ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo, the nationalist, philosopher, yogi and seer-poet of modern India declares in most unambiguous terms:

“The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.” (11.1.1429-1430)

The choice of topic is motivated by the glorious vision of Sri Aurobindo, that offers the hope of a bright new world to the modern man who seems to be caught up in a predicament: he longs for fulfilment which appears to be beyond his grasp. Sri Aurobindo visualized a brilliant future for humanity, provided it is prepared to work for it. Not content with giving a comprehensive theory, he worked out the methodology too. His literary works reflect his firm faith that man’s destiny is the ‘life divine’. He asserts that this destiny can be reached if man determines to follow the path of spirituality. The aim of the study is to arrive at an understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of man’s destiny - a vision that marks as much a social as an evolutionary breakthrough. The study also seeks to establish the contemporary relevance of Sri Aurobindo’s vision, which accommodates both ancient and modern ideals in a harmonious synthesis and points the way to a better future. An effort is made to bring out the comprehensiveness and clarity of this vision.

Savitri is an expression of the soul taking form in words, which, the Mother says, is like the prophetic story of the earth, embodying in itself, man’s future evolution and destiny. It is seen as a song of the creation from the beginning to the possible fulfilment of man’s life on earth. The study relies upon a systematic reading of the text. It is acknowledged that a thematic approach is
followed, since it is felt that comprehending *Savitri* in all its dimensions is beyond the limited scope of this study.

The aim of the study is not to judge or assess but to undertake a journey of discovery - of the truth, beauty and joy that lie hidden in the vastness of *Savitri*. It is accepted as an undeniable fact that spiritual poetry must be approached through the soul and not the intellect. However, this study is based on the premise that an objective and seemingly intellectual approach is not in exclusion of the soul, for even the seeds of the mind are in the soul, which finds expression in every good and beautiful thing that appears in the consciousness.

The introductory chapter seeks to examine the human predicament against the background of the modern civilization, which according to Sri Aurobindo, has become too big for man’s limited capacity, to utilize and manage. The chapter touches upon man’s endless quest for peace and happiness and his reluctance to accept spirituality as a possible solution since spirituality is often seen as a departure from life. The first chapter also suggests that exciting new possibilities open up for man, if he learns to look upon spirituality as a way of life rather than an uneasy compromise between spirit and life.

A brief biographical sketch of Sri Aurobindo is included, with the hope that a glimpse into his life and work will give certain valuable insights. Sri Aurobindo is seen as one who believes that all life is evolution - from the grosser to the finer, from the powerless to the powerful, from the dependent to the independent. The human being, according to him, is a supreme example of this principle of evolution. He asserts that the deliberate cultivation of the Supramental is the path that human evolution has to follow if the human destiny of divinity is to find fulfilment on this earth.
The second chapter gives an overview of the basic concepts of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. An attempt is made to prepare the ground for a better understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s concept of evolution and man’s destiny, by discussing the meaning of certain special terms and expressions. A broad outline of Savitri is also given, with the intention of highlighting the symbolic overtones that synchronize with the legend. This chapter brings out the point of view that the evolution of consciousness is the central framework for understanding Sri Aurobindo’s thought. According to him consciousness is inherent in all things, in seemingly inert matter as well as plant, animal, human and superhuman life. Consciousness liberates itself through an inner law that directs evolution. The purpose of man is to go beyond his present form of consciousness. Yoga is a means for cooperating with the cosmic evolutionary urge that is destined to take mankind ahead from the present mental stage to a higher, supra-mental stage of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo visualizes a progressive growth of the finite consciousness of man towards the eternal, and the infinite: his growth into spiritual consciousness by the development of his ordinary ignorant being into an illumined divine nature.

Savitri projects Sri Aurobindo’s integral perspective of man the individual, man in the universe and man in the process of evolution. The third chapter seeks to explore Savitri from this point of view. An attempt is made to follow the path of man’s evolution and to identify some of the significant steps in the adventurous journey of the spirit through different planes of consciousness. Savitri depicts the evolving man who ultimately finds his destiny. This chapter focuses on how this evolutionary process has been worked out by man, who is represented by Aswapati. The release of man from Ignorance, the evolution of the spiritual man and his awakening to the Supreme Reality – this culmination of Aswapati’s spiritual voyage is looked upon as a new beginning. It is pointed out that according to Sri Aurobindo the goal of all creation is not a revelation of the
spirit but an integral transformation of Nature. The chapter ends on the note that a greater destiny awaits man after his evolution into a spiritual being.

The next chapter discusses the total transformation of the human self and the evolution of the supramental being. The chapter projects Sri Aurobindo's view of man as one who possesses within him, a mass of spiritual capacity that can help him recast himself into a soul-power of the Supreme and move towards his ultimate destiny of the life divine by a progressive yogic endeavour. Sri Aurobindo identifies three phases in the process of transformation of the Spiritual Man into the Supramental Being. This process of triple transformation is discussed in some detail. It is felt that these philosophical concepts will provide a better insight into the yogic process described in Savitri.

The fourth chapter also traces the evolution of man from the spiritual being to the supramental being through the character of Savitri. While Aswapati's yoga is perceived as an ascent of his spirit to the higher planes of consciousness until he obtains Divine grace which can transform earth-life, Savitri's yoga is seen as a spiritual exploration that leads her deeper into the kingdoms within herself until she finds her Soul-Force and attains Cosmic Consciousness. In this context it is pointed out that grasping the full significance of Savitri is beyond the bounds of those uninitiated into spirituality. This study is based on the belief that one who approaches Savitri with an open mind can feel the vibrations it gives out, and catch at least a faint glimpse of the light it casts.

In the course of the study it is found that several guidelines to the spiritual seeker may be gleaned from each canto of the epic. In fact each step of yoga is described in Savitri, but it is well hidden behind the broader framework. Each line perhaps contains a wealth of knowledge but one must rise to the required level of true consciousness to discover it. A detailed discussion of the process, the
difficulties and solutions is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is felt that touching upon some of these aspects of spiritual practice in the context of Savitri’s yoga is justified because of the special significance of the character. Savitri combines in herself the dual aspects of the being – the human and the divine. Her human self undergoes experiences common to all humanity, while her inner witness-self urges her to overcome human limitations and move forward on the path of spiritual progress.

The fifth chapter discusses Savitri from the aesthetic perspective. Savitri is seen as an integral harmony of a grand spiritual vision, profound symbolic significance, great poetic appeal and splendid beauty. It is unreservedly acknowledged that the immense complexity of Savitri offers a challenge that one hesitates to take up. Yet one finds oneself drawn towards it, lured by the charm of its beauty and the force of its vision. An attempt is made to give a glimpse into the poetic appeal of Savitri with the intention that it might lead to a better appreciation and keener perception of this ‘new age epic’. It is admitted that the aesthetic perspective of Savitri can constitute a study by itself. However, some of the stylistic features are discussed with hope that it will help the student to appreciate the subtle and finer nuances of this magnificent poetic creation. This chapter reflects Sri Aurobindo’s integral vision of the Spirit’s communion with Matter. He emphasizes a perfect correspondence between form and substance. He provides an excellent illustration of this principle in Savitri. He considers technique as an indispensable tool to achieve this fine fusion of form and substance. He looks upon technique as a first step towards perfection. He uses technique as a means of expression. In Savitri one finds a perfection of rhythm and style that has come about as a spontaneous expression of his soul-vision. Savitri voices the earth’s yearning, the soul’s aspiration and the Divine word, in a manner that leaves the idea resonating in the reader’s mind long after he has read it.
The concluding chapter sums up the findings of this study. It touches upon the significant aspects of Sri Aurobindo's vision of man's destiny as reflected in Savitri. It brings out the point that spirituality, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is essentially all-inclusive, not separative; integral, not ascetic. It is concluded that Savitri is an affirmation of Sri Aurobindo's faith in man's capacity to awaken his dormant self, and make his life a channel for divine love, power and joy.

The chapter establishes the contemporary relevance of Sri Aurobindo's vision. It is believed that the spiritual approach suggested by Sri Aurobindo offers each individual, the possibility of adopting it to the extent that he can manage in his present state of evolution. It also has the scope to embrace larger parts of his life as he evolves further. It is felt that this flexibility and practical applicability of Sri Aurobindo's ideal make it a viable option for the contemporary man. However it is acknowledged that there may be some who regard Sri Aurobindo's vision of man's destiny as just a dream, a glorious dream perhaps, but still a dream. It may be pointed out that this dream or vision does not deny the material formula. It is based on the premise that the material formula is too limited and must therefore be recast in terms of higher principles, the next higher development of man. This is where the spiritual element comes in as an integrating factor, for reason also yields results that are far too limited and inadequate to provide answers to the innumerable problems of man. Sri Aurobindo believes that reason by itself cannot long maintain the human race in its progress. He recommends that we must get out of the mind-life-body formula and adopt a fresh approach. Sceptics might argue that there is nothing new about this approach. In this context it is found relevant to discuss certain differences between religious society as it exists now and a spiritual society as visualized by Sri Aurobindo.
This study emphasizes Sri Aurobindo’s faith that there will be no contradiction between matter and spirit when man’s consciousness has evolved into its highest planes and the Self is united with the cosmic Spirit. It is on this principle that a spiritual society of the future would be based. In such a society there would be no contradiction between spirituality and science. Rather, a spiritual society may evolve a higher science of man and complement it with the science of things, thereby providing a symbiosis of science, society and spirituality. Spirituality can bring in the balancing factor needed in the modern civilization that is driven by science and technology. This prospect of the harmonizing effect of spirituality on human society is perhaps what makes Sri Aurobindo’s vision of man’s destiny greatly relevant to the contemporary scenario.

Sri Aurobindo kindles a vision and initiates an action that has a bearing on the whole human situation. His Integral Yoga is said to be a comprehensive system, which aims at an integral union with the Infinite and the complete transformation of man’s life with an earth-orientation towards the Divine. Savitri is the poetic expression of his philosophy. It voices his mystic-spiritual experiences gained through yogic practice. This study seeks to reveal Sri Aurobindo as a mystic who never left his fellow beings behind. It tries to project his fervent desire to elevate man, to instil in him a sense of his own dignity, a sense of responsibility for his own destiny and the destiny of all people. It is hoped that it succeeds in bringing out the universal appeal of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic and spiritual vision. It is also expected that this study leads to a better appreciation of Sri Aurobindo as a great lover of humanity who, in his ‘bosom nursed a greater dawn’: the dawn of a ‘new age’ when truth, beauty, love, harmony and bliss shall be the hallmarks of human life on earth.