forget this factor when we deal with Savitri as an Avatar. What is her function? Was it to leave an imprint on the inner or the outer body of mankind? We have extraordinary passages about the

essence of Avatarhood in *Essays on the Gita*, but in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo also gives us glimpses of this. I would like to read a few selections from a long passage that comes later in the poem in Book Six, the Book of Fate, about Avatarhood:

He who would save himself lives bare and calm;
 He who would save the race must share its pain:
 This he shall know who obeys that grandiose urge.
 The great who came to save this suffering world
 And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,
 Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain:
 They are caught by the Wheel that they had hoped to break,
 On their shoulders they must bear man's load of fate. (444-445)

The last line refers to Christ bearing man's fate on his shoulders as the cross. Skipping ahead to the next page Sri Aurobindo writes:

He carries the suffering world in his own breast; Its
 sins weigh on his thoughts, its grief is his:
 Earth's ancient load lies heavy on his soul;
 Night and its powers beleaguer his tardy steps,
 The titan adversary's clutch he bears;
 His march is a battle and a pilgrimage.
 Life's evil smites, he is stricken with the world's pain:
 A million wounds gape in his secret heart. (446)

These million wounds are a fact. In the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo these are described at length. The Mother too would clarify that these wounds were taken by Sri Aurobindo on himself.

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
 The world itself becomes his adversary,
 His enemies are the beings he came to save.
 Those he would save are his antagonists:
 This world is in love with its own ignorance,

Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,
It gives the cross in payment for the crown. (448)

This last line here recalls the lines from Canto One that we ended with: "The cross their payment for the crown they gave, / Only they leave behind a splendid Name." These passages give us a picture of relation between the Avatar and humanity. They show how we betray our Avatars, harass and kill them. Ultimately what they leave behind for us is a great church or a famous temple or a big monastery.

Even in the Ashram there were only a few sadhaks who were engaged in an intense tapasya (askesis) and fully utilised the advantage of the physical presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There is a great difference between the time when Avatars live in their bodies and when they leave their presence behind. I do not mean to say that the mission cannot be achieved when the Avatars are not present physically, but while they are in their physical, their body acts like a sponge taking upon itself a great amount of human suffering. Their body has that special capacity to absorb human pain and sorrow. During the First World War, after returning to France, in 1915 the Mother suddenly fell sick and it became so serious that she was almost on the verge of death. Later she said that it was because she had lent her body so that the horror and suffering of the World War could be absorbed by her. Without that support humanity would have suffered much more.

Secondly, their physical body also acts like a ladder in the subtle physical consciousness that helps sadhaks progress in their sadhana. It is therefore of utmost importance to take advantage of their physical existence. For those who are intent on making spiritual progress and reaching a higher level of consciousness, for them Avatar's powerful physical existence is of great help.

Therefore, Sri Aurobindo mentions this twice saying that while they are there, a few have caught flame and risen to greater life.

6 The Godhead greater by a human fate

Too unlike the world she came to help and save,
Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast
And from its dim chasms welled a dire return,
A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall. (7)

In her divinity, Savitri was "too unlike the world she came to help and save". We have come across this intolerance for the divine truth earlier. Here there is the same idea that the world cannot bear such a great consciousness. Therefore it becomes a burden on the ignorant breast of the world. And how do we normally react when we feel anyone to be troublesome and like a burden? In return the world reacts to the Avatar, rejects him, and throws upon him all its sorrow and suffering most ungratefully.

To live with grief, to confront death on her road, —
The mortal's lot became the immortal's share.
Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,
Awaiting her ordeal's hour abode,
Outcast from her inborn felicity,
Accepting life's obscure terrestrial robe,
Hiding herself even from those she loved,
The godhead greater by a human fate. (7-8)

Part of the work of the Avatar is to live with human grief. Savitri too is "trapped in the gin of earthly destinies". "Gin" refers to a "cotton gin" in which the seeds are separated from the cotton. Here it has been used in an interesting manner. Savitri is as if separating or sorting out the falsehood from the truth. By removing the false appearance from reality, she is bringing out the true destiny of the earth.

She is awaiting her "ordeal's hour". What is it? We come to know of it only in the last verse of this canto that this ordeal is

the death of Satyavan. Her inborn felicity is the great bliss which is her natural state. But here on earth, she has had to accept the obscure terrestrial robe which is human nature, hiding the treasure of divinity within herself.

"The godhead greater by a human fate". (8) This is a very significant line. I remember the Mother saying something to the effect that the Divine becomes more complete when he manifests himself. This is to say, when there is a full manifestation of the Divine in Matter, in a transformed matter, the purpose of the manifestation is fulfilled. This fullness of manifestation of the Divine can take place only on earth, as the earth symbolises matter. It is in this wider sense that the Divine becomes more complete. Human fate is not limited to becoming happier. Our fate is to become a superman, nothing short of that. This is the fate to which Savitri has to lead humanity.

Now she is quietly hiding herself from those she loves, because she is undergoing this inner transformation and has undertaken the burden of human suffering. In that state of consciousness,

A dark foreknowledge separated her
 From all of whom she was the star and stay.
 Too great to impart the peril and the pain,
 In her torn depths she kept the grief to come...
 Even in this moment of her soul's despair,
 In its grim rendezvous with death and fear
 No cry broke from her lips, no call for aid;
 She told the secret of her woe to none... (8)

This dark foreknowledge was given by Rishi Narad about the untimely death of Satyavan, but this is revealed only later in the poem. We find there that it is only Savitri and her parents who are told about it, Satyavan doesn't know anything about it at all. Now her parents are away and Savitri is alone in her foreknowledge. The psychological state of Savitri is described in

a long passage much later in the poem in Book Seven. I'll read just a brief portion of it:

The more she plunged into love that anguish grew; Her
 deepest grief from sweetest gulfs arose.
 Remembrance was a poignant pang, she felt
 Each day a golden leaf torn cruelly out From
 her too slender book of love and joy.
 Thus swaying in strong gusts of happiness
 And swimming in foreboding's sombre waves
 And feeding sorrow and terror with her heart, —
 For now they sat among her bosom's guests
 Or in her inner chamber paced apart, —
 Her eyes stared blind into the future's night. (467)

Let us not forget that here we are dealing with the human Savitri and not the divine Savitri. Without accepting the human aspect of Savitri this grief and its poignancy loses its meaning. In contrast to the grief she feels within, externally she is totally poised and calm. On the following page we read:

... nothing was shown outside:
 She was still to them the child they knew and loved; The
 sorrowing woman they saw not within.
 No change was in her beautiful motions seen:
 A worshipped empress all once vied to serve,
 She made herself the diligent serf of all,
 Nor spared the labour of broom and jar and well. (470)

We see how she continues with her daily chores.

Psychologically, Savitri is experiencing a tremendous pang, as this is her last day with Satyavan, but she reveals none of it to those around her.

Now going back to the passage in Canto One:

As one who watching over men left blind
 Takes up the load of an unwitting race,

Harboring a foe whom with her heart she must feed,
Unknown her act, unknown the doom she faced.

Unhelped she must foresee and dread and dare. (8)

This "unknown" refers to others and to mankind. In a later passage in Book Six, Sri Aurobindo writes,

A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge. (461)

In the present passage, Sri Aurobindo refers more directly to the death of Satyavan rather than the fate of humanity.

The long foreknown and fatal morn was here

Bringing a noon that seemed like every noon. (8)

"Long foreknown and fatal morn" refers to the fact that she has known about Satyavan's impending death for twelve long months, but for others it was just another day.

For nature walks upon her mighty way,

Unheeding when she breaks a soul, a life,... (8)

In the vastness of Nature's work, the death of a man matters little. Therefore it is unheeding and does not stop for anyone.

Leaving her slain behind she travels on:

Man only marks and God's all-seeing eyes. (8)

We mark time by measuring how long we live. But man does not have 'God's all-seeing eyes' which measure past, present and future at the same time.

Even in this moment of her soul's despair

This moment is when Satyavan is about to die.

In its grim rendezvous with death and fear,

No cry broke from her lips, no call for aid;

She told the secret of her woe to none:

Calm was her face and courage kept her mute,... (8)

Savitri has a rendezvous, a meeting, with death. But even in this grim moment of her life, she tells no one and keeps it all within herself. She has a tremendous personality. She was a housewife but she has this deep inner spiritual dimension. Ordinary human beings, when in great pain and suffering, speak with others to unburden themselves. But Savitri does not speak of it to anyone and suffers it all alone. She could not share it. Would anyone have understood Savitri's problem? If it had been just the issue of Satyavan's death alone, then perhaps some could have understood it. But there is another dimension which is beyond the death of Satyavan and has to do with humanity as a whole. That would be very difficult for anyone to understand. It is partly because of this that she has to remain silent about it. On the occult and metaphysical level, this intense grief which she holds inside, which is at the same time personal and universal, is itself a potent indication that she will be able to face and overcome death. She is going through a process of intense concentration, preparing herself for that moment of liberation when the whole of humanity could be freed of its suffering.

Why does Savitri not ask the Universal Mother to help her at this point in time? First, Savitri is not someone to succumb to emotional pain. Second, she was gathering her entire past, the past of humanity, and the grief of humanity within herself, and when it has become complete and overflowing she will call for the supreme Godhead, the Supreme Mother. Then we will see the double aspect of the Mother. Sri Aurobindo says,

Yet only her outward self suffered and strove; Even
her humanity was half divine:
Her spirit opened to the Spirit in all, Her
nature felt all Nature as its own.

Apart, living within, all lives she bore; Aloof,
 she carried in herself the world:
 Her dread was one with the great cosmic dread,
 Her strength was founded on the cosmic might; The
 universal Mother's love was hers.
 Against the evil at life's afflicted roots,
 Her own calamity its private sign,
 Of her pangs she made a mystic poignant sword. (8-9)

Slowly we are proceeding towards the part where Savitri invokes her own destiny, where we see not only her human aspect, but also her inner divinity, her universal aspect. We do not yet see her transcendental aspect. Sri Aurobindo says:

Aloof, she carried in herself the world.

Her dread was one with the great cosmic dread. (8)

Her personal dread was the death of Satyavan, but it was not only his death she dreaded. There are many realised saints and sages whose life ends on this transitory earth. But Satyavan's is a cosmic death and that is why she experiences a cosmic dread. The expression "private sign" in the passage means Satyavan's death was the private sign of man's general fate. His death represents a sign, a symbol of a vaster truth. This particular death is a symbol of a universal problem, that is why it was a "private sign".

Of her pangs she made a mystic poignant sword
 A solitary mind, a world-wide heart,
 To the lone Immortal's unshared work she rose. (9)

She has gathered and concentrated her pangs within, and now she is bringing in the Force for her Avataric work. We will now read some interesting verses from the point of view of one's inner evolution.

At first life grieved not in her burdened breast:
 On the lap of earth's original somnolence

Inert, released into forgetfulness,
 Prone it reposed, unconscious on mind's verge,
 Obtuse and tranquil like the stone and star. In
 a deep cleft of silence twixt two realms
 She lay remote from grief, unsawn by care,
 Nothing recalling of the sorrow here. (9)

Earlier we that saw, grief and sorrow were restricted to her surface self: "Yet only her outward self suffered and strove" (8). Then she turned her pangs into a mystic poignant sword. But here he says, "At first life grieved not in her burdened breast". All her emotional disturbance was "released into forgetfulness". This was earlier, when she was just waking up.

Then a slow faint remembrance shadowlike moved,
 And sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom
 And recognised the close and lingering ache,
 Deep, quiet, old, made natural to its place,
 But knew not why it was there nor whence it came. (9)

As she wakes, she remembers the pain in her heart she has been bearing for Satyavan's impending death. There is a lesson of life for us here – how to face suffering. After all, there is no escape for any one of us, whether rich or poor, whether learned or illiterate, suffering is an innate part of our existence itself. We become disturbed and confused when grief overtakes us. But Savitri quietly carries and bears this suffering and uses it in her fight to overcome it.

The power that kindles mind was still withdrawn
 Heavy unwilling were life's servitors – Like
 workers with no wages of delight. Sullen,
 the torch of sense refused to burn; The
 unassisted brain found not its past.
 Only a vague earth-nature held the frame. (9)

She was nothing more than just an external frame of a physical body. Then from that immobility and complete self-oblivion, there comes the awakening. It is in this moment of darkness in which the divinity shines through. The divinity is as if forced out. Now she stirs and the divinity comes out.

But now she stirred, her life shared the cosmic load.

At the summons of her body's voice less call

Her strong far-winged spirit traveled back,

Back to the yoke of ignorance and fate,

Back to the labour and stress of mortal days,

Lighting a pathway through strange symbol dreams

Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep. (9)

The true Savitri is coming forth and the first thing that happens is that she embraces the whole past. She gathers as if from times immemorial the ignorance, karma, fate and law from the past evolution of the earth.

Her house of Nature felt an unseen sway,

Illumined swiftly were life's darkened rooms,

And memory's casements opened on the hours

And the tired feet of thought approached her doors. (9)

Her senses start functioning and it is as if suddenly the memory of the entire earth comes back to her and everything starts stirring – Earth and Love and Doom. She feels the massiveness of her consciousness. She has opened herself to this entire cosmos. "All came back to her: Earth, Love and Doom". (9) All this is in herself. These three words are the essence of *Savitri*. She represents the potential of divinising the earth but also the fact that this earth has taken its birth from the Inconscient. Savitri has to transform this Inconscient; this is her contribution as the Avatar. Of course, she herself is the very embodiment of Love and this is what will enable her to conquer this doom.

The ancient disputants, encircled her Like
giant figures wrestling in the night:
The godheads from the dim Inconscient born
Awoke to struggle and the pang divine,
And in the shadow of her flaming heart,
At the sombre center of the dire debate,
A guardian of the unconsolated 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. (9-10) ***

7 Confronting Time and Fate

Savitri is the incarnation of the Divine Love that transforms the Inconscient and thereby brings changes upon the earth by changing its laws. One of the most powerful laws of the earth is the law of death. She has come to show us an altogether new path, to transform death and transform earth by the power of her Love. Several ancient disputants come to her:

The ancient disputants, encircled her Like
giant figures wrestling in the night:
The godheads from the dim Inconscient born
Awoke to struggle and the pang divine,... (9-10)

There takes place in her a recollection of the past essence of the earth. If she has to hew a new path for the work of transformation, then she has to destroy all that resists the new. All that has to be cleansed before the new can be established. Therefore, the past is brought forth consciously before she can establish the new creation.

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-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. (10)

We observe the tragedy of the earth, its long agony and timeless grief, and its inability to see its goal or purpose. She suffers it all, each day offers it all to the Divine.

All the fierce question of man's hours relived,

The sacrifice of suffering and desire
 Earth offers to the immortal ecstasy
 Begin again beneath the eternal Hand. (10)

It is as if a purification has taken place through the daily worship, the daily offering of tears that earth offers as a sacrifice to the divine bliss that must one day get established here. Savitri's suffering is a symbol of this sacrifice.

Awake she endured the moments' serried march
 And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,
 And heard the ignorant cry of living things. Amid
 the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene Her soul
 arose confronting Time and Fate.

Immobile in herself, she gathered force.

This was the day when Satyavan must die. (10)

Now the final scene is set. Savitri has brought forth her Avataric consciousness and is prepared to face Time and Fate – the fate of Satyavan, the fate of the earth. Any moment now the battle is going to begin.

It is similar to that point like in the Kurukshetra war when Arjuna was ready to fight and waiting for the conch to blow. There the battle was a physical one though with ethical and religious overtones. Here in this case, Savitri's battle is not only cosmic and universal, but concerns the very future of the earth. She must destroy all that resists the future and all that cannot sustain the future. There are negative elements on this earth which actively resist its progress, but there are also elements which do not welcome the Truth. In the battle of Kurukshetra, Arjuna was supported by Sri Krishna, but here Savitri is Sri Krishna. She is the fighter, the charioteer, the supreme Divine all in one. There is an interesting common point between the two. Before going to the battle, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to pray to Devi Durga and here we see that Savitri also prays Mother Durga in her *triratni* Tapasya

(*Vrata*). Later on in the poem we will see that when she faces Death, the great Mother Durga takes over the battle, and Sri Aurobindo says that it is Durga that battles with Death. It is interesting to see the role of Durga here. The aspects of Durga – Maheshwari and Mahakali – reveal themselves when Savitri has a dialogue with Death. Then we understand that it is the Supreme Mother who is trying to remove the mask from the face of Death and once this mask of falsehood is removed, we see the very same divinity behind Death too.

In passing, let me mention here that, while writing about the Avatars, Sri Aurobindo mentions that the Avatars have two kinds of impact in the evolution of humanity. One is an outer or external impact that slowly seeps within, and the other is an inner change of consciousness that is slowly manifested on the outer layers.

He mentions the names of Lord Buddha and Christ who belong to the first category. They have revolutionised the entire social pattern of man's living with religion, ideology and ethics etc. For example; the entire Western law is based on the teachings of Christ. On the external level its influence is formidable. Slowly it trickles down on the individual level.

But Sri Krishna and Sri Rama hardly had a statue or a temple or a law to govern the outer man. In the Gita, Sri Krishna always addresses the inner man for his inner change. This change in the inner consciousness becomes reflected on the social level. Lord Buddha left behind a Dharma, a Sangha, and monks or Sannyasins with their very strict laws and disciplines and injunctions. But Sri Krishna has not left behind any of these institutions because he always taught about inner transformation. Both of these works are equally necessary, and according to the need of the time-spirit in evolution, the Avatars discharge their specific mission. Sometimes it becomes

imperative to bring about an outer change much more than an inner one. The inner slowly works itself out. Let us not forget that the external body also has to evolve. The outer institutions are also manifestations of the Lord in different ways. So it is quite complex a task to rightly understand the role and mission of the Avatars with our limited faculties.

In a way every Avatar comes to play both roles. One is to purify the social and outer life of humanity and thereby effectuate an inner change. But the stress of each Avatar may vary. Some stress more a social line of change and some stress on the change of the individual consciousness. Even while discharging both these roles, for each Avatar, one is always more prominent than the other. But we can never say it is exclusively this or that.

Sri Rama expressed the outer as well as the inner because he came as an Avatar to establish the moral law on the mental level for the mental man. Then evolution rose to that level. Maryada Purushottama represents the consciousness of a mental moral being of the highest kind. Sri Krishna brought down the consciousness of the Overmind which belonged to a region higher than the moral mind. As this was essentially a different consciousness, he behaved differently. He did not stick to the moral format like Sri Rama as that was not his truth. He had two wives and many gopikas. The inner dimension of Sri Krishna was much vaster than his outer life and we are too limited to judge his outer life. We can see the gopikas and may criticise the ways of Sri Krishna, but we do not have the vision to see what the gopikas represented and manifested. We must learn to bow with humility to all these Avatars.

This was the day when Satyavan must die. (10)

This verse has left many interpreters baffled and though it looks like a simple sentence, it is as if the whole of *Savitri* pivots on this one single verse.

I was asked if this line has any link with the passing away of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their work? To answer this I shall have to deal with the question of "What is Death? Who is Satyavan? Does Satyavan really die? Why does this sentence occur again when Narad announces: "This day returning Satyavan must die". (431)

Let us take up these questions one by one. Without clarifying who Satyavan is, it is not easy to deal with *Savitri*. The first question is: Who is Satyavan? If we do not clarify who Satyavan is, then his death will have no meaning for us. In the very beginning I had read the "Author's Note" where Sri Aurobindo described the symbolism of the different characters. So briefly, I will start with that. He says, "Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance." This is one aspect. Another one is when Savitri announces her decision of having selected Satyavan as her husband and then Aswapati, to know about the details of Satyavan, asks Narad about him. Narad says the following:

The truth thou hast claimed; I give to thee the truth.

A marvel of the meeting earth and heavens

Is he whom Savitri has chosen mid men,

His figure is the front of Nature's march,... (429)

Here we see that Satyavan is at the forefront of Nature's evolution, a leader of the march.

His single being excels the works of Time.

A sapphire cutting from the sleep of heaven,

Delightful is the soul of Satyavan,

A ray out of the rapturous Infinite,

A silence waking to a hymn of joy. (430)

He suggests he is a ray from the infinite, Sachchidananda.

A divinity and kingliness gird his brow;

His eyes keep a memory from a world of bliss....

In him soul and Nature, equal Presences,
 Balance and fuse in a wide harmony....
 His speech carries a light of inner truth,
 And a large-eyed communion with the Power
 In common things has made veilless his mind,
 A seer in earth-shapes of garbless deity....
 His strength is like a tower built to reach heaven,
 A godhead quarried from the stones of life. (430-431)

In this passage, we have a description of the outer personality of Satyavan, his speech, his thought, his will, his behaviour, etc. Of course, the outer being reflects the inner being. In certain lines Sage Narad also expresses the inner truth of Satyavan. Then towards the end of the poem, Sri Aurobindo says:

He is my soul that climbs from nescient Night Through
 life and mind and supernature's Vast
 To the supernal light of Timelessness
 And my eternity hid in moving Time
 And my boundlessness cut by the curve of Space. (702-703)

In this passage we see that he represents the aspiration moving upward in evolution. This suggests that Satyavan is not just the human soul. He is the primordial soul that is there in the nescient Night, in the Inconscient itself. What is this primordial soul? To understand this we have to go back to the story of creation as narrated by the Mother. I will remind you briefly about it. In the first creation four emanations were created: Consciousness, Bliss, Life, and Truth. When these four emanations went too far away and lost contact with the supreme Aditi, they turned into their very opposites: Inconscience, Suffering, Death and Falsehood. Because of that, the supreme Aditi made a second creation which was founded on the hierarchy of the Supermind, Overmind, the different levels of mind, life and body principles and below these the subconscious and the Inconscient. Then Aditi, the Creatrix,

invoked the Lord to descend into the Inconscient to bring there Light and Aspiration. Thus supreme Love descended into the Inconscient, and this is called the first Avatar. This Avatar of Love was Satyavan himself. As Sri Aurobindo says in the passage, "He is my soul that climbs from nescient Night." Once he descended he again starts this upward climb in evolution, and since then, has been on this journey from Matter to Life to Mind and thereafter to the Supermind. Satyavan is not just an ordinary man who is going to die according to this prophecy. Satyavan is the Eternal, the Avatar who has hid himself in moving Time and the curve of Space.

It climbs to the greatness it has left behind.
And to the beauty and joy from which it fell.
To the closeness and sweetness of all things divine,
To light without bounds and life illimitable,
Taste of the depths of the Ineffable's bliss,
Touch of the immortal and the infinite. (703)

He has left behind himself the summit he came from. What a colossal sacrifice it is to again climb back slowly to that effulgent greatness, to the beauty and Ananda of the Sachchidananda. Satyavan is that eternal Ananda aspect in the Inconscient, and therefore he is the Avatar of love. He is the soul climbing to the supramental Light which is without bounds and to the life divine which is illimitable. Satyavan is moving towards that destiny. Sri Aurobindo says that he is the "Taste of the depths of the ineffable bliss; / Touch of the immortal and the infinite." These lines suggest that he is the concreteness of the Divine in matter.

He is my soul that gropes out of the beast To
reach humanity's heights of lucent thought
And the vicinity of Truth's sublime. He is the
godhead growing in human lives And in the
body of earth-being's forms:

He is the soul of man climbing to God

In Nature's surge out of earth's ignorance. (703)

This is the evolution from matter through life and mind to the "vicinity of truths sublime", the Supermind. The secret of evolution is that unless and until there is an aspiration from below, there will not be any response from above. At each level he is working relentlessly so that the deity from above can be called down. Satyavan represents the one carrying the Truth from each level to the next. He has been the soul of Matter and Life and Mind engineering the upward movement. But he alone cannot manifest the Divine here unless the Grace and Power from above answer his call. Satyavan is the ascent, but Savitri is the descent. These are the two perennial, eternal movements that embrace the earth. So we see what Satyavan represents and his mission for the earth, and how he accomplishes it through the spark of Love that he represents in Matter. Being a ray of the Infinite he commands Nature's march. He is the soul but he also is the manifesting Nature. He is manifesting outside what he represents within himself. It is Savitri who knows who Satyavan truly is: the Avatar who has manifested here to divinise the earth. And Savitri herself is an embodiment of Divine Love of the Supreme. One is moving upward and the other is descending downward. This is why Savitri was so insistent about marrying Satyavan. Even after knowing about his untimely demise within a year she chooses him. Savitri could not possibly have chosen anyone else on this earth.

Let us understand that this meeting, or marriage was not destined to be as other happy marriages. This is a meeting on the evolutionary level itself. At each rung of evolution, Savitri and Satyavan have met to usher in the next level of manifestation. In the story "The Sapphire Tale" the Mother tells a story about Meotha and Liane. When they meet, they feel they have already

have known each other, as if it was a rediscovery. Similarly, Satyavan and Savitri are eternal twin avatars, the dual power of God. Their meeting is neither the first nor the last. Each time the need arises in the evolution, Savitri will be compelled to come down.

A dual power of God in an ignorant world,
In a hedged creation shut from limited self,
Bringing down God to the insentient globe,
Lifting earth-being to immortality. (702)

This is why the Mother has said that wherever there was an opportunity to manifest the consciousness, she was there. Satyavan has been leading the evolution since the beginning and therefore Savitri too has been manifesting eternally.

8 Satyavan must die

In Canto Two of Book One there is a line, "Her will must cancel her body's destiny." (12) And another verse, "Her past, a block on the immortal's road,/ Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate." (12) But if her body's destiny is not challenged and she is not fated to die, then why does Sri Aurobindo say "Her will must cancel her body's destiny"? What has been announced and prophesied is the death of Satyavan's body. Is she supposed to cancel that? Sri Aurobindo says she must not only "cancel her body's destiny" but also "shape anew her fate." Therefore, we have to look at it from a different angle.

There is a link between Savitri and Satyavan that is just the same as between the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We have to look into the details of why Satyavan had to leave and, if I can draw a parallel, why Sri Aurobindo had to leave his body. Was it an absolute "must die" or was there any choice left to him? We understand that Sri Aurobindo thought the Mother's body was more suitable to accomplish their yoga of supramental descent and transformation. Then it looks like he had no choice and that it was a necessity for his work of transformation on earth that he should go.

In the light of *Savitri*, when we look into the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we get a little more understanding into the passing away of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their work of transformation. At this point everything resolves around one question: "What is death?" Does it have only a clinical connotation? What is its total implication? For me this verse "Satyavan must die" is of utmost importance to understand the supreme secret of *Savitri*. Let us see what Satyavan represents? We have come to understand that he is the descent of the Supreme Consciousness into the Inconscient, and it is this

Avataric soul which moves upwards in evolution invoking Savitri at each stage. They have been meeting eternally as they are the eternal Avatars of the earth. The following few verses will throw a little more light on this.

For now I know that all I lived and was
 Moved towards this moment of my heart's rebirth;
 I look back on the meaning of myself,
 A soul made ready on earth's soil for thee. (406)

Few lines earlier the poet wrote,

Rare is the cup fit for love's nectar wine,
 As rare the vessel that can hold God's birth;
 A soul made ready through a thousand years
 Is the living mould of a supreme Descent. (398)

Satyavan is that soul who has been toiling through thousands of years so that he can become a living mould of the supreme Descent. In one of her conversations Mother hits the nail on the head, regarding *Savitri*:

Savitri is really a condensation, a concentration of the universal Mother—the eternal universal Mother, Mother of all universes from all eternity—in an earthly personality for the Earth's salvation. And Satyavan is the soul of the Earth, the Earth's *jiva*. So when the Lord says, 'he whom you love and whom you have chosen,' it means the earth. All the details are there! When she comes back down, when Death has yielded at last, when all has been settled and the Supreme tells her, 'Go, go with him, the one you have chosen,' how does Sri Aurobindo describe it? He says that she very carefully takes the Soul of Satyavan into her arms, like a little child, to pass through all the realms and come back down to earth. Everything is there! He hasn't forgotten a single detail to make it easy to understand—for someone who knows how to understand. And it is when Savitri reaches the earth that

Satyavan regains his full human stature. (*Mother's Agenda 2: 37-38*)

That the essence of Satyavan is as the *jiva* or the soul of the earth has been fully revealed here. Any evolution on the earth automatically implies the evolution of the soul of the earth. To put it in a simple way, we can take the parallel of our own life. We say that our soul progresses and matures through many births to finally realise the Divine on earth. Similarly, the earthsoul too progresses and matures and keeps reaching a higher status through its many evolutionary stages. This is, in short, the essence of Satyavan.

But there is also another very important dimension of Satyavan. He is also the soul that embodies Divine Love just as Savitri herself is the incarnation of Divine Love. Who else could she have chosen? Secondly, she has to choose Satyavan because her work is on the earth and for the earth. To accomplish her mission she has to be close to the *jiva* of the earth who is Satyavan. If she had chosen to work on any other planet with any other subtle body or other elements then she need not have chosen Satyavan; he would not have been her inevitable choice. Now we see the importance of earth. Its significance is brought out in the following verses:

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
 Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
 The forge where the Archmason shapes his works.
 Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,
 Than all the glorious liberties of heaven....
 There where the gods and demons battle in night
 Or wrestle on the borders of the Sun,
 Taught by the sweetness and the pain of life
 To bear the uneven strenuous beat that throbs
 Against the edge of some divinest hope,

To dare the impossible with these pangs of search,
In me the spirit of immortal love
Stretches its arms out to embrace mankind.
Too far thy heavens for me from suffering men.
Imperfect is the joy not shared by all. (686)

Savitri has been offered an immortal place with the Gods, but she rejects all these for the earth saying that earth is the place for her to embrace humanity and fight her battle so that she can share her joy with all. As she says here in the last line, "Imperfect is the joy not shared by all." Now we know why she deliberately chooses Satyavan on the earth.

Next we must examine the concept of death. In this we get an extraordinarily new concept from the Mother that goes beyond common definitions. She said,

Death is the decentralisation of the consciousness contained
in the body's cells. (Ibid 10: 341)

This is her discovery as to how death occurs. What we have learnt in biology is that when the sperm comes into ovum, it starts splitting itself and millions of cells are produced to make a body. What is it that holds all these millions of cells together, what is it that essentially keeps them held as one unit as a body? They are held together by a centralised consciousness. Cells are pure material objects held by the consciousness which, when it decides to withdraw, dissolves due to the decentralisation of the consciousness. This is an amazing and extraordinary word for death: "decentralisation". It is almost scientific in its description.

Now is this consciousness that of the mind, the vital, the physical or the psychic? It is probable that it is the psychic consciousness, and when the psychic being decides to withdraw from the body, death occurs. For example, when a building is built, the bricks are held together by cement and if by any magical process the cement is withdrawn then the bricks loosen

up and fall. This cementing factor in terms of life is the consciousness.

Through millions of years of experimentation, Nature has learnt to put together Matter held by consciousness and that is how when animals or a human child are born, the process looks so automatic and spontaneous. There is a mechanical process of binding the cells with the support of the consciousness, and the collapse of that support causes death. Now, if we want to go beyond death, we have to learn to centralise the cells in a conscious manner and not mechanically. If it is done mechanically, then the law of death intervenes. In future, the supramental body of the supramental man will be centralised and decentralised consciously. For such a being "death" will not exist. He may be able to decentralise and recentralise the same cells within a brief span of time.

If death is the phenomenon of decentralisation and dispersion of the cells, the psychic consciousness by its very nature is immortal, to manifest in the physical world it has to clothe itself in more or less lasting forms. This material form has to go through a process of transformation to become more and more a perfect and lasting expression of that consciousness in a manifold way. The Mother spoke about her own body in this way. She was trying to find out this secret of how to will the centralisation of the body's cells. In her own body this dispersion had slowed down because her willed consciousness was holding the cells together. She says,

With a whole world of perceptions at the same time (*Mother makes a gesture around her head*), like a general earthly consciousness, with examples showing that it is only when the consciousness that is contained in the cells is decentralised that one is dead. Otherwise, not even the heart stopping can cause death.

Naturally, this decentralisation stems from innumerable causes, but they are causes we might call psychological. And the cells contained in the body, or composing the body, are held in form by a centralisation of the consciousness in them, and as long as that power of concentration is there, the body cannot die. It's only when the power of concentration disappears that the cells scatter. And then one dies. Then the body dies. (Ibid.)

What the Mother means is that the clinical report of death certified by the doctor, that the death has been caused due of an arrest of the heart or a brain haemorrhage or kidney failure, etc. is a very superficial way of understanding death. It is only when the soul decides to withdraw and the consciousness holding together the cells starts decentralising that death comes. She says that the first step towards immortality is to "replace the mechanical centralisation by a willed centralisation".

In another talk two months later she says,

Among other things and in a quite practical and positive way, he explained to me that the cause of all illnesses, all disorders, all conflicts, here in the material world, is that the two simultaneous movements (one is the movement of duration – what we could call Stability – and the other, the movement of transformation), the two movements in the original Consciousness are only one and not in contradiction; and I was shown how (not with the thought: with the consciousness), here, they are separate, and that's what is the cause of death. It's because they can't be in harmony – they don't know how to be in harmony: they can, but they don't know. One is the movement of transformation, the other the movement of stability. When they are not in harmony, or not in harmony where they should be, it causes a break in equilibrium and the being dies – things die, everything dies

because of that. But put that way, it makes no sense. It's the experience of the thing which is given.... And this also, the cough and all that – all of it, everything – it's so simple! So obvious once you have the experience.

We could say (almost) that if the two find their equilibrium of simultaneous existence, it re-creates the Divine.... He is in us, but not in harmony. (Ibid 11: 48)

The Mother speaks exclusively in the context of physical transformation. We may not be able to understand this as we have no experience of the cellular consciousness. However, as we are dealing with the concept of death, we need a little more clarification. In the Mother's work of transformation, this has been one of the major problems.

To understand these opposite faces in Nature, we can take, for example, the individual versus the society. A society basically represents a force of stability whereas the individual represents the force of change and when there is disharmony between the two, we have different kinds of problems in the society. These eternal forces act in every field of man's evolution including the cells of the body. The best way to balance this harmony is to find the equilibrium which most of the time we do not possess. Either our body or our mind is in such a stability that it does not want to change for anything new or progressive. As we grow older we get more and more fixed and stabilised in our thinking, feeling, responding, reacting, talking and behaving, etc. At a certain point this stability becomes so fixed and rigid that it results in death and the soul decides to leave the body. The paradox here is that stability is required but not a rigid one. So long as there is a possibility of pliability, subtleness and transparency in the physical, vital and the mental, the soul tries to use the body.

For example, look at the concept of retirement. It is a very negative attitude. I know quite a few people who have given in

to the idea of death after retirement. It is a psychological attitude. So long as one is in service in any office, he works and thinks that he is progressing. Then there is a possibility of change. But if in retirement one sits cosily on a cushion, it means one's stability is going to sink into fixity. One thinks of relaxing and then moves towards decentralisation. It is good to have a change of work but not retirement.

Other than these two letters there is another one that goes further in-depth. She says,

...what people call 'death' is when the instrument of expression – the instrument of connection with the milieu, of expression – has deteriorated to the point where it can no longer be used, and so there comes a moment when the consciousness... abandons it. Probably for all sorts of reasons (there must be different reasons in each case), but the consciousness abandons it because it can no longer be used. (Ibid 8: 349)

The "instrument of expression" could be the physical, vital or mental, but all are the expressions of the psychic being. The psychic being uses our body with all its associated faculties to express itself in any way it chooses. It may be creative or mechanical, scientific, artistic, or adventurous. As long as the body remains a channel of experience or expression for the psychic being, it is allowed to live on. But as we age and our faculties become dulled, or as diseases set in, or we become rigid and fixed in our habits and thoughts and are no longer fit for the progressive changes that are required, we gradually cut off the connections between the soul and the world. The soul feels that there is no point trying to use the body anymore as it refuses to respond and it leaves. The moment the soul leaves, the cells start getting dispersed and decentralised. This is what the Mother was trying to express about death. Firstly, death is the

decentralisation of the cells which are held together by a consciousness. Secondly, death occurs when the physical, vital and mental faculties stop acting as instruments of experience or expression for the soul.

The Mother explained this about physical death in the context of physical transformation. But in *Savitri*, there is a different approach to death. In *Savitri* death is not Yama as understood in India as lord of death. Sri Aurobindo never used the word "Yama" in *Savitri*. There are several verses in *Savitri* describing death as a great negation, as a huge denial, as Night. There death is everything that negates the Truth.

In our ancient mythology it is written that

Yama as the son of Vivaswan is the ordainer who governs the world by the Law of the Truth-Light, by divine Illumination. The Sun-God Vivaswan, in his various aspects is the Fosterer, the Seer, the Ordainer, the illumining Sun, the power of the Father of creatures. "His realm is described as the Truth, the Law, the Vast... He is the sole Seer, Seer of Oneness and Knower of the Self, and leads him into the highest Sight. He is Yama, Controller and Ordainer, for he governs man's action and manifested being by the direct Law of the Truth—*satyadharmā*, and therefore by the right principle of our nature, *yatha-tathyatah*. A luminous power proceeding from the Father of all existence, he reveals in himself the divine Purusha of whom all beings are the manifestations." (*The Ancient Tale of Savitri*: 43)

This is the concept of Yama in the Upanishads. In brief, to recapitulate we understand that Yama is the son of Vivaswan, the Sun-god who is the Seer, Ordainer, the illumining Sun. He is the Truth, the Law and the Vast which is Satyam, Ritam and Brihat. Yama is the son of such a father. Then what is the role ordained for him to play? Quite naturally his role is to lead people to

Satyam, Ritam and Brihat. He obstructs all those who are not line with this truth. Thus, we have this beautiful verse in *Savitri*: "For thou must die to thyself to reach God's height: / I, Death, am the gate of immortality" (647). In the Upanishadic meaning, Yama is not really a negative godhead. He allows only those people who are following the eternal law of Truth to pass into immortality. Quite naturally he will let pass through the gate only those who aspire and live for Truth and live by that Law. It is by him alone that all falsehood is blocked. In other words, Yama is the protector of Truth. He cancels all those who do not follow the path of Truth.

Yama allows those yogis and conscious souls who live in the Satyam, Ritam and Brihat to pass through the gates to the divine Immortality. Yama, in fact, helps the seekers of the Divine, as we know through the story of Nachiketas. Yama gets rid of those who are steeped in falsehood and negation, resistant to Truth. Therefore, unfortunately, he has been given a negative interpretation and perhaps therefore, Sri Aurobindo does not use the word "Yama" in *Savitri*, as it is usually understood in Indian mythology.

Next, we have to explain the battle between Savitri and the Lord of Death. Savitri is the daughter of the God "Savitur". Yama is the son of the same God, Vivaswan. So, how can there be a battle between the brother and the sister of the Sun God? Both these godheads are essentially working for the very same purpose: the manifestation of the Supermind on earth. The only difference is that one is working in a negative way and the other in a positive way. For example, Ravana created all kinds of havoc but finally he reached the feet of the Lord, Sri Rama. Therefore Sri Aurobindo says in one of his Aphorisms, about Bhakti: "If He [God] will not give you the embrace of the lover, compel Him to give you the embrace of the wrestler." (CWSA 12: 482). In this

way, Death's path is negative and Savitri manifests as the positive Avatar leading the whole earth towards the Supermind.

Practically speaking, death is doing us good in a way: it reminds us to progress and transform ourselves into a greater perfection. It serves as an impetus in our lives to go beyond ignorance. It is only when we are in a state of consciousness which has reached beyond ignorance and live in the light of knowledge that the role of death becomes redundant. We may understand death to be like a rather strict teacher who has to punish the child or beat the child for his own good. We have the need for pain and suffering as long as we remain in the field of ignorance. The role of death is there as long as there is ignorance. The moment ignorance is gone, death vanishes.

Sri Aurobindo is not prejudiced against Yama. He is the seer and Avatar who has unravelled the secrets of the Inconscient. The "Inconscient" itself is another name for death as it does not allow any light to enter its domain. Anything that resists light is the night. If we resist light either in thought or action or emotion, it means that we are harbouring death and all that negates light and life. In this context, Satyavan's death assumes a completely different meaning. Primarily, these two principles of Love and Death originated right in the Inconscient itself.

Let us pause to understand whether the death of Satyavan was a normal one, which we have described as a decentralisation of the consciousness of the cells. Is this aspect of death applicable to Satyavan? Is it a physical death, or is it the end of night and falsehood, or is it possibly another channel towards immortality?

Let us consider the sentence "This was the day when Satyavan must die." Is this line grammatically correct? It seems paradoxical to use past tense with the imperative form "must". Should it not be "This was the day Satyavan will die." Why did he say "must"?

We have seen the meaning of death and also the symbolism of Satyavan. To recapitulate: Satyavan is the soul of the earth, the *jiva* of the earth, and the eternal Avatar of Love. And death on the physical level is a decentralisation of cells. We also have discussed the God of Death as Yama, the son of Vivaswan, who was the Sun-God.

When we put together these issues we see that Satyavan was the inevitable choice of Savitri. It could not have been otherwise because Savitri is an incarnation of the Divine Mother who has come upon the earth as an embodiment of supreme Grace and Love. She has to choose Satyavan, the eternal Avatar of Love, to work towards the transformation of the earth. So this is the picture we have till now.

Next, in which way is death applicable to Satyavan? Well, the decentralisation of cells occurs when the body, or the whole being, does not have the capacity of experiencing and expressing the soul. This can be the case with any of us ordinary human beings, but not with Satyavan. Let us see what Narad says about him—

His strength is like a tower built to reach heaven,
 A godhead quarried from the stones of life.
 O loss, if death into its elements
 Of which his gracious envelope was built,
 Shatter this vase before it breathes its sweets,
 As if earth could not keep too long from heaven
 A treasure thus unique loaned by the gods,
 A being so rare, of so divine a make! (431)

His was a very special and conscious birth meant for a specific function on earth. Secondly, we have seen that Yama, being the son of Vivaswan, stops all those who do not follow the path of Satyam, Ritam and Brihat. In the Upanishads, Yama is described as the gate-keeper of these qualities, a very positive role. Here

also this couldn't be the reason for Satyavan's death, because we cannot say that Satyavan was not following the Truth.

Let us take the third reason. Could it be that negation, denial and falsehood be the cause of his death? Satyavan stands for the *jiva* of the earth, which means that he is the embodiment of all that the earth stands for. At present we all know that our earth is ruled by the law of death, and there is falsehood and ignorance, the negation and denial of truth. Satyavan is aspiring for a new supramental world, but his body has gathered into itself the gist of the entire evolution of the earth right from the Inconscient to the level of man. The truth that Satyavan carries within himself is still hidden under these many layers of falsehood, which in other words means under the layer of death. We can conclude that Satyavan must die for this falsehood and ignorance to be destroyed. If the new supramental light has to come to transform the earth, then the old law of death has to be transformed through the body of Satyavan himself. Why is it necessary? It is because Satyavan's body carries this inconscience, this ignorance and falsehood of the earth more than anyone else as he is the earth's *jiva*. This falsehood may be centered in the vital, but the vital overrules the body and the body certainly bears its impact. This is the reason for the death of Satyavan's body: he was carrying the entire atavism of negation in his body.

Looking at it from this angle we understand that if Satyavan represents the essence of earth's evolution, and if the falsehood in his body is destroyed, then with one single massive stroke the entire malady is remedied. Without this necessity, Satyavan had no need to die at all. This is why "Satyavan must die".

Sri Aurobindo says that a luminous Satyavan arose when the God of Death appeared and followed him. He says:

The dim and awful godhead rose erect
From his brief stooping to his touch on earth,

And, like a dream that wakes out of a dream,
 Forsaking the poor mould of that dead clay,
 Another luminous Satyavan arose,
 Starting upright from the recumbent earth
 As if someone over viewless borders stepped Emerging
 on the edge of unseen worlds.
 In the earth's day the silent marvel stood Between
 the mortal woman and the god.
 Such seemed he as if one departed came
 Wearing the light of a celestial shape
 Splendidly alien to the mortal air. (576)

Prior to this, Sri Aurobindo describes Savitri putting Satyavan's body down onto the forest soil:

Calmly she laid upon the forest soil The
 dead who still reposed upon her breast
 And bore to turn away from the dead form:
 Sole now she rose to meet the dreadful god. (473)

Here Sri Aurobindo says it is a "dead form", not "dead Satyavan". Satyavan was on her lap, but then she pushes the "dead form" away, and a luminous Satyavan arises from the very same form. Then Sri Aurobindo describes the march into the Night, the domain of Death, led by Satyavan followed by Death and Savitri. This clearly explains that what Satyavan left behind was his dead form in order to rise into a luminous subtle physical body. Savitri also rose in a subtle physical form to follow Satyavan and Death in their journey:

So on a spirit's flaming outrush borne
 She crossed the borders of dividing sense;
 Like pale discarded sheaths dropped dully down
 Her mortal members fell back from her soul. (578)

I particularly want to focus on the fact that the body of Satyavan, which carried the past of the earth itself, was left

behind. We now know what Satyavan stood for in terms of the earth's evolution. It is therefore all the more important that his body had to be discarded or left behind because in this very canto we will see that Savitri declares that she has come to destroy the past so that the new future may be ushered in. If the past represented the kingdom of Death, then Satyavan's body "must" die. This is why Sri Aurobindo used the word "must" instead of "will" or "shall", or any future tense.

For example, if I have a prophetic vision, I say, "this tree will fall". But in Sri Aurobindo it is not only a prophetic vision, it is inextricably linked with a force of inevitability of the event that must happen. The deep and great necessity for the death of Satyavan is the need to establish the new supramental world upon the earth. The Mother has manifested this time as the Avatar of the supramental Mahashakti. As Savitri, the only means that could be adopted to achieve this was the death of Satyavan's body. Once again we repeat for a greater clarification that Satyavan, being the *jiva*, had a thick encrustation of all the inconscience and ignorance and falsehood wrapping and entwining his physical being. If Savitri is to end this terrible encrustation from the face of the earth, this single body of the *jiva* himself had to be destroyed with a single massive stroke.

This physical body was destroyed so that Satyavan's soul could be liberated from the shackles of the Matter, Life and Mind principles to move on freely towards supermanhood. Liberation for Satyavan does not mean *mukti* in the usual sense of the word. What is meant is that he is now freed from human falsehood so that his soul can work for the next rung of evolution. As we know, he has been working for this purpose of earth right from the stage of Matter itself. His liberation is not a going back to the Divine Sachchidananda for rest or any other such thing. He is taking this whole earth, stage by stage, towards the Supermind.

He himself has to be first liberated from the mesh of falsehood to be able to carry the earth forward. In that sense we can now understand the necessity of the word "must" used by Sri Aurobindo.

After discussing this argument, let me now place before you another and different way of looking at this line. This alternative argument says that even though Narad had predicted the inevitable death of Satyavan, he could have had a choice not to die at all. How is this possible? It is logical to believe that we are all bound by our fate and destiny. It is certainly true at the horizontal level of consciousness in which we live. We are presently living a kind of life in which we feel helpless against Fate. But if we take into consideration the vertical dimension of consciousness, then a surprising intervention of the Supreme Mother's Grace can annul any such "must" and overrule all the inevitabilities, if it so desires. Savitri comes from those worlds much beyond our horizontal level and she has the necessary power with her to manifest the Grace that can cut through the "must" and negate the predicted fate of Satyavan. The purpose of Savitri's birth is to break loose the fundamental rigid laws of Fate, Destiny, Ignorance, Death, etc. She has come to break these laws of the present world that bind us helplessly. If she gives in to this "must die" and says "this is the only way", then the purpose of her manifestation is lost.

Next, let me take up the verb "was" in the line "This was the day that Satyavan must die". It is an important issue. We are here concerned with the tense. We have understood the inevitability of death. But "was" and "must die" do not tally tense-wise. In fact the verse "This was the day" tells us that the position taken by the poet is in the future of the event. He is looking back and narrating an event that took place in the past. Now let us take Ramayana. How was it written? Set in the present, it was depicted as an event

of the future. The issue of the poet's position is important because in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo not only looks into the past, he also looks towards the coming future. This tense of the perspective is important because it reflects the level of their own yoga as Avatars.

In one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo writes that he started writing *Savitri* before the Mother came and it was quite different then. Then, there were Parts One and Two with only five books in all. The last book was the Book of Everlasting Day, but in it there was no supramental vision at all. He wrote that *Savitri* "ended by calling down the power of the Highest Worlds of Sachchidananda", and that he had "no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme" (CWSA 27: 277).

We have to understand that Sri Aurobindo was not like other poets who were imagining or constructing a future. He said that "I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension" (Ibid: 272) That is why he needed to revise it so many times; it was due to the development of his own yogic experience that he rewrote. The Mother said that as he was writing *Savitri*, she was simultaneously experiencing all of it. Therefore, had he only conjectured about the future, the Mother would not have experienced it. She talked of a simultaneity of experience between them. Therefore, *Savitri* is of utmost relevance for the spiritual future of mankind. It is a record in verse, carrying the simultaneous experience of both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We see that the simple verb "was" is not as simple as we think. It is deeply interwoven with the poet and his experience.

In passing, let me put before you one more view. One of the scholars Dr. R.Y. Deshpande who has a tendency of delving deeply into analysis and research points out that when Narad said that "Twelve swift-winged months are given to him and her"

(431), why does the "must die" fall on Satyavan? Deshpande refers a great deal to the original text in Sanskrit of the Mahabharata. He suggests the possibility that Savitri and Satyavan were married on the day of *amavasya*. According to the Hindu mythology such a marriage bears all the possibility of the husband's death first. Could it be for this reason that Narad predicts the death of Satyavan? That argument seems too frivolous or superfluous for such a text, and besides, Savitri and Satyavan had already tied the knot by a Gandharva marriage before they announced it to their parents. I mention this in passing because the author went into detail regarding many such events in their life. He also mentioned that his death could have occurred due to a snake-bite or a sun-stroke in the forest. Discussing his arguments with the support of the original Sanskrit text, he concluded that he was afflicted by a sun-stroke, which seems more likely than a snake-bite. Then he suggests the possibility that a sun-stroke could have been like a temporary death but it may have as well been a deep swoon. Dr. Deshpande gave all these arguments and discusses the opinions of a few scholars who firmly felt that Satyavan did not die at all. But this refers to the original text, not to the *Savitri* written by Sri Aurobindo.

Now, let us see the meaning of Satyavan's death for Savitri. Is it only the loss of her husband? I would like to draw here a parallel with the passing away of Sri Aurobindo himself. The fact as to how much relevance has Satyavan's death for *Savitri* will become a little clearer when we get some hints about the passing away of Sri Aurobindo, perhaps touching a little upon the passing away of the Mother too.

To make it brief and concise, I have brought an essay by Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) that covers very important points about this subject. Of course Nolini Kanta Gupta and A.B. Purani, also wrote

on the subject, but Amal Kiran has brought in also the other authors' points. The relevant paragraph relating to Sri Aurobindo's passing away reads:

No doubt, it was not death in its utter commonness. The uraemia that preceded it had been unique. Every medical sign was there of its absolute hold over the body's reactions – save one: Sri Aurobindo, as if by an independence of comatose brain and nerve, could command consciousness again and again, inquire what the time was or ask for water. Unique also was the sequel of the uraemic poisoning. Between the instant when life clinically ended and the instant when the body was laid in a casket and lowered into a special vault in the Ashram courtyard, nearly five days passed without a trace of decomposition. And many saw with even their physical eyes the body glowing with what the Mother had called the concentration in it of the light of the Supermind, the Divine Consciousness in its integrality which Sri Aurobindo and she had been labouring with the patience of heaven-sent pioneers to bring down for the first time to suffering earth. Mortality in its normal form was not here; yet something of its age-old doom was present and that was a question-mark glaring in the face of every disciple and making most enigmatic that varied wonderful life of seventy-eight years, triumphant over all human difficulties.

The question-mark cannot be completely removed. Depths beyond depths lie in an event of this nature: the human mind is unable to compass them all. But a few significances gleam out for an initial understanding and set a general perspective in which our aching and groping gaze may rest.

There was no failure on Sri Aurobindo's part: this is certain from the psychological and physical details put together — of the preceding months as well as of the actual illness. There was only a strange sacrifice. And if Sri Aurobindo the

indomitable made the sacrifice, it must be one that was a sudden terrible short-cut to some secret victory for God in the world at the cost of a personal consummation. (*Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*: 78)

The hint he gives here is that it was “a terrible shortcut” in his work for God in the world. In a conversation with a disciple, the Mother had said:

People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice Sri Aurobindo has made for the world. About a year ago, while I was discussing things, I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. He spoke out in a very firm tone, “No, this can never be. If necessary for this transformation, I might go, you will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation.” (CWM 13: 8)

So it was a kind of diplomatic move, as if to take the devil by surprise. Sri Aurobindo consciously made the choice in order to hasten the advent of the Supermind.

We see the importance of the words “If necessary for this transformation, I might go”. One of them had to leave. Now we can understand why he left his body – because that was the only short-cut available to hasten their main work on earth. In a poem called “In the Battle” Sri Aurobindo writes:

Often, in the slow ages’ long retreat
On Life’s thin ridge through Time’s enormous sea,
I have accepted death and borne defeat
To gain some vantage by my fall for Thee. (CWSA 2: 614)

Accepting death was a fully conscious decision. Sri Aurobindo had borne defeat only to gain some great advantage. Amal Kiran wrote:

Sri Aurobindo, born to put his mission above everything else, could not but follow the course he did: how could he betray the long-invoked Supermind whose hour on earth was

preparing to strike, or let the world which he had bound to his heart pay disastrously for its unreadiness for the divine advent? He gathered, as it were, the myriad antagonistic spears into his own breast, took upon himself a globe-wide catastrophe....

Not only to build a golden dome but to transform what he symbolically called the dragon base in the Inconscience from which the universe has evolved: this was Sri Aurobindo's work. And it had to be done one way or another. There could have been a way of slow conquest, preserving his own body by a careful rationed spirituality which would run no deadly hazards for the sake of rapid salvation of the sorrowburdened world. The way of revolutionary evolution, thrown open like an abyss, was to let his body admit an illness symbolic of the drive of the Inconscience from below and, after a limited though intensely significant contest, carry in an actual death its own godlike presence into the stuff of the Inconscience. (*Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*: 79)

The Supermind needed a footstool upon earth. This footstool had to be provided at whatever cost, and the cost was Sri Aurobindo's own body. His greatest ideal was to bring down the Supermind for the earth.

Why does he say "rapid salvation of the sorrow-burdened world"? Why was it necessary to hasten their work? Imagine the time constraint we are in. We are at a stage where we are rapidly destroying the birds, the animals, humankind and Nature! There was a haste in bringing down the Supermind because humanity would have no chance of survival if left to itself.

If we to read his sonnets we can know Sri Aurobindo's direct personal experiences. They are overwhelming. Amal Kiran has put it so aptly: "He gathered, as it were, the myriad antagonistic

spears into his own breast, took upon himself a globe-wide catastrophe" (Ibid).

Continuing with the quotation, Amal Kiran says,

Death was the glory-hole desperately blown into the massive rock of that stuff for the physical divinity of Sri Aurobindo to permeate in a direct and literal sense the darkness wrapped within darkness which the Vedic seers had long ago intuited to be Nature's cryptic womb of lightward creation. By identifying his physical divinity with that primal negation of the divine, he has effected an immediate entry into the heart of the enemy's camp: he has taken by surprise the central strong-hold of all that frustrates and destroys, all that renders precarious the body's beauty, frail the life-energy's strength, flickering the mind's knowledge, and swallows up in its monstrous void the marvellous legacy left to mankind by the hero and the sage. (Ibid: 80)

This is the secret. It is as if the physical cells of Sri Aurobindo's body that received the supramental light were mingled (or got assimilated) with the cells of matter on the earth. There was perhaps no other means/way of bringing down the supramental light into matter and for him this was a kind of a shortcut to penetrate physically and literally into matter with the supramental consciousness. Had it been a physical body which is "centralised by the consciousness", without a dispersion of the cells, matter could not have received it. The great strategy that Sri Aurobindo applied was to disperse the supramentalised cells into the very bosom of matter. It is like a mixing or a blending that has taken place. If we do not understand the meaning of his death in this manner, we will not understand the ideal of transformation that Sri Aurobindo had.

In our common parlance, he fell victim to 'death'. But we have to expand the meaning of 'death' itself. Remember, he told the Mother that she could not be the one to leave her body, "you will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation" (CWM 13: 8)

There is a vast meaning in this statement. Amal Kiran writes:

It is because she, in harmony with his plan to fight from two bases, remains on earth to foster the golden future, that he could draw back from the visible scene as if to pull inward the taut string of the spiritual bow and make the Godtipped arrow fly swifter and farther. She who has been one with him in the Supramental attainment, one in vast vision and integral work, joint-parent of the new age in which the outer physical as well as the inner psychological is meant to be Godlike and wonderfully immune, she is the bridge across which Sri Aurobindo's triumph of winning all while seeming to lose everything moves in ever-increasing beauty and power into Matter's ignorant world of a life that is but death in disguise. Without her embodied mediation, without her retention of the Aurobindonian consciousness in full visibility before us, the upward illumining of the Inconscience by Sri Aurobindo for Matter's transformation would lack in completeness of result. Her protective hold on earth justifies the withdrawal he has accomplished: her radiant presence fulfils the miraculous power of his absence. (*Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*: 81-82)

Just as in a war the commander has to make a precise plan of attack, from which side, where to station the supporting rear army, etc., here too, a divinely planned strategy had to be *checked* out. This was a war being waged from two different bases – the gross physical and the subtle physical. Obviously Sri Aurobindo chose to be on the subtle physical plane and the Mother on the physical. Why did Sri Aurobindo ask the Mother to stay back on

the earth? He mentioned that her body was better prepared for the physical transformation. The Mother's body was prepared by Mahasaraswati herself when she was in the womb of her mother. This is confirmed by the Mother herself. Sri Aurobindo found her body to be both more prepared and suitable for the work of transformation upon the earth. He took up the other frontier of the subtle physical. The work had to be accomplished from both the subtle and the gross physical sides. They had to safeguard the earth, the old stuff, and at the same time bring in the new body, the new stuff, the new transformation.

By the cooperation between that absence and this presence a leap in spiritual evolution has been made. A hint of it is in a new expression that comes again and again over the Mother's face. The Supermind, whose realisation and subsequent descent are the Aurobindonian Yoga, seems now not only active as before from above, unfolding its gigantic downward dynamism in its own time, but also operative as a gleaming nucleus of World-Will from even the physical brain-level of the embodied consciousness that is the guru, day after day, to the Godward movement of our souls. In other words, the Supermind possessed overhead by the Mother is now commanded more and more by her from its own growing poise below. (Ibid: 82)

Out of this strategy they brought down the Supermind and the Mind of Light could descend into the very body of the Mother. And it is owing to this strategy that the Supermind, which is now there in the earth atmosphere, was commanded by the Mother to go forth and become the active "nucleus of the World-Will" itself. It is now no more only the will of the Avatars called the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, it has also now become the will of Satyavan, as the earth-soul, the earth-*jiva*; it has become a part of the earth's consciousness. Amal Kiran concludes his essay thus,

The possibility dawns of a rapturous acceleration of the Truth-Consciousness's transforming process – and a greater, more luminous mastery of material life, a deeper invasion of the body by the Immortal Existence, a swifter and more palpable progress towards the conquest of darkness and death for which the secret decisive blow was struck in that strangely fateful moment in the dead of night one year ago. (Ibid.)

This was written in 1951 for the first anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's passing, for the day the blow was struck on death, as was the case on the day of Satyavan's death. The blow was not on Satyavan, but on death itself. With the death of Satyavan, death would die for all time to come. Amal Kiran's essay refers to the work done by Sri Aurobindo, but like some of his other articles it is both poignant and relevant vis-à-vis *Savitri*.

Srinivasa Iyengar in his biography of Sri Aurobindo writes:

There was a death certainly, and there was a phenomenon surpassing our notions of "death". The death was unnecessary because, had Sri Aurobindo been willing to use his Yogic force as he had done on former occasions, the "disease" could not have made headway and proved mortal. Not age, not disease, not just these; death was suffered, it was almost invited. But why? (*Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*: 716)

The Mother would say that anytime she had a problem, or pain or suffering she would just tell Sri Aurobindo and it would vanish. She had only to tell him. She said that she did not have to do anything. I just told him and it would go. Reading this it almost seems like Sri Aurobindo invited death on himself, because if he had willed it, he could have cured himself. Iyengar continues:

There must have been a capital reason; not a personal reason, but a cosmic reason – what was it? What was it Sri

Aurobindo hoped to achieve – or avert – by making his tremendous assignation with the Night?

Since coming to Pondicherry, the whole aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was to bring the Supermind here into our world, and make it a part of the earth-consciousness, as 'Life' and 'Mind' already are. When, during his interview on 4 February 1943, Dilip asked Sri Aurobindo, "Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?" the Master answered very simply, "*Yes, I have come for that.*" If *that* was the cardinal purpose of Sri Aurobindo's avatarhood and ministry on earth, anything he did – including his "selfimmolation" – must have had a close connection with that fundamental objective. Even in 1938, the Mother used to see the Supermind descending into Sri Aurobindo, but it couldn't be settled for good in the earth-consciousness, especially in the physical or the physical mind. In the series of articles included in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Sri Aurobindo introduced, as we have seen earlier, the "realm between" – the Mind of Light – a limited or delegated power of the Supermind; and we have the Mother's word – reinforced by the experience of the Supramental radiance from his body from 5th to 8th December – that "as soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrawal from his body, what he called the Mind of Light got realised here". Was it, perhaps, necessary for Sri Aurobindo to receive the full force of the Supermind in the physical, retain it for a few days, so that the way might be cleared for the ultimate Supramentalisation of the earth and man? (Ibid)

It is the mark of the 'gentleman' that he would suffer himself, rather than inflict pain on others or even see them suffer. According to Nirod, Sri Aurobindo was a "Supramental perfect gentleman", and had a magnanimity of the kind described in the lines –

A magnanimity as of sea or sky

Enveloped with its greatness all that came. (15)

And it is Shiva most a fact that Sri Aurobindo reminded Nirod!
And Yogiswara Shiva, what was his role in the world-existence:

A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie
All suffering into his single grief and make
All agony in all the worlds his own...(446)

The poison of the world has stained his throat.(447)

If he could himself invite and absorb – even at the cost of surrendering the material envelope that was his body – the first full impact of the Supramental descent (as Shiva received the impact of Ganga cascading in a furious downpour on the earth), both to make sure of the descent and to contain and consolidate the gains for the world, why, certainly he would do it – as Shiva drank the poison and yet contained it in his throat! If the victory could be won somewhere by somebody, it would become possible ultimately for anybody to win it anywhere.

To open the possibility was the main thing. And the sacrifice of his body, as the first physical base for the demonstration of the Supramental possibility – if that could advance the date of the total descent of the Supramental light, or ensure the near descent – well, the sacrifice was worth making. Since, after all, even without his physical presence, he would be *here*, one with the Mother's consciousness and power, he could also accelerate, witness and participate in the decreed Divine manifestation upon earth. (Ibid: 743-744)

I think that this article has reinforced the occult and the metaphysical reasons for the self-sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo and applies as much to the sacrifice of the body of Satyavan. We now can see that it was necessary to bring in the new consciousness for which he was commissioned since his birth. He adopted this means to make that descent swifter to secure the future of the earth. The period of twelve months given to Satyavan

symbolically hints at the hastening of this descent, signifying that the Supermind was ready for descent. Savitri had come. But to manifest her, the sacrifice of Satyavan's body was necessary.

Regarding this Mind of Light, the Mother has said "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realised in me." (CWM 13: 63). She also said,

The Supermind had descended long ago very long ago into the mind and even into the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly through those intermediaries. The question was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light is called "the Mind of Light". (Ibid: 62-63)

What I understand here is that the Mind of Light is not a realm or state of consciousness like the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind or the Overmind and Supermind. Nor is it a level that is squeezed in between Overmind and Supermind; it is not a squeezed-in light or realm. Its source is beyond. It is the Supermind directly entering the human brain which is a physical thing, which is matter. It could have come into the vital or the mind. But the brain is different because it is closest to the physical mind which, when made ready by purification, can receive the Supermind directly. What we have to understand is that the Supermind can come into the mind or the vital or the psychic being and work indirectly in these areas. But towards the end of this life Sri Aurobindo tried to get a direct contact established between the Supermind and the physical and not through the support of the other layers like the vital, the mind, the psychic or the soul.

This is because he was working towards the transformation of the physical body. So the vital and the mental had to be suspended temporarily. Therefore, he found a direct route to the body. And this body is guided by the physical mind which has its own characteristics. What Sri Aurobindo wanted to achieve was a change in the body itself. Until and unless this body is directly changed with the influence of the Supermind, its influence on the vital and the mind cannot be sustained. The body has to be made ready before anything else can fully be transformed. The body consciousness has to be changed, the body's cells have to be changed. Sri Krishna, as the Avatar, brought in the high consciousness of the Overmind. But we have not been able to retain it. Why? Any high achievement in the realm of the mental and the vital needs the support of the physical transformation for its permanent influence. Lots of spiritual accomplishments have been achieved in the higher realms of psychic or higher levels of mind, etc. But they are meant only for the few. Sri Aurobindo has brought in this direct contact with the body. Had he not succeeded in doing it now, it may have taken millions of years to stabilise any spiritual experience permanently on the earth. He had to shorten his life to save humanity and take it further.

The collapse of Satyavan was to begin the dawn of a new world like that mythological bird called the phoenix which rises from its own ashes. Satyavan rises into a new body from his own body. It is Savitri then who remains behind in this world to do the work. So what is the relation between the Mother and Savitri? In what manner could we say that they are one and the same? We will come to know about that only when we complete the Canto Two entitled "The Issue". Till now, we have seen Satyavan, we have seen "death" and the great event, but we are yet to see who Savitri is. After that we will have a fuller picture.

End of Canto-I: The Symbol Dawn

9 Her will must cancel her body's destiny

Let us go back to the lines that are very significant:

L She must plead her case upon extinction's verge,
In the world's death-cave uphold life's helpless claim (12)

These are very significant. Later in the poem, in fact, in the last passage of *Savitri* that Sri Aurobindo dictated, there is an expansion of these verses. This passage comes in Book Four, Canto Two, in which Narad prophesises about Savitri.

A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge. (461)

Notice in this last line the similarity of words with the passage on page 12 – "extinction's edge" and "extinction's verge." He continues:

Her single greatness in that last dire scene
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny Where
all is won or all is lost for man.
In that tremendous silence lone and lost
Of a deciding hour in the world's fate,
In her soul's climbing beyond mortal time
When she stands sole with Death or sole with God
Apart upon a silent desperate brink,
Alone with her self and death and destiny
As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
When being must end or life rebuild its base,
Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
No human aid can reach her in that hour,

No armoured god stand shining at her side.
 Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save. For
 this the silent Force came missioned down; In
 her the conscious Will took human shape:
 She only can save herself and save the world. (461)

This passage is tremendously prophetic and we can feel its mantric power. Earlier in Book-I Canto-II, Sri Aurobindo says,

On the bare peak where Self is alone with Nought
 And life has no sense and love no place to stand,... (12)

Here he is describing a peak of consciousness where there is only Self and nothingness. Similarly, in the later passage in Book Four he says,

As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
 When being must end or life rebuild its base,... (461)

Please mark the similarity. Continuing in the same passage he says,

Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
 No human aid can reach her in that hour,... (461)

So this was the situation in the Mother's own life. This dire moment – "Alone with death and close to extinction's edge" – had come to her in 1962. We have read that it was a critical period. In her own words she recounts that period,

I am more and more aware that people really panicked this time; they imagined I was going to die – I could have died had the Lord willed it. But ...it has been a sort of death, that's for sure – sure, sure, sure – although I don't say so because... After all, one must have some regard for people's common sense!

But really, if I let myself go one step further, I would say that I was dead and... have come back to life. But I don't say it.

A lot of people have been praying for me and even taking

vows that if I didn't die they would go here and there on a pilgrimage – it's quite touching.

This greatly objectifies my situation which has nothing to do with an illness to be cured! I can't be cured! This is a work of transformation. At any moment, if the Lord decides it's *hopeless*, it will be *hopeless*, finished; and no matter what happens, if the Lord has decided that I'll go right to the end of the experience, then I'll go right to the end.

That whole way of seeing, feeling and reacting belongs really to another world. Really to another world... to such a degree that if I had no regard for people's peace of mind I would say, "I don't know whether I am dead or alive." Because there is a life, a type of life vibration that is completely independent of.... No, I'll put it another way: the way people ordinarily feel life, feel that they are alive, is intimately linked with a certain sensation they have of their bodies and of themselves. If you totally eliminate that sensation, the type of relation that allows people to say "I am alive"... well, eliminate that, but then how can you say, "I am alive," or "I am not alive"? The distinction No Longer Exists. Well, for me, it has been completely eliminated. That night [April 12-13] it was definitively swept out of me. It has never come back. Its something that seems impossible now. So what they mean by "I am alive" is... I can't say "I am alive" the way they do – It's something else entirely." (*Mother's Agenda* 3: 211-212)

This short conversation tells about how she literally went to the other side and returned. I still remember – I was very young at the time and did not understand anything of what was going on – Nolini-da gave a talk emphasising that the Mother literally had a battle with death. The conquest of death was the result of the battle at that time.

This again throws light on the verse, "...Satyavan must die". It means that one must literally die in order to conquer death, and this is what the Mother underwent. After having conquered the essence of death in that realm, she said: "I can't say 'I am alive' the way they do", meaning other human beings. For her this sense of what is being alive or dead had completely disappeared as she was living altogether in another consciousness. We have to try to understand this word "living" in this way. Here we have to distinguish between the Avatar Mother and the Divine Mother. What she is writing here is as the Avatar Mother, meaning the Divine in a body working with the limitations and struggles. We should not think that for her it does not matter if she is on this side or that side because she is in the universal or transcendental consciousness. If that was so, then she need not have come down amongst us at all. She had come down, and so she had to experience this deathless state.

In another conversation, she says,

They make such a fuss over death, as if it were the end—this word 'death' is so absurd! I see it as simply passing from one house into another or from one room to another; you take one simple step, you cross the threshold, and there you are on the other side – and then you come back. (Ibid 2: 237)

This reference to the "other side" and "this side" is what we mean as death and life. Suppose we have a surface, like a box surface, and imagine an ant walking on its surface. There is another ant also walking on the same surface and both can see each other. But if the second ant goes round and walks on the other side of the box then the first can no longer see it and may assume that it is dead and gone. But we can see both sides of the box and both the ants on the two sides of the box.

Likewise, a divine consciousness possesses multidimensional view and for someone on earth with this consciousness, if someone dies they are not really dead but simply living in another region and not on this earth. The difference is just that. Therefore, when the Mother says: "I don't know whether I am dead or alive," it is because of this vast consciousness with multiple dimensions. Science has yet no idea of these experiences. When we pass from one dimension to another, we call it "death". For a spiritual person or a yogi who has realised the Self, "death" is not how we understand it. The Mother lost this sense of three dimensions and the difference between this life and the life beyond the physical. In fact, in another context she stated that the so-called dead people, who are dead for us, are still very concretely alive. For her it is like seeing the ants walking on opposite sides of a box. Both are alive. In the consciousness of the Mother, whether people are dead or alive is quite the same and so she could speak about life and death in the same breath. Sri Aurobindo had prophesied about this great experience in Mother's life. He said that no human being could help her in that hour. She was left alone for days together. Only when she came out of her trance or experience of which we cannot have any understanding, she was fed a little to keep going. Otherwise she was immobile on her bed. Nolini-da had quoted this passage and spoke to us about her experience. Very significantly, this was also the last passage dictated by Sri Aurobindo to Nirod-da. ***

Fate & Determinism

Now we will turn to the subject of fate and determinism. In Book Six, "The Book of Fate", we have this passage:

Then Aswapati answered to the seer:

"Is then the spirit ruled by an outward world?

O seer, is there no remedy within?

But what is Fate if not the spirit's will

After long time fulfilled by cosmic Force?
 I deemed a mighty Power had come with her;
 Is not that Power the high compeer of Fate?" (456)

This is one way of looking at fate: that fate is the spirit's will fulfilled by cosmic Force in the course of time. Then Narad answers,

O Aswapati, random seem the ways
 Along whose banks your footsteps stray or run
 In casual hours or moments of the gods, Yet
 your least stumblings are foreseen above.
 Infallibly the curves of life are drawn
 Following the stream of Time through the unknown; They
 are led by a clue the calm immortals keep.
 This blazoned hieroglyph of prophet morns
 A meaning more sublime in symbols writes
 Than sealed Thought wakes to, but of this high script How
 shall my voice convince the mind of earth?
 Heaven's wiser love rejects the mortal's prayer;
 Unblinded by the breath of his desire,
 Unclouded by the mists of fear and hope, It
 bends above the strife of love with death; It
 keeps for her her privilege of pain.
 A greatness in thy daughter's soul resides
 That can transform herself and all around
 But must cross on stones of suffering to its goal. (456-457)

After this come some verses saying that even though Savitri can transform herself and all around, she has to undergo suffering. Further down he says,

It is decreed and Satyavan must die; The
 hour is fixed, chosen the fatal stroke.
 What else shall be is written in her soul
 But till the hour reveals the fateful script,

The writing waits illegible and mute. (458)

Here we come to a very beautiful secret. Everything is foreseen and predestined, yet we will not know it until the time has come. Once I had written to the Mother about something to which she answered that my future would be revealed to me as I went along. When she wrote to me, I didn't understand anything. Later I understood that the entire future or the destiny of each one is written. But it is not revealed until the hour comes. Perhaps it is not useful for us to know things beforehand. Therefore Narad says that till the hour reveals the fateful script, the writing will remain illegible.

Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance.

O King, thy fate is a transaction done

At every hour between Nature and thy soul

With God for its foreseeing arbiter. (458)

How magnificent! Whatever is going to happen in our lives, or is currently happening, depends upon God as he acts as the foreseeing arbiter between our soul and Nature.

Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny's book. (458)

A balance, you know, is the relative amount of debits and credits in an account.

Man can accept his fate, he can refuse. Even

if the One maintains the unseen decree He

writes thy refusal in thy credit page:

For doom is not a close, a mystic seal. (458)

The fate of man can be cancelled or changed. It is "not a close, a mystic seal."

Arisen from the tragic crash of life,

Arisen from the body's torture and death,

The spirit rises mightier by defeat;

Its godlike wings grow wider with each fall.

Its splendid failures sum to victory.

O man, the events that meet thee on thy road,
 Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief,
 Are not thy fate, – they touch thee awhile and pass;
 Even death can cut not short thy spirit's walk:
 Thy goal, the road thou chooseth are thy fate. (458)

Our understanding of karma in India is very different from this. Sri Aurobindo has completely redefined fate and karma.

On the altar throwing thy thoughts, thy heart, thy works,
 Thy fate is a long sacrifice to the gods
 Till they have opened to thee thy secret self
 And made thee one with the indwelling God. (458)

We keep jumping between one platform to another, one solution to another, until we understand at the very end that God alone can help us. If there is an angel of heaven looking after our life, we should consider ourselves graced. But often we do not realise the Grace bestowed by God on us. We do not hear the footsteps of the angels of heaven. We keep running in the marketplace of life looking for joy and peace and happiness.

Savitri is now facing the crisis of Satyavan's death. In this critical moment she also goes through a psychological experience where nothing in the past or present can help her. She has to be the "ungarbed entity within", which means that she has to bring forth her own spirit from within herself.

Sri Aurobindo says:

That hour had fallen now on Savitri.
 A point she had reached where life must be in vain
 Or, in her unborn element awake,
 Her will must cancel her body's destiny. (12)

This is the point of no return. It is a very intriguing phrase that "life must be in vain". In this critical moment, either she loses herself or she has to awaken in herself that consciousness or deity who will "cancel her body's destiny." Now, what is her body's

destiny? Satyavan's body's destiny is known to us, but is Savitri also to die? Why does he say that her body's destiny must be cancelled? Maybe Satyavan's body's destiny could be cancelled if the divine Grace intervened. Why does

Sri Aurobindo write that "Her will must cancel her body's destiny" and not that of Satyavan's body? Then there is a verse a little later in which he says,

Her past, a block on the Immortal's road,
Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate. (12)

So twice we get this kind of a complete identification with Satyavan. There are other line in the poem where we see this identification also. For example,

For when he wandered in the forest, oft
Her conscious spirit walked with him and knew
His actions as if in herself he moved;... (473)

Earlier we had read that all the three characters of Death, Satyavan and Savitri were seen moving in her soul scene. There has to be some correlation between her fate, Satyavan's death and their absolute identification with each other. If we do not understand the cardinal points here – rather, the deeper symbolism – then we miss out on a central theme. This part is very intriguing and I shall read a selection from the Mother's conversations which throws light upon this identification of Savitri with Satyavan:

On the one hand there is what Sri Aurobindo – who, as the Avatar, represented the supreme Consciousness and Will on earth – declared me to be, that is, the supreme universal Mother; and on the other hand, there is what I am realizing in my body through the integral sadhana. I could be the supreme Mother and not do any sadhana, and as a matter of fact, as long as Sri Aurobindo was in his body, it was he who did the sadhana, and I received the effects. These effects were

automatically established in the outer being, but he was the one doing it, not I – I was merely the bridge between his sadhana and the world. Only when he left his body was I forced to take up the sadhana myself; not only did I have to do what I was doing before – being a bridge between his sadhana and the world – but I had to carry on the sadhana myself. When he left, he turned over to me the responsibility for what he himself had been doing in his body, and I had to do it. (*Mother's Agenda* 1: 209)

Satyavan is beating in the heart of Savitri. Thus we see that when death had taken him, she was still there with him following him into the void:

But different still, one loved, enveloped, clasped,
A treasure saved from the collapse of space. (579)

On the very physical level itself there is a grand alliance. It is a kind of transfusion that is taking place from one body to the other. It is Savitri who now has to work out things first in her body. In life, it was Sri Aurobindo who worked out things first in his body and then passed them on to the Mother. Satyavan represents the aspiration of the earth, his zeal to realise the new Light, and he doesn't have to know about the supramental Yoga per se. The process and the procedure as to how to bring in the new body are left with Savitri and her yoga. In life, Sri Aurobindo brought in and manifested the new consciousness and only in the end he passed on the Mind of Light to the Mother so that she could continue their work. Here it is just the reverse; Savitri has to pass on her accomplishments to Satyavan.

For only the unborn spirit's timeless power
Can lift the yoke imposed by birth in Time. (12)

We see that even Savitri has to invoke the spirit in herself.

Only the Self that builds this figure of self
Can rase the fixed interminable line

That joins these changing names, these numberless lives,
 These new oblivious personalities
 And keeps still lurking in our conscious acts
 The trail of old forgotten thoughts and deeds,
 Disown the legacy of our buried selves,
 The burdensome heirship to our vanished forms
 Accepted blindly by the body and soul. (12)

These are lines on fate and karma. No human effort or ceremonies or *yajnas* can erase the bindings of karma. It is only the Self that "builds this figure of self" that can do this. In simple words this means that we have to contact our innermost Self if we want to undo or erase our karma. It is only the psychic contact that can wash away our karma. All the *yajnas* and *kriyas* dictated by the pandits or *pujaris* of the temples are an eyewash.

An episode in an unremembered tale,
 Its beginning lost, its motive and plot concealed,
 A once living story has prepared and made
 Our present fate, child of past energies. (12)

Since we are connected with all our past births, there is an interlink of karmas or karmic acts that lurk through the conscious acts of our present life too. In other words, our past karmas leave a definite impact on our conscious acts of this life.

The whole story of karma is put plainly and clearly. Our present fate is only a "child of past energies." It is nothing but a continuation of a previous plan. Our body and soul now accept the burden of the past which can be off-loaded only by the Self.

The fixity of the cosmic sequences
 Fastened with hidden inevitable links
 She must disrupt, dislodge by her soul's force
 Her past, a block on the Immortal's road,
 Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate. (12)

Once again he refers to the necessity of the "soul's force" to dislodge her fate; nothing else is going to be of any avail. The reason she recollects her past is because she has to erase the possibility of it becoming a block on the immortal's road. She must wipe off the karma: "Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate." This shaping anew her fate is closely linked with shaping anew the fate of the earth.

Here I shall quote from another conversation of the Mother. Her experiences help us understand the work of Savitri a little more, if we can put it that way. The Mother says:

To this day I remember the experience. Truly, that's what I felt – I did not intellectualise it. Exactly the impression of what Christ must have experienced when he felt the weight of the cross. It was the weight of a whole world of darkness, unconsciousness, universal bad will, total incomprehension, something... And it really felt like that... as if I were carrying a frightful weight – which was frightful because of its darkness, not because of its weight. So I thought, 'Well, well. This must be how Christ felt when they laid the cross on him.' (*Mother's Agenda* 1: 410-411)

This is the burden that the Avatars bear upon themselves to save humanity. She mentions clearly that it was the darkness of human consciousness that weighed heavier than the weight itself. So long as we take Avatars to be just one more photograph of a spiritual personality on the wall and refuse to follow the path of truth in life, we shall be highly burdened. Each and every Avatar had to face this universal ill-will, total incomprehension and complete apathy towards their work. At the same time, at one place the Mother mentions that in spite of the lack of recognition by humanity, an Avatar always accomplishes his mission, even if he stays closed in a room.

Here, I shall mention another experience of the Mother which is incredibly graphic in its expression. It helps us more clearly understand phrases like, "Her will must cancel her body's destiny" or "shape anew her fate". The Mother says:

This body was built for that purpose, because I remember very well that when the war – the First World War – started and I offered my body up in sacrifice to the Lord so that the war would not be in vain, every part of my body, one after another (*Mother touches her legs, her arms etc.*), or sometimes the same part several times over, represented a battlefield: I could see it, I could feel it, I Lived it. Everytime it was... it was very strange, I had only to sit quietly and watch: I would see here, there, there, the whole thing in my body, all that was going on. And while it went on, I would put the concentration of the divine Force there, so that all—all that pain, all that suffering, everything—would hasten the preparation of the earth and the Descent of the Force. And that went on consciously throughout the war. (Ibid 4: 271)

This again is a magnificent incident showing how the body can "Make a rased ground and shape anew her fate." and "cancel her body's destiny." We see here the physical body of the Avatar turning into a battleground "so that the war would not be in vain." The Mother and Sri Aurobindo certainly tried to prevent this war but at the same time when it broke out, they diverted the pain and suffering and converted it into an opportunity to hasten the descent. Later they explained that these wars were, like the death of Satyavan, brought upon for cleansing of human consciousness. The darkness of consciousness was so dense that the Divine had to take recourse to such horrendous events like these wars so that the universal human consciousness could be cleansed to some extent and pushed forward. This death of Satyavan can be applied to all our lives, both on the individual

and social levels. We have by now seen love, doom and death. One of the most imminent thing that Savitri had come to do was to erase the law of death.

At another place, Mother throws a very significant light when she says:

...in the second canto, speaking of Savitri, he says that she has come (he puts it poetically, of course!) to (*laughing*) kick out all the rules – all the taboos, the rules, the fixed laws, all the closed doors, all the impossibilities –to undo it all.

I went one better; I didn't even know the rules so I didn't need to fight them! All I had to do was ignore them, so they didn't exist – that was even better. (*Mother's Agenda* 3: 65)

The Mother has come like Savitri to demolish the past, the negation, the falsehood. We are focusing on these parallels through the lives of Savitri and the Mother. When we read this epic, we will feel that we are going through the autobiography of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's lives together.

10 Love in her was wider than the universe

Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.
A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:... (15)

This wide self-giving was her native act. For her, spreading and constantly giving love was as natural as sunlight to the sun. There was a magnanimity, a generosity "as of sea or sky", meaning she was equally generous to all. The sky and the sea are there for all to enjoy. Such is the nature of Savitri. Whoever came to the Mother – a sadhak, a visitor, a foreigner, an atheist or anyone – returned always with a sense of a "greatened world."

Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise. (15)

Can one imagine a sweet sun? That was exactly the Mother, so we all called her "Douce Mère", Sweet Mother. This was sweet Mother, a "temperate sun." She has told us about herself, how much she had to veil her brilliance, her transcendental effulgence to come down to us and interact with us. If she did not temper herself down, we would be burnt up. Here was the supreme Aditi who came down to each one of us according to our receptivity.

As a child I particularly remember her kindness and care. My first contact with her was as child. We came here without our parents and it was she who made us forget our parents almost altogether. What she gave us as a divine Mother could not be given by our physical parents. She understood our inner needs and demands which we ourselves didn't know. I wrote my first

letter to her when very young about certain difficulties I was having in learning French, as I wanted to do well in the subject. She blessed me with such a wonderful reply expressing her blessings such that, from then on, my letter writing flow was established. Volumes of letters would approach her from Ashramites, outsiders, and even from foreign countries, and to each one she used to attend personally according to his or her need and necessity.

There have been times when she said that writing a letter to her, even if it is not sent to her in the physical, reached her straightaway and so too was her reply received. Even now we very often do that. It is one of the best ways to build up a deep contact with her. There are myriad ways in which her reply reaches us. It is absolutely concrete. All we need is to remain open to her. Sweetness is a divine quality that touches the psychic. The French word "*douceur*" is much richer than the English: together with sweetness, it possesses a much greater tenderness and softness. She would totally wrap us in her love. As children we were like little birds chirping only her name. We used to follow her wherever she went, from the Ashram to the Tennis ground to the Playground and other places. Even now when I go to Nirod-da's room, I go back in time and see myself standing there, waiting for her. She would come down the stairs, go towards the garage and three or four of us standing there would greet her saying: "*Bonjour Douce Mère*". And imagine: in all her busy, hurried steps, she would stop for a moment, touch gently each of our heads and say to each one of us, "*Bonjour mon petit enfant*". She would tap each one of us on our head and three times repeat "*Bonjour*". This was the individual care. Just imagine how deep she sank in our inner being, even though externally we didn't know anything about her. Perhaps because we were young, we had no mental blocks nor emotional preferences.

She had a black car that Pavitra-da used to drive for her. She would come down, go to the Tennis ground to play tennis for about an hour or so with those of us who knew the game. The drive would be very slow. We would see her leave in the car. And by the time she would reach the Tennis ground, we would run fast to be there before the Tennis ground door would open to receive her. I am sure she must have laughed and thought us to be mad little kids picking up sunlight wherever we could. After she entered, Tara-di would blow the whistle and we had to run to our group in the Tennis ground. As I mentioned, Mother used to play for an hour or so. At times, I do not know for how long, maybe the group came late or something, as children we used to watch her play tennis. I still remember how I used to watch her play. I also still remember that I used to think how the Mother, together with her eternal play in the universe, played tennis with us. Just imagine, it is more than four decades ago, but some of these impressions are indelible. As Sri Aurobindo says, the true memory is that which is caught by the psychic.

She used to play on the western side and we used to sit on the western side compound wall. Pranab-da was always with her, and she would select the players who would play with her. Later we came to know who played with her but at that time we only saw the Mother. No one else mattered to us. She never served an overhand, only an underhand. Just imagine, she was in her 80s! She would take overhand shots which were clean and clear shots, right within the boundaries of the court limits. One thing I still remember is that no one ever gave her a strong service or a strong game. Everyone had to control him or herself enough to give the shot close to the Mother for her to return the ball with the help of just a few steps. You may imagine that we could not make her run across the court. She would of course take two or three steps on the left or on the right, a back shot or a forward back shot.

When the Mother played Tennis, it was a delight to watch her. We never noticed who the opponent was. But Tennis for her was not just a game or passion. There was a purpose:

You see, I do not play tennis only for the sake of exercise. I play because with each stroke, each return, I can send some good atmosphere and bring down light and peace to remove the depression or psychological problems. And to those who are physically unwell, with each ball I send them strength and energy so that they can recover their health. Also with each stroke I remove their mental and vital difficulties of ego and desire. Thus you see, even in tennis I am helping each one to solve their difficulties and to grow towards progress and perfection. (*Mother and Abhay*: 67)

The Mother played with us, laughed with us, came to the theatre and the school, watched us learning wrestling in the pit, held the string on the finishing line when we ran a hundred metre shot. But at every point, she was projecting an aspect of her divine vibrations. It was almost as if the ball itself that came back to you carried her blessings, her message and her power. These are the ways she would work upon people. This is not the Divinity telling us to meditate or worship or control this or that. Every moment in every day she developed in us a spiritual sense to correct our being, to progress towards our goal so that we could awaken ourselves.

She was our only goal when we were young. My greatest dream was to reach the string that she was holding on one end while we had a 100-metre dash. Even though I was not as fat then as I am now, I could never reach the string first. By the time I reached the line, the string was out and gone. I was third. Still, I had the good fortune to receive one toffee from her hands immediately after the run. Our captain would hold us by the hand and take us straight to her for the toffees, the cashew toffees we get even

now. These were then tastier than the world's best Swiss chocolates as they were given to us by her hand. The Mother would stand there, as you might have seen in some of the photographs, children doing pranam at her feet. The boy coming first got three toffees, the second one got two toffees, and I got just one. God knows what she gave me through that toffee and if I have yet been able to digest it at all!

The Mother was closely involved in all our activities along with her inner sadhana. She would come to the theatre, Playground, Sports ground and even hold our strings at the finishing lines when we ran. She was sending us light and love in every manner possible. Like sunlight she kept on spreading the radiance of her love and sweetness of "Douce Mère" everywhere, without any condition or demand. These lines reminded me of the Sweet Mother I have seen myself.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambience,
And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule. (15)

Sri Aurobindo commented on this image of the hunted bird:

It is true that all the rest gives the transcendental values in the composition of Savitri's being, while here there is a departure to show how this transcendental greatness contacts the psychic demand of human nature in its weakness and responds to it and acts upon it. That was the purpose of the new passage and it is difficult to accomplish it without bringing in a normal psychic instead of a transcendental

tone.... This passage was introduced because it brought in something in Savitri's relation with the human world which seemed to me a necessary part of a complete psychological description of her (CWSA 27: 291).

Perhaps this is the reason why this line touches those who have been with the Mother. She stooped down to the demands of human nature, its weaknesses and responded and acted upon them. Each time we read this passage something of the psychic awakens, it helps us contact our psychic being. Let us remember that, after all, the Avatar acts upon the individual through the psychic. Hence this contact has to be brought out. At present we think of the Avatar, his huge work, his power to remove the *adharma*. But it is not just that. The Avatar comes down to work with each one of us and can do so only through our psychic. Therefore this passage is so brilliant and captivating as it reveals the Mother's direct contact with the psychic.

When an individual has problems, he approaches the Divine and takes refuge in him as though his own remembered home. For the soul to go back to the Divine is like returning home. Likewise one could take refuge in Savitri as in a haven of safety. It is like a tired bird going back home to its nest to replenish itself for the next morning's flight. An exhausted and tired soul takes refuge in the Mother's lap to revive itself, regain its strength to come back into the world and reconstitute itself to face the world again. The next verses are:

A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,

Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;... (15)

Once the Mother had said, "It is not your work to light the fire. As I told you, I am always lighting it — you have only to open yourself to receive it and tend it with your goodwill" (CWM 17: 127-128) Lighting the fire in us means that she has awakened the psychic in us, but are we aware of that? The gates of heaven have

been opened for her children, but are we walking through those gates? That is the meaning of tending the fire. How long do we take to do it? It all depends on our sincerity and faithfulness. The next verses give us a glimpse of the transcendental aspect of the Divine Mother and of Savitri:

Love in her was wider than the universe,

The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.

The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell:... (15)

All this while Sri Aurobindo is speaking about divine love and what a burning test it is to be able to hold this love. The Mother narrates a story regarding this divine love by narrating an old legend told by her.

Long ago, very long ago, in the desert land that is now Arabia, a divine being incarnated on earth to awaken it to the Supreme Love. As one would expect, he was persecuted by men, misunderstood, suspected, hunted after. Mortally wounded by his assailants, he wished to die alone, quietly, so that his work might be accomplished; and, pursued by them, he fled. Suddenly in the broad barren plain, a tiny bush of pomegranate appeared. The Saviour stole under its low branches in order to give up his body in peace; and at once the bush expanded miraculously, increased itself, widened, became deep and luxuriant in such a way that when the pursuers passed by they did not even suspect that the One whom they were chasing was hidden there, and they continued on their way.

While, drop by drop, the sacred blood fell, fertilising the soil, the bush covered itself with marvellous flowers, scarlet, enormous — clusters of petals, innumerable drops of blood...

These are the flowers that, for us, express and hold the divine love. (CWM 14: 123)

This flower of divine love is the flower of the pomegranate fruit. This is an old Chaldean legend that the Mother narrated. But it gives us the character of the Avatar who is suspected, misunderstood, hunted and persecuted by mankind. In spite of all the resistances, he leaves behind his peace and love for mankind.

She has also explained the first descent of divine love into the Inconscient to save it:

When Consciousness separated from its Origin and became Inconscience, the Origin emanated love to reawaken Consciousness from the depth of the Inconscience and bring it back into touch with its Origin.

It may be said that at its origin love is the supreme power of attraction which awakens, in response, the irresistible need of an absolute self-giving; they are the two poles of the urge towards complete fusion.

No other movement could, better and more surely than this, throw a bridge across the abyss dug by the sense of separation that comes from the formation of the individual. It was necessary to bring back to itself what had been projected into space without destroying for this purpose the universe created thus.

That is why love sprang up, the irresistible power of union. (Ibid: 123-124)

The Mother related still another explanation about divine love:

When the baker wants to make the dough of his bread rise, he puts some leaven into it, and it is from within that the transformation takes place.

When the Divine wanted to rouse Matter, awaken it and make it rise towards God, He threw Himself into Matter under the form of love, and it is from within that the transformation takes place.

So it is by living from within an organisation that one can help it to become enlightened and rise towards the Truth.

(Ibid: 124)

This is such a simple, though unforgettable example of how divine Love works from within and transforms Matter. The Divine has an equal love for all human beings but the obscurity of consciousness of most men prevents them from perceiving the divine Love. Truth is wonderful. Our perception distorts it. To become conscious of the divine Love, all other love must be abandoned. There is always a bitter taste behind the human love. Certainly one has the right to love and true love carries in itself its joy. But unfortunately, human beings are selfish and they immediately mix with their love, the desire to be loved in return and this desire is contrary to spiritual truth and the cause of passions and sufferings.

Now, let us continue with the passage in *Savitri*. A few lines further he writes,

Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath Spiritual
that can make all things divine.

For even her gulfs were secrecies of light. (15-16)

Normally we do not reach the deepest self nor do we know about it. But with Savitri, all that is unknown and unseen within her was also full of the secrecies of light.

At once she was the stillness and the word,

A continent of self-diffusing peace,

An ocean of untrembling virgin fire;

The strength, the silence of the gods were hers. (16)

The "word" here suggests the transcendental aspect of Savitri, because it is the "word" that rises from the transcendental stillness; it is the word of creation. She was simultaneously both the stillness and the word, which are seemingly opposites but are really complementary and necessary to each other. The stillness

is static Being and the word is the dynamic creative Force and Consciousness. This was her predominant characteristic.

Normally when we face an enemy we buckle in like Arjuna, whose human nature came up and refused to fight. But when Savitri faced her dreaded enemy, the godhead Death, she was absolutely still. She evoked her own supreme divinity. She was at once "A continent of self-diffusing peace" and "An ocean of untrembling virgin fire", the combination of peace and fire of stillness and strength. What is this "virgin fire"? Fire is also there in the aspiration in man. But in Savitri this is the original "virgin fire" out of which this universe is born. In the line, "The strength, the silence of the gods were hers", Sri Aurobindo firmly ties these qualities to the outer character and temperament of Savitri.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our Yoga. But it has always seemed to me impossible unless there comes as its support and foundation and guard the Divine Truth – what I call the Supramental – and its Divine Power. (CWSA 29: 333)

And the Mother says,

Truth does not depend on any external form and shall manifest in spite of all bad will or opposition. (*Mother's Agenda* 7: 19)

We can understand from this that divine Love is inseparable from divine Truth. We cannot bring either of these separately because Sat and Ananda go together, and Love is an expression of Ananda.

I will read another conversation from the Mother:

I was wondering, "Since this world is progressive... Won't there always be what we call 'adverse forces,' in other words, things that don't harmoniously follow the movement?"

Then came the answer, the vision of That: "No, the moment of this very Possibility is drawing near, the moment for the manifestation of the essence of perfect Love, which can transform this unconsciousness, this ignorance and this ill will that goes with it into a luminous and joyous progression, wholly progressive, wholly comprehensive, thirsting for perfection."

It was very concrete.

And it corresponds to a state where you are so Perfectly identified with all that is, that you concretely become all that is antidivine – and so you can offer it up. It can be offered up and really transformed through this offering. (Ibid 3: 47)

The central idea here is that when one becomes identified with all that is, one can offer it up to the Divine to be transformed. Love is a transformative force, and by identifying with the antidivine elements, they can be surrendered to the Supreme and transformed. One cannot offer anything from the surface. One has to go deep down, as in the example I had quoted earlier of making bread. The dough has to rise from within. Likewise, one has to enter the heart of the anti-divine force, into its very consciousness, to transform it. Nothing can be transformed from the surface. I should rather say that one has to live in it, identify fully with it. For that matter, even in ordinary circumstances, if we want to help someone, we cannot do it externally or only by giving a piece of advice. We have to go deeper and understand the person from inner levels. Knowing things externally does not help at all. True help always comes from within. When love enters the anti-divine being, or into anyone else for that matter, it is then, through the process of identification, that some kind of

purge or cleansing takes place. Then it becomes possible to offer to the Supreme all that is troubling, painful and miserable.

Earlier I referred to the Mother's significant experience in 1962 on April 12th and 13th night about which she said, "I was almost dead." That night she had this pivotal experience:

Suddenly in the night I woke up with the full awareness of what we could call the Yoga of the world. The Supreme Love was manifesting through big pulsations, and each pulsation was bringing the world further in its manifestation. It was the formidable pulsations of the eternal, stupendous Love, only Love: each pulsation of the Love was carrying the universe further in its manifestation.

And the certitude that what is to be done is done and the Supramental Manifestation is realised.

Everything was Personal, nothing was individual.

This was going on and on and on and on....

The certitude that what is to be done is Done.

All the results of the Falsehood had disappeared: Death was an illusion, Sickness was an illusion, Ignorance was an illusion – something that had no reality, no existence.... Only Love, and Love, and Love, and Love – immense, formidable, stupendous, carrying everything. (Ibid 3: 131)

This experience occurred just after the Mother had fought a lone battle with death. After Sri Aurobindo left his body, she undertook this sadhana of transformation, and in about 12 years she conquered the Falsehood, Ignorance, Night and the principle of death in the April 1962 experience. Had she not fought and won this battle against death and falsehood, she could not have entered the cells of her body and started the real work of physical transformation. Remember the warning of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*:

On the bare peak where Self is alone with Nought

And life has no sense and love no place to stand,
 She must plead her case upon extinction's verge,
 In the world's death-cave uphold life's helpless claim
 And vindicate her right to be and love. (12)

Similarly, the Mother in 1962 entered this very womb of death from where she destroyed death itself. Conquering death does not mean that we will see no more deaths in the world. She has conquered the original principle of death but by then it already had thousands of minute formations which take much longer to strike down. But the Mother has cut the roots of it which means that slowly, little by little the whole principle of death will have to disappear as it will no longer get any nourishment whatsoever from its roots. What is still necessary is that, as individuals, we do not give it any support, any nutrition so that it can thrive. Each one of us has to fight this battle against falsehood within us so that death can be totally eradicated. This is precisely the *tapasya* which is the great integral yoga of transformation. The branches of death should not be given any food by us. On our part, this is our sadhana of constant rejection, vigilance and surrender and a continuous effort.

That extraordinary experience of 1962 – that of the Supreme Love manifesting through big pulsations – was the pulsation of the Sat-Chit-Ananda, and with each pulsation, a breath and a ring of Love went into the world. That pure Love gave the world the succour and it, in turn, gave to the Mother, the strength to fight death. It is the principle of Divine Love alone that can transform death. Before the Mother faced death, the Supreme manifested in her the original principle of Love, almost as the instrument, with which to fight death.

After this experience of the pulsations of divine Love, she asked, "And how to express it in the world?" It was like an impossibility, because of the contradiction ... But then it came: "you have

accepted that this world should know the Supramental Truth ... and it will be expressed totally, integrally" (Ibid 3: 131).

To manifest these vibrations of Love for the world to be saved, the Mother kept on working relentlessly from 1962 to 1973, till the last day of her physical life. That meant plunging into the material substance. From there on, she begins to act as a leaven in matter raising it up from within. With this experience in 1962, with the great waves of pulsations, she enters matter which is also the domain of death. That was the conquest of death and the beginning of the process of transformation.

She says,

It was like a memory, an eternally present memory of that consciousness of supreme Love emanated by the Lord onto earth — Into earth — to draw it back again to Him. And truly it was the descent of the very essence of the divine nature into the most total divine negation, and thus the abandonment of the divine condition to take on terrestrial darkness, so as to bring Earth back to the divine state. And unless That, that supreme Love, becomes all-powerfully conscious here on Earth, the return can never be definitive. (Ibid: 47)

At another time, the Mother said:

Sri Aurobindo has explained it in *Savitri*. Only when Divine Love has manifested in all its purity will everything yield, will it all yield – it will then be done.

It's the only thing that can do it.

It will be the great Victory.

(silence)

On a small scale, in very small details, I feel that of all the forces, this is the strongest. And it's the only one with a power over hostile wills. Only... for the world to change, it must

manifest here in all its fullness. We have to be up to it... (Ibid 1: 477)

And the next one is almost a summary of what I have read. She said that we should not try to be among the pure. Religion has taught us to be among the pure like sages and saints. But instead, she said:

Accept to be with those who are in darkness and, in total love, offer it all. (Ibid 3: 48)

And another

And when the day comes for the manifestation of supreme Love—a crystalised, concentrated descent of supreme Love – that will truly be the hour of Transformation, for nothing will be able to resist That.

But as it's all-powerful, a certain receptivity must be prepared on earth so its effects are not devastating. Sri Aurobindo has explained it in one of his letters. Someone asked him, 'Why doesn't this love come now?', and he replied something like this: If divine love in its essence were to manifest on earth, it would be like an explosion; for the earth is not supple enough or receptive enough to widen to the measure of this love. The earth must not only open itself but become wide and supple. Matter - not just physical Matter, but the substance of the physical consciousness as well - is still much too rigid. (Ibid 2: 21)

This passage is from 1961 before the actual experience in 1962. Please note noted the difference in tone and the word "devastating".

When we put together these apparently disconnected chords, we understand the work of Savitri or the Mother. If we want to get rid of our sorrow and suffering, the only solution is the touch of divine Love. This supreme Love cannot descend without the manifestation of the Truth. And for the Truth and the divine Love

to manifest, the earth has to prepare itself. And for this preparation there must be an Avatar who descends on earth. No human being can prepare the earth for this Love. Savitri had to descend as Love and the eternal evolutionary Satyavan also had to come as Love. It is in their meeting that the earth is prepared.

Their wedding is in itself symbolic of this preparation and, perhaps, that is the sign that the earth is ready for the descent of the supramental Truth. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have been doing this work together. All of their experiences are linked: Savitri, Satyavan, the Mother, Sri Aurobindo, Transformation, the experience of Death all form one big picture. If only we can take a little trouble to find out the details, then everything will fall into place and the picture of the Mother's work and vision becomes clear. I would even further state that for those of us who have sincerely turned to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, our understanding of *Savitri* would be easier and truer. Without this backup of the experiences of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo we will not be able to establish the links in this epic of *Savitri*.

That is the reason why I am constantly referring to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's experiences as described in their letters and explanations. It is only in conjunction with that that we can piece together the symbolism in *Savitri*. Without these we can understand some kind of bare meaning and rough symbolism, but will miss the soul of the book, that is, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo themselves. Without the touch of the soul of the book, nothing much will penetrate and it will not be much of a help. One may say that *Savitri* is an epic that can be fully enjoyed and even understood independently of this. Indeed it is possible but that understanding will be more or less on the intellectual level. After accepting Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,

the whole reading takes up a new meaning and it becomes a positive power in our own yoga of transformation.

Let us read further about purification and Love. It comes as part of Mother's comments on this Aphorism from Sri Aurobindo:

To feel & love the God of beauty and good in the ugly and the evil, and still yearn in utter love to heal it of its ugliness and its evil, this is real virtue and morality. (CWSA 12: 428)

With this comes True collaboration. For when you have this vision, this awareness, when you live in this consciousness, you also get the power to Pull That into the manifestation on earth and put it into contact with what, for the time being, distorts and disguises; thus the deformation and disguise are gradually transformed by the influence of the Truth behind.

Here we are at the top rung on the scale of collaboration.

Put this way, there is no need to bring the principle of love into our explanation. But if we want to know or understand the nature of the Force or Power that permits and accomplishes this transformation (specially in the case of evil, but for ugliness to some extent as well), we see that of all powers, Love is obviously the mightiest, the most integral—integral in that it applies to all cases. It's even mightier than the power of purification which dissolves bad wills and is, in a way, master over the adverse forces, but which doesn't have the direct transforming power; because the power of purification must First dissolve in order to form again later. It destroys one form to make a better one from it, while Love doesn't need to dissolve in order to transform: it has the direct transforming power. Love is like a flame changing the hard into the malleable, then sublimating even the malleable into a kind of purified vapor. It doesn't destroy: it transforms. (*Mother's Agenda* 2: 19-20)

These may be brief flashes of Truth. But apply this to Savitri and we will see that she does not destroy Death, but transforms Him. Destruction and then a reconstruction is relatively much easier than transformation as it needs working from deep within and that is what is accomplished by Love which is Savitri herself.

When we transfer these personal experiences of the Mother to Savitri, then things become clear. Why is there this battle between Savitri and Death? Savitri could have destroyed Death but that is not at all her purpose. If destruction was her way of working she could have destroyed or wiped off this world which is in such a sorry state and established the Overmental World!

In fact, she had tried to bring down the overmental creation. She prepared a complete overmental world with gods participating in it in the subtle physical. It was only short of being brought down upon the earth. She had already brought down some of the gods which possessed some of the Ashramites. Somebody became Varuna, somebody Mitra, etc. They developed miraculous faculties, and some became poets, artists, musicians or scientists!

It was an incredible period in the Ashram with such possessions and their results. But once these gods withdrew, the human being came back to their normal level of consciousness. How much the Mother wanted to remove the sufferings of this world that seeing our limitations and the narrowness of our consciousness she began replacing it with a higher manifestation.

But to this creation Sri Aurobindo replied? Perhaps this was the only time when he somewhat taunted the Mother by saying:

"Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed, ..." and then he smiled and said: "It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind

creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality."

With my inner consciousness I understood immediately: a few hours later the creation was gone... and from that moment we started anew on other bases. (CWM 9: 149)

Another time, she said,

Sri Aurobindo told me it was an overmental creation, not the Truth. These were his very words: "Yes, it's an overmental creation, but that's not the truth we're seeking; it's not the truth, *the highest truth*", he said. (*Mother's Agenda* 3: 463-464)

This kind of an intermediary creation would make mankind feel more comfortable; it would give much more peace, joy and happiness, but such a mankind would not be transformed. There would be no hunger or suffering or violence, but our nature would not fundamentally change. Moreover, the coming of the supramental consciousness and power would be postponed by thousands of years. After Sri Aurobindo expressed his views, without saying a word the Mother withdrew to her room and dissolved her new creation within half-an-hour. Such was the surrender of the Mother to Sri Aurobindo.

Superimposing a new world or giving a new face-left to the existing world would not do. Happiness or joy or comfort is not the goal of his world; the goal is to achieve Supermind. Sri Aurobindo wanted no compromise. The way we are living is a blindfolded existence, far from Truth. We shall have to suffer perhaps a few more hundred years more before becoming conscious, but what will then manifest will be permanent.

It is in our world that the Avatars descend. At the Overmental level, where the gods reign supreme, why should they think of the Supermind at all? The whole secret is that this transformation

has to come from within and for that the divine Love has to come. This is what Savitri has come for in her embodiment. If we understand Savitri in this light, then simply reading *Savitri* is doing yoga. It has to be read like a hymn to the Mother with total adoration, as if she is hearing every word of it, because she truly hears it. I might have told you about my learning *Savitri* by heart and the letter I wrote about it to the Mother. She found it interesting as it would benefit me with perseverance and told me to do it. Every day, I used to learn five verses and go and recite them in the Meditation Hall in front of the dual photo of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This creates a tremendously vibrant and conscious bridge between us and the Mother, when our reading itself becomes a supreme act of devotion, dedication and offering.

Well, after discussing divine Love and its relation to the establishment of the Truth, I would like to read an answer from the Mother to a question about this. The question was:

What is the relation of human love to Divine love? Is the human an obstacle to the Divine love? Or is not rather the capacity for human love an index to the capacity for Divine love? Have not great spiritual figures, such as Christ, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, been remarkably loving and affectionate by nature?

Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force. But because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious Power. Consciously it seeks

for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instruments, awakens to its vibrations those who are capable of an answer, endeavours to realise in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others. Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades—or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this of a personal experience all their own was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.

Love is universal and eternal; it is always manifesting itself and always identical in its essence. And it is a Divine Force; for the distortions we see in its apparent workings belong to its instruments. Love does not manifest in human beings alone; it is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very stones; in the animals it is easy to detect its presence. All the deformations of this great and divine Power come from the obscurity and ignorance and selfishness of the limited instrument. Love, the eternal force, has no clinging, no desire, no hunger for possession, no selfregarding attachment; it is, in its pure movement, the seeking for union of the self with the Divine, a seeking absolute and regardless of all other things. Love divine gives itself and asks for nothing. What human beings have made of it, we do not need to say; they have turned it into an ugly and repulsive thing. And yet even in human beings the first contact of love does bring down something of its purer substance; they become capable for a moment of forgetting themselves, for a moment its divine touch awakens and magnifies all that is fine and beautiful. But afterwards there comes to the surface the human nature, full of its impure demands, asking for something in exchange, bartering what it gives, clamouring

for its own inferior satisfactions, distorting and soiling what was divine.

To manifest the Divine love you must be capable of receiving the Divine love. For only those can manifest it who are by their nature open to its native movement. The wider and clearer the opening in them, the more they manifest love divine in its original purity; the more it is mixed with the lower human feelings, the greater is the deformation. One who is not open to love in its essence and in its truth cannot approach the Divine. Even the seekers through knowledge come to a point beyond which if they want to go farther, they are bound to find themselves entering at the same time into love and to feel the two as one, knowledge the light of the divine union, love the very heart of knowledge. There is a place in the soul's progress where they meet and you cannot distinguish one from the other. The division, the distinction between the two that you make in the beginning are a creation of the mind: once you rise to a higher level, they disappear.

Among those who have come into this world seeking to reveal the Divine here and transform earthly life, there are some who have manifested the Divine love in a greater fullness. In some the purity of the manifestation is so great that they are misunderstood by the whole of humanity and are even accused of being hard and unloving, although the Divine love is there. But it is in them divine and not human in its form as in its substance. For when man speaks of love, he associates it with an emotional and sentimental weakness. But the divine intensity of self-forgetfulness, the capacity of throwing oneself out entirely, making no restriction and no reservation, as a gift, asking nothing in exchange, this is little known to human beings. And when it is there unmixed with weak and sentimental emotions, they find it hard and cold;

they cannot recognise in it the very highest and intensest power of love. (CWM 3: 69-71)

With regard to Sri Aurobindo this misunderstanding could have been there, but Mother has always appeared before us as the incarnation of Love. That is why she was called "Douce Mère", Sweet Mother. Nobody would think of calling Sri Aurobindo "Sweet Sri Aurobindo", because he never expressed this intensity of Love outwardly as the Mother did. Therefore we may not recognise in him the highest or the intensest form of love, its power and effect. The Mother has said that he is as close to us as the Mother in the aspect of Love. It is just that his divine intensity is not so visible in his outer actions. It is quite natural that one who is upholding and manifesting the divine Truth will obviously manifest divine Love as well. But it is our human approach that fails to recognise that.

The Mother continues:

The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine Power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine love. This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice. The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine

movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.

The movement of love is not limited to human beings and it is perhaps less distorted in other worlds than in the human. Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing,—a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here. Once you have come in contact with this large, pure and true Divine love, if you have felt it even for a short time and in its smallest form, you will realise what an abject thing human desire has made of it. It has become in human nature something low, brutal, selfish, violent, ugly, or else it is something weak and sentimental, made up of the pettiest feeling, brittle, superficial, exacting. And this baseness and brutality or this self-regarding weakness they call love! (Ibid: 71-72)

I would further refer to another conversation of the Mother which will bring greater clarity to our understanding of Love and

its work for the earth. It will surely help us comprehend the work of Savitri and Satyavan for earth.

Love is a supreme force which the Eternal Consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine. The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine. Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed, "There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!" And with the awakening to love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace. (Ibid: 73-74)

This is exactly the story of Satyavan and Savitri, Savitri the incarnation of Divine Love and Grace and the Love and Satyavan the aspiration from the earth itself. She continues:

Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fullness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of Love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine. This world was a world of dead matter, till Divine love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way, it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought. The maximum it has reached is what seems to human beings love in its highest form, its purest and most disinterested kind, like the love of the mother for the child.

This human movement of love is secretly seeking for something else than what it has yet found; but it does not know where to find it, it does not even know what it is. The moment man's consciousness awakens to the Divine love, pure, independent of all manifestation in human forms, he knows for what his heart has all the time been truly longing. That is the beginning of the Soul's aspiration, that brings the awakening of the consciousness and its yearning for union with the Divine. All the forms that are of the ignorance, all the deformations it has imposed must from that moment fade and disappear and give place to one single movement of the creation answering to the Divine love by its love for the Divine. Once the creation is conscious, awakened, opened to love for the Divine, the Divine love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete.

Great beings have taken birth in this world who came to bring down here something of the sovereign purity and power of Divine love. The Divine love has thrown itself into a personal form in them that its realisation upon earth may be at once more easy and more perfect. Divine love, when manifested in a personal being, is easier to realise; it is more difficult when it is unmanifested or impersonal in its movement. A human being, awakened by this personal touch, with this personal intensity, to the consciousness of the Divine love, will find his work and change made more easy; the union for which he seeks becomes more natural and close. And the union, the realisation will become for him, too, more full, more perfect; for the wide uniformity of a universal and impersonal Love will be lit up and vivified with the colour and beauty of all possible relations with the Divine. (Ibid: 74-75)

We may note that one important idea she conveys is that the most disinterested and pure love in human form is that of the mother for the child. And then the other idea that the Divine Love when manifested in a personal being is easier to realise. Well, combining these two, perhaps we get an answer to one of our questions that was raised at the beginning. The question is, *"What's the difference between the Mother as the Avatar of Divine Love and other Avatars?"* We have the answer here: this is perhaps the first time in the evolution's history that an Avatar has come not only as a female but also as the Mother.

Human beings often require a human form to adore and worship; few can worship the impersonal aspect of the Divine. It is this basic tendency in people that make them worship as their idols, various heroes in politics, film or sports. We have brought ourselves so low that we do not know the difference between a human egoistic soul and a divine being. In India perhaps we are the worst in venerating false human egos. The younger generation has to be taught to value spiritual masters. It is to be done through the life stories of great people, saints and sages, leaders and social reformers, so that early in their youth people may learn to discriminate right from wrong.

Through the Mother's conversations in her comments on human love, we see that the supreme Love is indeed at the basis of all love as such. In plants, it is there as the aspiration for sunlight, in human beings it comes as the attraction for another. She also mentions that in its initial stages human love is quite pure: there are moments of self-forgetfulness and self-giving in multiple shades of intensity. But later on the ego tends to take over and its demands and possessiveness spoil our relationships. Equal exchange, barter and bargaining start and the calm joy of a selfless love vanishes. If only we could be a little conscious when

dealing with this most blissful force, we could then catch a glimpse of a divine rapture which could make our relationships much more meaningful and lasting.

The Mother has spoken of the holocaust of the Divine and Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the holocaust of the Divine Mother. It is usually understood as the holocaust of the Purusha, but Sri Aurobindo says that it is more the holocaust of Prakriti because it is the Mother who descends as the special incarnation of Love, undergoing intense sorrow and suffering for humanity. Some of the most wonderful verses in *Savitri* are these:

Love in her was wider than the universe,

The whole world could take refuge in her single heart. (15)

In order to gain a fuller perspective and appreciation of Savitri's personality, I will read further what is spoken by Savitri to Death about the meaning of divine Love. It is most relevant because these verses from Book X describe how this divine Love relates to Savitri and Satyavan themselves:

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. (633)

These are small hints which throw a great deal of light on love.

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." (633)

These verses reveal the relation between Savitri and Satyavan:
he is the Eternal's delegate soul and she is the force of God.

The next passage from Book X speaks of human love. It is
Death who describes it, as he would not speak about divine
Love. He tells Savitri:

O traveller in the chariot of the Sun,
High priestess in thy holy fancy's shrine
Who with a magic ritual in earth's house
Worshippest ideal and eternal love,
What is this love thy thought has deified,
This sacred legend and immortal myth?
It is a conscious yearning of thy flesh,
It is a glorious burning of thy nerves,
A rose of dream-splendour petalling thy mind,
A great red rapture and torture of thy heart. A
sudden transfiguration of thy days, It passes
and the world is as before.

A ravishing edge of sweetness and of pain,
A thrill in its yearning makes it seem divine,
A golden bridge across the roar of the years,
A cord tying thee to eternity.
And yet how brief and frail! how soon is spent

This treasure wasted by the gods on man,
 This happy closeness as of soul to soul,
 This honey of the body's companionship,
 This heightened joy, this ecstasy in the veins,
 This strange illumination of the sense!
 If Satyavan had lived, love would have died;
 But Satyavan is dead and love shall live
 A little while in thy sad breast, until
 His face and body fade on memory's wall
 Where other bodies, other faces come. (610)

Sri Aurobindo here describes the exact situation of human love on earth, its brevity and impermanence and its first illumination in the senses, of an ecstasy and feeling of heightened joy in the veins. But all that is there as long as the body of the lover is alive. As soon as he is gone, love goes to other bodies and other faces. It is to Death's angry argument that Savitri gives as her reply the previous passage.

We have given a more or less complete picture of divine Love, how pure a sacrifice it is of their taking upon themselves all the sorrow of the world.

Let me mention here one particular difference between the Mother incarnating herself as the divine Love in contrast to other previous Avatars such as Christ. We all know about Christ's contribution to earth through divine Love, but this time the Mother has come down on earth for the work of transformation of human nature. To be able to accomplish that she has brought down the divine power of the supramental Force along with divine Love. It is when divine Love is coupled with the power of the supramental Force that it can transform the face of the earth. To date no previous Avatars had the advantage of this new Force. Until now so many sages and vibhutis came and worked to uplift the human race. Every one of them sacrificed immeasurably, but

we humans remained quite the same. It is partly because this transforming power was not there. All their love could not penetrate deep. They could not build anything on a permanent basis. We must keep this fact in mind about the Mother as the incarnation of divine Love.

Now we continue again Book I, Canto II:

Till then no mournful line had barred this ray.
 On the frail breast of this precarious earth,
 Since her orb'd sight in its breath-fastened house,
 Opening in sympathy with happier stars
 Where life is not exposed to sorrowful change,
 Remembered beauty death-claimed lids ignore
 And wondered at this world of fragile forms
 Carried on canvas-strips of shimmering Time,
 The impunity of unborn Might was hers. (16)

With one phrase "fragile form" we realise that Sri Aurobindo contrasts her innate strength which is not like that of other human beings. "...unborn Might" speak of Savitri's nature and power. Next we are going to get a description of her other characteristics and how different she is from ordinary human beings.

Although she leaned to bear the human load,
 Her walk kept still the measures of the gods. (16)

Savitri, or the Divine Mother, has made herself very limited, close and native to humans as she has become like anyone of us. She has taken up all the sorrows and limitations, but there was still a difference, she still had that stature of the gods, that impact of the gods. In fact, in one of the conversations in the Playground, a child asked her, "Mother if you are such a supreme goddess, why did you come down?" She sweetly replied, "Otherwise how could you have held my hand?" It is a beautiful answer! That is Savitri, "she leaned to bear the human load". Savitri, and the

divine Mother, made herself small, close and native to human beings so as to be like us. She has taken upon herself the human limitations.

11 Her soul's issue

Earth's breath had failed to stain that brilliant glass:
Unsmear'd with the dust of our mortal atmosphere

It still reflected heaven's spiritual joy. (16)

Usually, this mortal atmosphere of the earth's dust and pollution stains us. But the Mother was not affected by any of these human corruptions.

Almost they saw who lived within her light
Her playmate in the sempiternal spheres
Descended from its unattainable realms
In her attracting advent's luminous wake, The
white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss
Drifting with burning wings above her days:

Heaven's tranquil shield guarded the missioned child. (16)

Who is this playmate descended from those unattainable realms? It is the "The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss". The 'dragon bird' is the sign of physical immortality which always guards Savitri as a strong shield of protection.

Here perhaps it will not be out of place if I recollect some incidents in Mother's life that shed light on this passage. Once when she was a young girl in France, she went with her friend to a hall as big as 12 metres long and she was asked to cross the hall only in three steps. The Mother stood at one end of the hall, collected herself and in three huge steps—just a hop, step and jump—she covered the entire hall, reaching the other end. No human power can cross a hall of 12 metres in just 3 steps! She said that she was carried. Another time, when she was walking on a mountain with her friend, she did not observe the edge of a peak and fell straight down. What was very strange was that she was unhurt without even a scratch on her body. I think she herself mentioned that it felt as if she was protected by an angel. And

yet another time, one day she was walking in the streets of Paris, almost in a state of trance, absolutely unmindful of the traffic, and she did not hear a tramway coming. Suddenly, at the last second, she saw, or felt, some being pushing her back to safety. (As narrated in *Mother's Chronicles* Book 1: 87-88)

Later, while recollecting her past life, she revealed that an angel would hover above and around her always protecting and caring for her. It was that angel who helped her leap across the huge hall in three steps, as well as in other small instances too. She always felt the presence of the angel around her. These verses below refer to such a presence which always shielded her.

Heaven's tranquil shield guarded the missioned child.

A glowing orbit was her early term,

Years like gold raiment of the gods that pass; Her
youth sat throned in calm felicity.

But joy cannot endure until the end:

There is a darkness in terrestrial things

That will not suffer long too glad a note. (16-17)

I shall read an explanation from Nolini-da that I found quite beautiful. He writes:

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. (CWNKG 3: 166)

The verse above perhaps fits that description that joy cannot endure until the end, it does not last long and then we need the sorrow of tears to understand its value. We cannot bask in complete light, we need the shadow to hide our weaknesses. Savitri, even in her youth, "sat throned in calm felicity" where all was quiet and wonderful. But suddenly,

On her too closed the inescapable Hand:

The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time. (17)

The "Hand" is that of Death, the "snare of Time" is the snare of human ignorance and the "armed Immortal" is Savitri herself.

Now a different idea comes in:

One dealt with her who meets the burdened great. (17)

This "One" here refers to the Master of evolution. The following verses refer to this Master. It means that the Master of evolution is also guiding her and what does he do?

Assigner of the ordeal and the path

Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul (17)

This means that this spirit assigns to each one of us our path on the journey of life. But for the one who has come to save this earth, what path does he choose?

Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit's goads,

The dubious godhead with his torch of pain

Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world

And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss. (17)

Note the word "unfinished" because if the world was finished and complete, there would no longer be the need of an Avatar. But this spirit of Evolution calls for the Avatar to complete the work.

August and pitiless in his calm outlook,

Heightening the Eternal's dreadful strategy,

He measured the difficulty with the might

And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross.

Assailing her divinest elements,

He made her heart kin to the striving human heart

And forced her strength to its appointed road. (17)

Savitri is also assailed in her "divinest elements". She is brought to such a point of crisis where she is compelled to bring forward her inner strength in order to be able to reach the appointed goal. It is for this purpose alone that she has accepted to be

mortal. Knowing her mission, she accepted to descend here on earth. What is this mission?

To wrestle with the Shadow she had come And
must confront the riddle of man's birth
And life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night.
Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice. (17)

This describes Savitri's mission which we come across for the first time. Till now there was only an indirect reference to it. These are very powerful verses outlining her mission and work for the earth. To explain these lines we refer to a few lines from Book XI Canto I:

To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine. (692) Further:
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine. (692)
In this light, let us take up those we are presently studying,
To wrestle with the Shadow she had come (17)

We know that this shadow is Death himself. Please mark the term "wrestle" – it is a powerful word. It tells us that she must engage in a struggle and even suggests that it is going to be a physical struggle. Conquest in the battle with Death has to be achieved on the level of the body. It is not simply an occult battle with the spirit of Death. "And must confront the riddle of man's birth." (17) Man's birth and death is a mystery. Why is one born or why does one die and where does one go after death? "And life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night". (17) Why has man been given these few brief years of existence? We come on earth,

struggle for existence, cry and laugh in different circumstances and leave the scene. She has come to find out the root of man's problems. She knows that its root is in the Inconscient and that it is death. Therefore she sinks into the depth and says,

Whether to bear with Ignorance and death

Or hew the ways of Immortality,... (17)

"Hew" is again a strong word meaning "cutting open". Savitri must hew the ways of Immortality. It is like clearing the jungle and making an entirely new path. We all follow a path that has been given to us since the beginning of creation and that path leads to death. Because of its repeated occurrence, whether consciously or unconsciously, from the zero hour till now, this path has become almost permanent, to such an extent that one cannot even think of changing it at any time in the future; it is that deep and determined.

Now Savitri has come to hew, or cut open, a second path, an altogether new path for mankind to follow – the path of Immortality. How will she accomplish this incredible task against such a supremely powerful force as Death? How will she build this path to Immortality? Nolini-da sheds some light on these questions:

The first original Sin is Death, the God of Denial, of nonexistence. 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 Savitri 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. (CWNKG 4: 253)

Love truly does not destroy, it transforms down to the very depths of the being. In this issue of hewing the ways to immortality, Savitri had to go herself into the realm of Death so that she could *absorb* it. A small example might clarify this point a little more. For instance, in completely dark room, when we bring a small candle, it lights up a limited area. Likewise, if we can bring in more and more powerful illumination, accordingly the darkness is absorbed by that light and if it is bright enough, no trace of darkness will remain; all of it will be transformed into light. Likewise, Savitri had to cut into the realm of death slowly and steadily with infinite patience and perseverance, digging this new path to immortality. The result of Satyavan and Savitri's battle with Death will be the full blaze of the Light of Truth reigning upon the earth. The words used by Nolini-da are very significant: "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". (Ibid)

Just as the light brought into the room absorbs the darkness, Savitri too has to transform Death into deathlessness or immortality. Death cannot be pushed out. Where will he go? There is no space, anywhere, outside the Divine. Death has to be *accommodated* within the Divine by cutting a new path towards Light. Bearing with Ignorance and Death implies making a compromise as we human beings always do. We compromise with Ignorance because we all are a part of it and we do not have

any power to challenge it. But Savitri takes up the battle to fight it; she has accepted this great challenge:

To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice. (17)

Singlehandedly she will face Death and bring immortality to man. If she loses this battle, then the whole of humanity is lost for good. Her destiny has been cast and her mortal birth is only to fulfil this mission upon earth. In her own words she says:

In the one task for which our lives were born,
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine. (692)

It is only after banishing Ignorance that she can establish God in the world. It is only by bringing immortality that one can change earthly life to life divine. One might ask "how does Savitri's victory over death have an effect on the earth?" She is, after all, a single individual. But she is a single individual with the power of an Avatar who has manifested here on earth to knock at the forbidden door of Death for the first time ever.

Aditi herself has descended as the Avatar to do this job for the earth! Whatever she will realise will become an ultimate property of the earth itself. To understand it clearly, suppose one man is able to make a potent crack in a dam. Then slowly, in the course of time, the whole dam will break. What is important is to make that first big crack. So if something can be done in her single, most-prepared body, then that accomplishment becomes part and parcel of the universal body. If she can defy Death, then in the course of time, Death can totally vanish from the earth. Singlehandedly, she was working for the whole wide earth all alone.

But not to submit and suffer was she born; To
lead, to deliver was her glorious part.

Here was no fabric of terrestrial make
Fit for a day's use by busy careless Powers. (17)

This is not difficult to understand. There is no question here that Savitri will lose this game. She is the perfect instrument for this work. She has come to free the earth of its sufferings. She was born to lead. She has not a fabric of terrestrial make like us. We are mere pawns in the hands of Nature. We are used and thrown in the dustbin of time. She has come down here to change this very earthly fabric.

An image fluttering on the screen of Fate,
Half-animated for a passing show,... (17)

Humans are made to dance to the tune of an invisible master like puppets whose shadows move on the screen of fate.

Or a castaway on the ocean of Desire
Flung to the eddies in a ruthless sport
And tossed along the gulfs of Circumstance,
A creature born to bend beneath the yoke,... (17)

We are like corks or castaways floating on the ocean of desire without the capacity for self-control. This is the pitiable condition of human beings. Driven by desire and the lower forces, we are tossed about from one sorrowful circumstance to another ruthlessly. We succumb to their pressures helplessly as we are yoked by karma.

A chattel and a plaything of Time's lords,
Or one more pawn who comes destined to be pushed
One slow move forward on a measureless board
In the chess-play of the earth-soul with Doom, –
Such is the human figure drawn by Time. (18)

It is so pathetic. We are like the pawns in a game of chess. Pawns move slowly step by step on the chess board; they are lowest ranking pieces, and they are the first ones to be sacrificed. Who are the players in this game? They are the earth-soul on one

side playing against Doom or Death on the other side. Evolution must go forward and make progress towards its goal. But if it was left to humanity, then it would take another millions of human births to realise it. Meanwhile there would be a tremendous loss and waste of human life and energy! For Nature, thousands of years pass in a wink; it cares little if there is a loss of time or energy. The Avatars come on the earth only to reduce that time and waste and hasten the process of evolution. Human consciousness is still at the level of the pawns in chess. It still has not yet been able to organise itself around the psychic being.

*** But

Savitri is different.

A conscious frame was here, a self-born Force. (18)

She is a self-born Force, meaning the original Force. She is a manifestation of that original Aditi, the Divine Mother. This reiterates the fact that Savitri is a conscious being with a selfborn force.

In this enigma of the dusk of God,
 This slow and strange uneasy compromise
 Of limiting Nature with a limitless Soul,
 Where all must move between an ordered Chance
 And an uncaring blind Necessity,
 Too high the fire spiritual dare not blaze. (18)

Pure independent choice is very hard to find. Our choice is dictated by circumstances. We do many things merely out of necessity or else very often we are guided by chance which Sri Aurobindo calls "ordered chance." Therefore, we are like pawns who do not have their own freedom. We are moved by chance and necessity. In such a condition of a relatively low consciousness, "Too high the fire spiritual dare not blaze". We cannot bear with high spiritual light for long, or else, any high light cannot stay long because we are unprepared for it.

If once it met the intense original Flame,
 An answering touch might shatter all measures made
 And earth sink down with the weight of the Infinite. (18)

This suggests that if mankind opens prematurely to the original divine Flame, all his limitations would be shattered and there would be such a tremendous downpour of Power and Light that we would be overwhelmed with the weight of the Infinite. Here we might ask what is meant by this "original flame". A general meaning would be divine Love. In one of her conversations, the Mother describes the relation between Light, Love and Flame. She says,

According to what he [Sri Aurobindo] 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. (*Mother's Agenda* 6: 236)

When we speak about the supreme Flame, we should remember that its origin is the supreme Love. In a way, it is a reversal of what we would think.

Love would be the original principle?

That seems to be what he is saying. But I told you, my experience [*the experience of great pulsations of Divine Love (in April, 1962)*] is that 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. (*Mother's Agenda* 6: 236)

We have a completely new dimension here. In fact, Mother was discussing this passage:

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;... (638)

She is commenting on the very first verse, "my unceasing fire", meaning herself. We saw that the flame has come originally from Love which is beyond Light and Consciousness. In the morning I was trying to reconcile this vis-à-vis Sat, Chit, Tapas and Ananda. I was wondering what can be beyond Chit-Tapas or the original Force? Here she says "the last thing one reaches is Love". It is difficult to understand. What can be beyond Sachchidananda?

Beyond Sat, Chit, Ananda is the Absolute, which we call *Tat*. Here we may make a distinction that *tat* is the unmanifested Brahman. Suddenly we see 'Love' coming in-between. In Sri Aurobindo's explanation, it is *tat* which becomes Sachchidananda, meaning that it comes into manifestation. When it starts manifesting, or "becoming" in philosophical terminology, then he brings forth the transcendental Mother. We can understand that *Tat* can become Sachchidananda only through the process of the transcendental Mother's intervention.

When Mother told the story of creation she mentioned that Brahman had brought her forth for the sake of creation. Again, in Sri Aurobindo's words, the transcendental Mother is also the womb of Sachchidananda himself. Imagine our Sweet Mother has given birth to Sachchidananda with her own Love embedded in it! She says, "One, this "one" is the "I." What I understand is that when one goes beyond the Sachchidananda, one contacts the transcendental Mother who is the bridge between the Known and the Unknown, the Manifest and the Unmanifest. She is the bridge, the Love which is higher than Chit-Tapas.

This gives us a fuller understanding of who Savitri is. The Mother has descended as Savitri. In the little book *The Mother* Sri Aurobindo says that "The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme" (CWSA 32: 14). But as the bridge between *Tat* and Sachchidananda, she is Love.

There is also a second explanation of how this *Tat* comes into manifestation. How does it unveil itself and come into the first focus of manifestation? Now we understand that the very first form of *Tat* is Sachchidananda, in which is the Mother that we recognise. But we do not recognise her when she is the bridge. At that time she has one foot in the *Tat* and the other in the manifestation as a bridge. Once it comes into formation, we recognise her as so and so and call her Divine, etc. To understand this concept we should read his essays on "Supramental Manifestation" where Sri Aurobindo has given a full picture of the manifestation.

In it, he describes how the Mother up-bears even Sachchidananda. In *The Life Divine* in the Ashram we have seen that it is she who brings *Tat* into Sachchidananda. In *Savitri* also there are plenty of verses about it. Now we can see everything falling into place. The divine Love which is "I" (the Mother) manifests as "Savitri". Savitri has brought that divine Love for humanity, she herself carries all the power of the Supreme Mother.

It is a tremendous status. A status of consciousness of which the equivalent is the Transcendental Mother. We must understand the manifestation of Savitri in that way.

If once it met the intense original Flame,

An answering touch might shatter all measures made

And earth sink down with the weight of the Infinite. (18)

Imagine if divine Love rushed down with all its power, obviously the earth would sink or break. Perhaps this is why Sri Aurobindo

had to put his body in between as a buffer to absorb the onslaught of the supramental descent. Otherwise the earth would have been devastated by the flood.

A gaol is this immense material world:

Across each road stands armed a stone-eyed Law,

At every gate the huge dim sentinels pace. (18)

Is this world an immense jail for most people? It seems to me most people are rather comfortable in this jail. It can be a jail for the sadhaka, for the aspirant's quest for a higher consciousness. It is not so for the common man. One who embarks on a spiritual path feels this bondage, the chains around his feet. Just as he wants to move forward or upward, everything wants to bind him to this earth with a "stone-eyed Law", as if forbidding him to cross the line. Sri Aurobindo has a poem entitled "A Tree" describing man as "earth-bound, heavenamorous". A part of our being is turned towards the spirit, but he says our "body and brain / hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain" (CWSA 2: 207).

Our karma maintains this "stone-eyed Law". At every gate are stationed "dim sentinels" forbidding us to go beyond.

A grey tribunal of the Ignorance,

An Inquisition of the priests of Night

In judgment sit on the adventurer soul,... (18)

These are difficulties faced by the adventurer soul. Aswapati, in his journey, had to face these tribunals of Ignorance, the priests of Night's Inquisition who were judging him and trying to restrain him from travelling further.

And the dual tables and the Karmic norm Restrain
the Titan in us and the God:

When we contact the divinity or catch a glimpse of her even briefly, we want to leap up into that experience, but very soon we are dragged backwards by the dual tables and the karmic norms. The "dual tables" are the good and bad, the dos and don'ts the

sense of morality that governs us. Even after we have come to a spiritual life, we cannot escape karma immediately. Until we are deliberately and decisively able to reach that higher level of consciousness, our karma is not erased. It can “restrain the Titan in us” – the Titan here is the tremendous vital energy which supports the seeker. This force is very necessary in the spiritual journey. This zeal in us also gets subdued by the karmic forces and thus our inner aspiration for God-realisation gets dampened by the forces of karma.

Pain with its lash, joy with its silver bribe

Guard the Wheel's circling immobility. (18)

What is this silver bridge? It refers to Judas who was tempted with silver coins to betray Christ? We often betray our godheads and Avatars for a bribe.

A bond is put on the high-climbing mind,

A seal on the too large wide-open heart;

Death stays the journeying discoverer, Life. (18)

Anyone who wants to lead a spiritual life is pulled back in many ways. Either it is the Titan's way or “a bond is put on the high climbing mind”, meaning that the mind has been created with limitations, or “a seal on the too large wide-open heart”, meaning that our heart is narrowed by emotions. These are limitations of human nature itself. It is not that we are not allowed to grow wide-hearted or adventurous in mind, but by nature we are incapacitated. This is the signature of the Inconscient on man. This is the way man has been built, such that he cannot escape the net of the Inconscient. Only very few can break through this net and reach the Infinite. Most of us are kept back in the Inconscient like birds, their wings clipped, unable to fly out into the open. We have the soul's aspiration, an intense zeal to go forward but we are not able to do so.

Thus is the throne of the Inconscient safe

While the tardy coilings of the aeons pass
 And the Animal browses in the sacred fence
 And the gold Hawk can cross the skies no more. (18)

The throne of the Inconscient is safe because no one can challenge it. Ages pass but the status of man is still so low that he is described as an "Animal", which is to say that he is still so narrow, earth-bound and incapacitated that he is no better than the animal browsing within "the sacred fence", the fence created by the Inconscient. The "gold Hawk" is man's own soul, but he is so bound that it cannot fly into the ethereal skies. This is the description of today's common man. Of course, there are some who escape this net.

Her spirit refused to hug the common soil,
 Or, finding all life's golden meanings robbed,
 Compound with earth, struck from the starry list,
 Or quench with black despair the God-given light. (19)

She does not want to come down to this level and give in to these dark forces. We see a resistance in her because she has a specific work to do. Her spirit refuses "to hug the common soil" or succumb to black despair and give up hope of transforming this world.

Accustomed to the eternal and the true,
 Her being conscious of its divine founts
 Asked not from mortal frailty pain's relief,
 Patched not with failure bargain or compromise. (19)

It is important to note here that she does not want to compromise with anything at all – neither with earth-nature or its weaknesses, nor with doom itself. She is ready to face directly all the weaknesses of the earth as well as death. Originally her nature belongs to the Supreme Nature, and is accustomed to the eternal and the true with its divine founts of bliss, consciousness and light. In comparison to that we are accustomed to a life of

compromise. She does not ask from mortal frailty any relief from pain. Unlike in the story of *Dr. Faustus*, she does not sell her soul. Even if she has to face sorrow and suffering, she will not give up.

A work she had to do, a word to speak:... (19)

There is a link between the work and the word. We shall look into it in greater detail. In 1912, the Mother had written in her diary a kind of agenda for the future. The first thing she wrote there was, the necessity of expressing the ancient wisdom in modern language. The second thing was to start an ideal collectivity, and the third concerned individuals who need to take up this new word and spread it. She wrote in detail about these new individuals who have to be egoless, etc. But it is interesting to see that right after arriving in Pondicherry in 1914, it is as if the divine Creatrix had given a kind of go-ahead to Sri Aurobindo. Soon that summer Sri Aurobindo launched the *Arya*, of which first issue came out on the 15th of August. With that she had begun the first step of her agenda which was to rewrite the ancient wisdom in modern language.

Sri Aurobindo had arrived four years earlier and he could have started this work. But it is in the right scheme of the process that the Mother had to come and make it to blossom forth. The divine Word was released with her coming. The divine Word is expressed by the new vision that Sri Aurobindo gives us through his major works first published in the *Arya*. The "Word" is the creative force which carries a vision. Sri Aurobindo did not simply present the old wisdom in modern English. He gave us the ancient wisdom recharged with the new supramental element in it. It was as if the old vision was reinterpreted in the light of what Sri Aurobindo was experiencing.

Let us understand that he did not just give us back the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita in English. He gave us a interpretation of the old truths in the light of new truths. In fact, in his

introduction to the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo specifically says that its method would be a "unification of intellectual and scientific disciple with those of intuitive experience" (CWSA 13: 98).

He could have written just *The Life Divine* and forgotten all the rest. Even then we could have had his vision. But he tried to see how his experience of the Supermind worked in different aspects of life. So he wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* on the one hand and *The Future Poetry* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* on the other. But *The Life Divine* was his *magnum opus*. *Savitri* had hardly started then.

Some of you may wonder if he had realised the Supermind as early as that. Perhaps not. But he had the first inklings of the Supermind when he was in Chandernagore for a few weeks? After earlier having *envisioned* it, he had his first contact there, if I may put it this way. He knew of the existence of the Supermind and his direction towards it was clear. Therefore, in the enlarged vision of the Supermind, he started writing the different versions of his experiences and strongly felt that this new knowledge and force could be made applicable to all major activities of human life. Basically, it is owing to this that he could call his yoga "Integral Yoga".

"Integral Yoga" is the outcome of the descent of the Supermind. He had to testify this himself. He could not leave this to the experience of anyone else. He laboured and tested everything by himself. Doctor test their medicines on different people, Sri Aurobindo tested his experience on different activities of life. This is how the multifaceted genius of Sri Aurobindo unfolds before us and we see that the very same force could be applied to all the branches of life.

In *Savitri* also he gave us an entirely new vision of life. It is this Word, this vision and inspiration, that later would guide and shape our lives. We may not be aware of the fact that a certain

philosophy and vision of life closely govern us. But his vision of life was present throughout the ages. Now we see a vision of materialistic life, in ancient times we were shown a spiritual vision, and in the Middle Ages we were given a religious one. I feel that Sri Aurobindo now has given us a new vision which is spreading in the world and preparing the human mind and adventurous souls for a new journey. This is the first work of an Avatar that is to spread the New Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have spread the new supramental consciousness. In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo mentioned that the purpose of Mother's coming is to bring down the Supermind to the earth. Once it is brought down, it will do its own work. Once this vision has been established and spread abroad, then humanity will be obliged to follow this new Truth and be guided by this Light.

This is also the work that Savitri has to discover and give to mankind. Further,

Writing the unfinished story of her soul

In thoughts and actions graved in Nature's book,... (19)

This suggests that she yet has to accomplish her main task, the conquest of Death, and she has to do that work not only in thought but in actions engraved in Nature's book. That means that these thoughts and actions of Savitri will become a part of earth-nature's laws in the future.

She accepted not to close the luminous page,

Cancel her commerce with eternity,

Or set a signature of weak assent

To the brute balance of the world's exchange. (19)

Savitri cannot relax until the great crisis is over. She has to fight till the end to establish a new law. She is in a "constant commerce with eternity." "Commerce" means give and take, an exchange with eternity. She cannot stop with that as she cannot stop her

real work, however difficult it may be. "A signature of weak assent" means submitting to the present conditions of the world. What is the condition of our world? It is a "brute balance". She does not want to sign that kind of a contract with the world; her contract is with the Eternal.

A force in her that toiled since earth was made,
 Accomplishing in life the great world-plan,
 Pursuing after death immortal aims,
 Repunged to admit frustration's barren role,
 Forfeit the meaning of her birth in Time,
 Obey the government of the casual fact
 Or yield her high destiny up to passing Chance. (19)

The lines verse indicates that the Mother has been there since the beginning of Time. As she herself has said, "Since the beginning of the earth, wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of the Consciousness, I was there" (CWM 13: 37).

Once when Sri Aurobindo was asked what he and the Mother had been doing in previous lives, his single phrase reply was "carrying on evolution" (CWSA 32: 88). So "accomplishing the great world-plan" was carrying on this evolution through all their prior births, in whatever form and manner, and wherever on this earth, with a single-most concentration. We know that in some of their previous births they were kings or queens or artists or poets, but in every form in which they came on the earth, they always pushed forward the evolution by some degree.

Let us not think that each time they brought a new rung of the evolution as they have done in this incarnation as "twin Avatars". They set forth the goal for the earth and, in a normal rhythm, to prepare the earth for the reception of this new consciousness, they return as Vibhutis over and over again, to reinforce the development of the consciousness for their ultimate goal.

Vibhutis work in close contact with mankind and they often pave the roads left behind by the Avatars, so that the truths brought down by the Avatar may not be too far from us or even incomprehensible. Vibhutis often take up one aspect of the Truth and pursue it to its perfection.

I shall give you an example. We know that Sri Aurobindo and Mother have come as "twin Avatars" especially at this time to bring down the supramental principle on earth. Before this there has always been a single Avatar. We should not expect such "twin Avatars" to descend together again and again. Now, what they have given us in the grand vision of *The Life Divine* or the supreme truth in *Savitri*, or the details of different yogas in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, may not be understood or practised by a great number of individuals now. That is quite natural as it needs an intense awareness of a deeper kind. In the near future, we might have a Vibhuti who would take up only one aspect of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, for example, one Vibhuti might work on mental purification and surrender of the mind alone, according to the vision of Sri Aurobindo. This is a relatively smaller achievement and necessary partial preparation which will gather momentum when the right time comes. Over a longer time and space the earth has to be made ready to receive the New Consciousness.

When the Avatar comes and presents his truth, he is often mocked at, ridiculed and wholly disregarded by most. It is usually only a few that he is able to touch. Belief in his work comes much later. When Sri Aurobindonians gather at one place for some reason, the importance we establish as a collective group, against all the disbelief and the contrary currents of the world forces, is that the camp-fire of his vision is lit.

I say that because I do go round a good deal in the world to participate in this new beginning. These small camp-fires will one

day become the flame-fire in the world. Therefore, against all odds, each small group must continue its work and effort in full faith. This is the work he has given us. If we have faith in his vision and not in our little capacities, it is sufficient. Remember what Mother had said regarding the criteria for joining Auroville? She said goodwill for human unity was the only prerequisite. Likewise, if we have full faith in Sri Aurobindo's vision, the necessary prerequisite is provided – all the rest will be done by them.

Here we have the same explanation that Savitri, or for us, the Mother, does not give up. She is not going to compromise with the law of the earth. She has been working out this divine plan during all her previous births.

Pursuing after death immortal aims,
Repugned to admit frustration's barren role,
Forfeit the meaning of her birth in Time,
Obey the government of the casual fact (19)

"The government of the casual fact" is that of our senses and mind. We are governed only by that and whatever we see and understand, we accept that alone as true. But Savitri does not give in to this casual fact; she is not like the common human being who is governed solely by external faculties.

12 Her single will opposed the cosmic rule

In her own self she found her high recourse;... (19)

What is this "high recourse"? The highest deity within us, the Atman, is usually the "high recourse". But Savitri found the universal Mother within herself and she also discovered that this universal Mother within her is the same consciousness that is there in evolution. We have already seen Satyavan representing it. "High recourse" is not only the Superconscient, but also the same superconscient who is weaving himself in the evolution upward from the Inconscient.

She matched with the iron law her sovereign right;... (19)

Now she became doubly reinforced so that she could match the iron law which is Death.

Her single will opposed the cosmic rule.

To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose. (19)

Her single will is that of the Supreme himself; no other will could oppose the "cosmic rule" or "to stay the wheels of Doom". Savitri has come to stay, that is, to stop, this cosmic Doom that moves on endlessly. She has come to stay its movement so that it does not move any further.

At the Unseen's knock upon her hidden gates

Her strength made greater by the lightning's touch

Awoke from slumber in her heart's recess. (19-20)

How is she able to stay the wheels of Doom? It is because she has contacted and connected with this Unseen. The strength of the Unseen, the Supreme Being has greatened her strength as if by the touch of lightning. It is interesting to note here that even in the life of an Avatar there is a period of preparation and only at a critical juncture in his life there comes the opportunity to

burst open his consciousness and then his vision and work become clear. Till that crucial moment the inner Divine waits patiently. This inner Divine is waiting in all of us to burst forth but a difference is that we are not conscious of it while the Avatar is. You will be able to observe in the life of each and every Avatar that a time comes when the dam of his consciousness bursts and they are face to face with the true divinity. Now it is the right time for Savitri to realise that powerful touch.

It bore the stroke of That which kills and saves.

Across the awful march no eye can see,

Barring its dreadful route no will can change,

She faced the engines of the universe;... (20)

These lines remind us of the description of Mahakali in Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother* where he says that Mahakali kills and destroys for the love of the humanity. It is only to save us from a greater danger that sometimes she is so ruthless and severe. This stroke mentioned here is that of Mahakali. The following lines mean that she faces all the mechanical laws of the universe and stops them.

A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels;... (20)

But at the same time she is the mother of Love. It is her heart stood in the way of the driving wheels, the march of Death and Doom.

Its giant workings paused in front of a mind,

Its stark conventions met the flame of a soul. (20)

Even an artist would try to imagine that this eternal march of nature which has been going on and on totally unchallenged since the beginning of Time is suddenly arrested as though someone has put on the brakes.

Its giant workings paused in front of a mind;... (20)

This is a mind that is one with the Supreme and her heart is the "flame of a soul". It suggests, the supreme Love of the

transcendent Mother was facing the conventions of the law of Death and karma in order to break them.

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
 That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:
 A prayer, a master act, a king idea
 Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
 Then miracle is made the common rule,
 One mighty deed can change the course of things;
 A lonely thought becomes omnipotent. (20)

Mankind may doubt if such a grandiose act can ever be taken by an individual! Doesn't it look a little too ambitious? One can argue that there have been so many rishis and saints since ages past but the condition of the world has remained quite the same. How can Savitri take up such an ambitious project upon herself? Such a doubt may certainly arise. But Sri Aurobindo explains how it is possible for a single individual to accomplish this work. It is because...

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
 That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:... (20)

The "Ineffable's timeless will", the will of the Supreme, can be contacted and moved into action. This Will is the divine Force in action and power is inherent in Force. This "timeless will" is a one-pointed Force for a specific goal or purpose. The Mother said that the divine Will has the potential to manifest and achieve. Unfortunately, for our common humanity, owing to our individual limitations, we cannot effectively contact this supreme Force. We need to be highly elevated in our consciousness for that. But the fact is that one can become a channel of that supreme Will and know what it is and what it wants. A Vibhuti or an Avatar aligns himself with the divine's Will and executes it and manifests it on earth. There are times when the Avatar fulfils his mission through the supreme Will but it may take a long time for the earth to

prepare in order to receive it. Its materialisation on the earth takes place only when there is a heightened collective aspiration for that future. We, the inhabitants of the earth, have to raise ourselves to be worthy of the new manifestation.

The Avatars too depend on the time-spirit for their mission to be fulfilled. Tomorrow's world is what Sri Aurobindo has prepared. Whether we know it or accept it matters little. The Avatar comes to push forward the present into the future. When we see Savitri or the Mother breaking age-old, fixed and rigid conventions, we have to understand that it is the underlying time-spirit that aspires to break into a new mould. In our own limited measure, we can see this spirit manifest in the youth all over the world who are demolishing the old scaffoldings to realise something new and higher. It is to prepare the world of tomorrow that they do this. It is the beginning of the subjective age which then shall lead to a spiritual age.

The subjective age will come when the individuals of society will feel uncomfortable with the outer props and take shelter in the inner and deeper recesses of existence. The whole journey from outer to inner is subjective. First it is 'I'—the ego-subject which is at the centre. Then the psychic being comes forward to replace it. It is predicted that one day Auroville will be guided by this true subjectivism of the psychic being which will be its *locus standi*. People there in the future will live life guided not by their ego's false subjectivism but by their true inner soul. When collectivities become based on this true subjective self, then the spiritual age will dawn. The Mother has come for this work and she has already inaugurated this age of subjectivism symbolically with her dream of Auroville. The spirit of the Avatar spreads far and wide only to blossom one day in time.

We can contact the "Ineffable's timeless will" through prayers.

As Sri Aurobindo says,

A prayer, a master act, a king idea
 Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
 Then miracle is made the common rule,
 One mighty deed can change the course of things;
 A lonely thought becomes omnipotent. (20)

A prayer is like an arrow shot into the Unknown, and if it is strong, pure and powerful enough by its own zeal and faith, then it is bound to reach the Supreme. A master act is an action which comes through intuition. A king idea similarly is based on a higher Truth. These can link man's strength to the "Transcendent Force". There are qualifications to this prayer and act and idea, and if one can fulfil these, then the individual can connect with the supreme Force. This is exactly what Savitri is going to do. Once we are in contact with this immovable Will then miracles become common. For the ignorant person, a miracle is beyond his comprehension. But a yogi not only understands why it happened but also how it happened. When one is no longer ignorant and can understand the underlying secrets of existence then miracles become a common affair. When one lives in contact with the higher Force, knowledge comes and one mighty deed of such an individual can change the course of things. An act done in connection and with the strength of the "transcendent Force" can change fate. One such mighty deed we all know: that of the 29th February 1956 – the descent of the Supermind. It changed the whole course of evolution.

How can a lonely thought become omnipotent? "Lonely" here does not mean "singled out" but rather a thought that is beyond human reach. It is in line with the Ineffable's timeless will, the Real-Idea which is automatically effective. A concrete example would be Sri Aurobindo's thoughts, or the supramental thought.

As thought reaches higher and higher regions and becomes part of the higher hemisphere of existence which is divine and based on oneness, it may be said to be peerless and lonely. When Sri Aurobindo discovered the supramental consciousness, he was the only one who knew anything about it. Of course, the Mother also came to realise it. This kind of uncommon thought is omnipotent. Common thoughts do not have much force. But when there is a contact with the universal level, and one is open to the higher intuition, we develop an attunement with the divine Truth. Then the universal mind sends down the necessary thoughts for the expression of our *swadharma*. Clarity of thought in the expression will then be predominant whether it be in philosophy, art, science or commerce. What is important is that this higher contact has to be made continuous and not only a brief experience.

The next verses give us a completely different view of the materialistic nature,

All now seems Nature's massed machinery;
 An endless servitude to material rule
 And long determination's rigid chain,
 Her firm and changeless habits aping Law,
 Her empire of unconscious deft device Annul
 the claim of man's free human will.

He too is a machine amid machines;... (20)

Man is a machine among machines. We have said that we have the potential to contact the Godhead above and within us. But the ordinary life is one in which "all is a massed machinery". We serve the laid down material rules and follow the rigid chains of laws and age-old habits. We are tied to this unconscious device of nature and have no true free will. We are each just a cog in the machinery of nature.

He too is a machine amid machines;

A piston brain pumps out the shapes of thought,
 A beating heart cuts out emotion's modes;
 An insentient energy fabricates a soul. (20)

This is the perspective of a materialist who does not believe in the Atman or soul. He thinks all is like a physical machine, with "a piston brain" originating the shapes of thought. He does not believe there are worlds beyond the grasp of our senses or cannot imagine there is a universal mind. He connects everything to the body's functioning – the emotions, soul, thoughts, everything is due to the chemistry of the body and there is nothing beyond. If there is a soul, he says it is a fabric of the physical energy.

Or the figure of the world reveals the signs
 Of a tied Chance repeating her old steps
 In circles around Matter's binding-posts. (20)

Although they do not have faith in God or any higher Supreme Consciousness, materialists believe that there is chance or some mechanical necessity which is guiding this world. Here Sri Aurobindo describes it as "a tied Chance is repeating her old steps / In circles". But this a paradox! If it is chance, then how can it repeat its old steps? Chance is an accidental happening, and doesn't follow an order. There is no possibility of any rhythmic repetition in the working of chance. So a repetition of old steps is quite impossible. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says that the materialists are not able to explain the existence of order in the world. Chance can never bring about this unique order that we see abundant in this universe and in Nature and its evolution.

Then there are philosophers who say that it is not chance but laws of absolute necessity which govern this universe. In answer to them, Sri Aurobindo argues that if necessity follows a certain strict rhythm or law, how come there is such an abundance of variety in the universe! If things were to follow one another, it

would be only routine and no variety would then be possible. So that argument also does not hold because truly speaking we live in a world of great multiplicity and not uniformity.

Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo describes God as being in everything, in the heavens and earth equally, in each atom of matter, and so there is a perfect order in creation. He can be in everyone and everything and still there can be a perfect variety because he is all freedom and can do whatever he wills. He is not bound by his own rules and yet he follows them according to a rhythm. What Sri Aurobindo is pointing out to the materialist is that this world is being continuously guided by a supreme consciousness, which is expressing itself; it is not a piston brain shaping thoughts or a beating heart cutting out emotions. Once we recognise that there is a supreme consciousness which is guiding the world and the individuals in it, it begins to make sense and also becomes meaningful. But for the materialist,

A random series of inept events
To which reason lends illusive sense, is here,
Or the empiric Life's instinctive search,
Or a vast ignorant mind's colossal work. (20)

Yet another theory claims that everything is only in the mind, whether we see order or disorder, harmony or disharmony. For example, if a very systematic and orderly individual goes in a room kept in disorder and without cleanliness, he will feel very uncomfortable. Now if, on the other hand, an untidy and indisciplined man who is used to disorder comes into that room, he will find nothing wrong. He will feel it is quite normal and be comfortable with it. When we are used to beauty and harmony we sense disharmony where it is lacking. It depends on the way the mind looks at it. So they say that an objective incident is not independent of the subjective individual. It changes according to the mind of each one.

But wisdom comes, and vision grows within:
 Then Nature's instrument crowns himself her king;
 He feels his witnessing self and conscious power;
 His soul steps back and sees the Light supreme. (20)

To explain these verses, I shall refer to a beautiful poem by Sri Aurobindo called "A Vision of Science", where he describes the sequence of evolution as it is emerging. First, he speaks about religion, then comes the rule of Science, and then will come the rule of spirituality. The significance here is that the scientifically objective material view leads to a greater wisdom. Once wisdom comes then vision grows. Vision changes our outlook. We begin to see things not only externally but also from within. But wisdom is gained not by acquiring the knowledge of science or technology, or by mastery and expertise of outer things. It comes when we experience the witness self, when we realise the Atman or the psychic being, and especially when we realise the Prakriti aspect together with Purusha. In the above passage from *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo uses the terms "witnessing self" and "conscious power" in the same line. One is the Purusha aspect and the other is the Prakriti aspect. Prakriti is not just the outer activities, emotions etc., it is also the Shakti or the Force behind all action as its guiding Force. If we realise only the Purusha aspect or the "witnessing self", then there is a danger of becoming an ascetic and of leaving this world. Therefore Sri Aurobindo adds "conscious Force." Normally, we understand Prakriti or Nature to be unconscious. But Sri Aurobindo stresses the Shakti aspect. On the highest level it is the supreme Mother. Actually, it is the same Mother who changes her form or appearance on different levels for her work. It is the same divine Shakti that we see as material nature around us, where the consciousness is lost, Prakriti becomes more or less mechanical in its movements, so we call it "unconscious". But by yoga sadhana, we have to realise the true Shakti behind this mechanical Prakriti. When we go for a walk and

see the tall and graceful trees, we appreciate the external beauty, the grace, the living green gloss of the outer form of the tree. But do we try to identify ourselves with the aspiration in a tree for light, for the sun? Mostly not, because this needs yoga practice and silence within to be able to feel it. We can begin to realise the conscious force of Prakriti as and when we start becoming conscious of our true Self.

While speaking about modern paintings, the Mother said that they came as a revolt against the old forms of art. We have seen that the whole world is filled with fabulous paintings of Nature, wonderful "snap shots" of life events, animals, churches, forms of nature in all the great museums. Their imitations are so perfect that true Nature and Life may feel embarrassed before them. It was like today's photography. A photograph faultlessly catches the outer, so when photography developed, these paintings were left with almost no role to play. They lost their value, so to speak. As a reaction, and also as a necessity, art had to discover a new medium and inner dimension, and that required development of the inner psychological state of the artist, of the individual. Then, of course, art went through different periods of expression. Now we have come to symbolic art in which it is not the form but the significance, the symbolism it represents which is portrayed by the artist.

In *The Renaissance in India*, when writing about Indian painting, Sri Aurobindo stressed the fact that right from the beginning it looked beyond the form. It never imitated form per se. That is why we notice tremendous difference between the art in Western museums and the art in Ajanta and Ellora caves or in the famous Indian temples. There is hardly any similarity – neither of colour, line or theme. Indian artists never went by the external form or outer body. Therefore, we find the body of the Buddha much taller and bigger than normal, with the great majesty of

enlightenment. I am referring to the famous painting of Siddhartha returning to his wife and child with a begging bowl after his enlightenment. Proportions do not matter here because the artist is not looking at the outer dimensions, he is going beyond them to bring forth something beyond the form.

Western art has been more preoccupied with the outer form. Indian art is basically an inner quest that is always looking within and beyond. Nowhere in India will we ever find a David as perfect as in Italy. We will see thousands of statues on the temple walls but never anywhere a perfection of form in marble like David's. Nor will we find anywhere in the world a fresco like Ajanta's. These are altogether different dimensions of vision – one inner, the other outer. India has always tried to see a godhead behind the outer form which is beyond the reach of the ordinary eye. Art, dance and music all include this inner dimension.

Similarly, Western music is on the mental and the vital plane – I mean the modern compositions. I was in Holland once listening to a music programme in the open. It enthused almost everyone and they broke into a massive dance. In fact, the atmosphere got so charged that if I had not had enough self-control, I would have certainly joined them. That kind of rhythm makes the body flow with the tune almost uncontrollably. Sometimes, it translates into vulgarity. Unfortunately, as India is fond of imitating everything, she has now captured this vulgarity in its fullness as we can see in many films and dance programmes. In terms of aesthetics, perhaps we are currently passing through the darkest tunnel. However, whether in the East or the West, this is the direct contribution of stark materialism which glorifies the body, the ultimate outer form we possess. That is what is considered now as the ultimate value. As the Mother says, there has to be a reversal of consciousness. We have to understand that even if the body has its own importance, it is ruled by other powers,

especially by the vital or the psychic. If music is so vital that it kicks the body, that is not music. The true purpose of music is to bring deep stillness into the being. Indian Ragas start with an *alap* which quietens the whole being as well as the outer atmosphere. If we can enter in a meditative state, we will feel a solid, concrete calm in which our inner flame does not flicker. Later when the beat and the rhythm take over we will feel the flame flicker. With vital music there is not this inner flicker, it is only the body moving with the outer rhythm.

Likewise, if in everything we can slowly turn inward and become conscious, feel the music, feel the painting, feel an identity with Nature, then we grow in consciousness. The Mother suggested that we lean against a tree and identify with the inner aspiration of the tree which is longing for the last ray of the evening sun and waiting for the morning light to appear, so that we can learn to identify with the consciousness of the tree which has a shakti, a power. That is its *rasa*, the spiritual *rasa* or substance of the tree. But it is impossible for us to be able to identify with Nature as long as we have not been able to go within and recognise our own Self. It requires a spiritual discipline to be able to go within ourselves and into other things and experience the Self that is in all. Then we can have simultaneous realisation of the witness Self and the conscious Force.

In the final line of the passage above, Sri Aurobindo says, "His soul steps back and sees the Supreme Light." This is a description of what will come in the spiritual age when mankind will live within and govern himself in the outer world in the light of a universal Cosmic Oneness.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

A Godhead stands behind the brute machine.
This truth broke in in a triumph of fire;
A victory was won for God in man,

The deity revealed its hidden face. (21)

It is interesting to see how Sri Aurobindo leads us from the materialistic view to the spiritual. Previous to this is the description of common man, and then come the deeper vision and wisdom, and now the Godhead behind the brute machine. This is how he links the truth of this Godhead, the divinity hidden within, and the outer material nature. This inner Godhead comes up suddenly and reveals herself to Savitri.

The great World-Mother now in her arose:
A living choice reversed fate's cold dead turn,
Affirmed the spirit's tread on Circumstance,
Pressed back the senseless dire revolving Wheel
And stopped the mute march of Necessity. (21)

Everything is now reversed. "Fate's cold dead turn" is arrested, which alludes to the death of Satyavan. All the negative elements are going to be reversed because the World-Mother has now taken over Savitri. Previously she had arrested the movement of the wheel of negation, now with the coming of the World-Mother, the movement of the "senseless dire revolving wheel" has been "pressed back", meaning this entire problem of falsehood and dark forces of negation and death have received a firm command from the World-Mother to stop. All these mechanical and lifeless cycles that go on and on in the name of Ignorance and Inconscience and Night are stopped by the World-Mother.

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. (21)

The closest description that comes to mind is the Mother's account of the Supermind's descent, when she smashed open the

door "denied and closed". Since the beginning of creation it is she who has been forcing all the doors to open to evolution. On February 29th 1956 she took a huge golden hammer and with one stroke, demolished the closed door so that supramental Light could flow down on earth. Here the verse refers to removing from "Death's visage its dumb absolute". But it also relates to the descent of the Supermind, because in breaking down the door which separates the supramental consciousness from earth, just as light absorbs the darkness around it, the descent of Supermind will take away the darkness of Death. With its descent, the necessity, the wheel, the circumstances, the negation, everything is stopped. With the single act of forcing the door denied it has "burst the bounds of consciousness and Time." The new consciousness of the Supermind brings for man new boundaries, new destinies and new horizons. It bursts the bounds of the present consciousness and Time. The Mother has opened the gates of Supermind and the consciousness of Time and Space have changed. This is an act that rings in consonance with what happens much later in the poem when *Savitri* battles Death.

What I wanted to bring to our study is how Cantos One and Two deal with the whole of *Savitri*. We see the flaming warrior, the World-Mother, who has forced open the door that of the Supermind, was denied and closed. Death's face is smitten and a new consciousness and time burst forth. We have the whole vision of *Savitri* in these two cantos.

13 Fulfilment of the immemorial quest

The essence of Sri Aurobindo's vision is in *Savitri*, and the Mother has said that *Savitri* is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo. We have tried to look into the basic concepts of Sri Aurobindo's vision. Therefore, in summarising our study talks, we can say that *Savitri* is the Supreme's answer to man's cosmic question about death. The problem of death has been perhaps mankind's primary question.

In the first paragraph of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says that man's immemorial quest has been for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality. Since the days of his first awakening man has pursued these four basic quests on different levels and through different means. To a certain extent man has progressed commendably in three of the areas less so in immortality. The Vedic rishis discovered the meaning of immortality by finding the Atman and declared that to be immortality. However, it is only half of the answer to the problem, because man cannot be satisfied with only the inner immortality; he seeks immortality of the body. There has been a quest to conquer death itself. It is as if to solve this problem once and for all that the "twin Avatars" incarnated now: to conclude this immemorial quest. Mankind is now on the way to immortality – not the only immortality of the Atman but of the body itself.

Just as the Vedas inaugurated the age of inner immortality, *Savitri* inaugurates the age of outer immortality. This outer immortality cannot remain isolated from the world itself as it means ultimately transforming life itself into a life divine. The first dawn of the Vedas was more on the individual level. The second dawn of *Savitri* is on the collective level. Therefore, its immense value lies in that it has given a firm assurance that earth will be divinised and transformed.

But to come to this knowledge and vision and solution, Sri Aurobindo undertook a great *tapasya*, gathering into himself the essential quest for human immortality, both inner and outer. In search of the answer, he rose as if a cone of fire in his yoga, as did Aswapati in *Savitri*. It is through Aswapati's yoga that we get a glimpse of this vision. His yoga is one of ascent, an ascent right from the gross physical body to the highest planes of Ananda. It has been the most formidable ascent from level to level, from plane to plane, into the different worlds hitherto undiscovered by mankind. Mankind had the intuition about higher planes, but the religious mentality called them "paradise" and "*swarga*" and enticed humanity to wait until leaving the earth to attain Bliss.

But Aswapati in his yoga of ascent found the essence of these worlds, their substance and quality. He entered the various worlds and met their inhabitants and after analysing and judging their beneficial and harmful influences, he found ways by which earth could be enriched by them. He travelled from level to level, from the subtle physical, to the lower vital to the higher vital, to the various mental levels. He says that on the surface, these worlds look very attractive, but somehow there were in them some innate limitations. He wanted to find out the reason of this limitation and entered deep into a region which was, as it were, the bottom of the pit, and there he met the Mother of Evil, the Mother of Ignorance. That was the source of the ignorance and perversion that we see in the world. Once he came to know this evil root cause of suffering and ignorance, he proceeded to the highest heavens. He lost his individual sense and was almost afloat in a world of bliss. He reached a high peak which was a kind of Nirvana. As he was about to enter into this void, a voice told him that this was only a beginning and that he was not here for his own salvation or Nirvana. There was something

beyond this and he must go further. Then from this Nirvana, Aswapati continued his journey and reached the overmental consciousness and from there he looked at the universe in its entirety. He saw not only its different levels, but he had a deep aspiration that the earth as it is should not be left to itself. He ascended still further, and reached the transcendental consciousness where he had the vision of the Divine Mother. Then he invoked the Divine Mother, crying 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. (345)

Such was his aspiration to the Divine Mother who, seeing Aswapati's intense aspiration, answered thus:

"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." (346).

Such was the ascent of Aswapati where by the power of his *tapasya*, he received the grace of the Divine Mother who consented to descend, to come down upon earth and bring down a branch of heaven to transplant in human soil. This branch of heaven is Savitri.

So this part was what we call "Aswapati's Yoga", which is given in about 10,000 verses in *Savitri*, describes the personal yoga of Sri Aurobindo. When he put it in *Savitri*, Aswapati's vision was Sri Aurobindo's vision itself. Afterwards comes the story of Savitri, her coming down as the daughter of Aswapati, and we see the

childhood and youth of Savitri to the time when she meets Satyavan. Even in the life of the Avatar a preparation takes place, and this preparation develops during Savitri's youth. After meeting Satyavan and learning of his impending death in twelve months, this preparation accelerates. Savitri undergoes her own Yoga which is somewhat different from that Aswapati's, and reaches a climax at the time of Satyavan's death.

Then Savitri leaps into dynamic action and she faces the dreaded God of Death. It is not at all easy to defeat Death. Death debates and challenges Savitri time and again, and his last challenge is this:

O human claimant to immortality,
 Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force, 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,... (664)

This was a remarkable challenge from Death. He tells Savitri to show him the Divine Mother's face. It is as if Ravana wanting to see the face of Rama and therefore did all his dramatic evil deeds, even though his inner aspiration was to meet Rama. Perhaps it is the same for Death. He challenges so that the Avatar may descend and in attempting to vanquish Death, reveals himself. Death was such a supreme power, that not even the cosmic mother could face him, but when he throws his final challenge the transcendental Mother comes to the front and says:

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. (666)

She is saying that the Supreme Mother has created Death only in order to goad man towards Light. After this the luminous

body of Savitri is revealed and, as stated in Sri Aurobindo's supremely beautiful verse, "His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured". (667) But he is not really destroyed, he is transformed. The dark face is pulled off and behind the dark form we find a luminous Godhead. After all, Yama the god of death he is the son of Vivaswan, the sun-god. Death is only a mask meant for man's evolution. When that mask is taken off,

A secret splendour rose revealed to sight Where
once the vast embodied Void had stood.

Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face. (679)

Ultimately, even death is transformed and perhaps it is the same thing with all of us. We all have a mask which is basically ugly because of its perversion. But if this mask can be transformed the wonderful face within can be revealed. That is what needs to come out. This is basically the story and the legend and symbolism of *Savitri* as given to us through the Yoga of Aswapati and Savitri.

Aswapati and Savitri, have two very distinct approaches in this Yoga and both of them together make up Sri Aurobindo's vision. Aswapati's yoga has the individual, universal and transcendental aspects. The ascent of Aswapati is divided into three phases of ascent – the first one is individual where he realises his own being. The second time when the voice tells him that he is not here for his own salvation he has to ascend further and suddenly he becomes the universal representative of humanity. In the third ascent he invokes the Divine Mother and receives the transcendental boon, the boon of Savitri's descent.

Savitri's Yoga too happens at three levels: the psychic transformation, the spiritual transformation, and the supramental transformation. Sri Aurobindo describes these three transformations in *The Life Divine* and we see that in Savitri also. This is precisely her work. In the first phase, Savitri enters deep within into her soul or psychic centre and her being is

transformed and organised around that centre. In the spiritual transformation, there is the descent of the Universal Mother in her. This occurs during her debate with Death. Transformation comes when she brings forth her own supramental and transcendental aspect and at that time Death is transformed. We see in Aswapati's yoga the individual, universal and transcendent aspects, and in Savitri we see the corresponding psychic, spiritual and supramental transformations. Together they make one Integral Yoga, yet there is some difference in these two aspects of the Yoga. Aswapati's yoga is primarily that of an ascent in which the witness Purusha predominates throughout as he observes the different worlds until he meets the Divine Mother. Savitri's yoga is basically the yoga of descent, it is transformative by nature. Therefore, without the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's Yoga cannot be completed. All the religions of the past with their gods and goddesses may have made god-oriented devotees, but the mission of the Mother is transformation. If we invoke the Mother then we are calling down the power to transform our nature. We can call any god or goddess to solve our petty problems. Aswapati reveals the entire cosmic world-plan and the Mother executes the dynamic transformation. Both are working together. They want to transform this earth-life into a divine life. The process of doing this can be done only through the supramental consciousness and power.

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This volume "*Savitri: Its Profound and Magnificent Significance*" (Volume One) is a collection of talks given at Van Nivas, Nainital in the years 2000-2001. It contains explanations of selected lines from cantos I & II and some relevant themes which help in understanding the entire scheme of the book.

Canto one has been dealt with from the evolutionary perspective. The second half of the book discusses two pertinent topics which connects Book One to the entire epic. These two cantos form the foundation on which this magnum opus stands.



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