THE CONCEPT OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE AND ITS APPLICATION TO SAUJITRI
CHAPTER II

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The dictionary meanings of the term apocalyptic are: '1. of or like an apocalypse; affording a revelation or prophecy. 2. pertaining to the Apocalypse or biblical book of Revelations.' Obviously, these meanings refer us to the term apocalyptic for further elaboration. The meanings of 'apocalypse' as given in the dictionary are: '1. See Revelation of St. John the Divine. 2. any of a class of Jewish or Christian writings on divine revelation that appeared from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 350. 3. revelation; discovery; disclosure.' Even these definitions once again refer us to "Revelation of St. John." The meaning of Revelation of St. John, as given in the dictionary is: 'the last book in the New Testament; the Apocalypse.' Now, the various dictionary meanings of the term "revelation" associated with St. John are: '1. the act of revealing or disclosing; disclosure. 2. something revealed or disclosed, esp. a striking disclosure, as of something not before realized. 3. Theol. a. God's disclosure of Himself and His will to His creatures. b. an instance of such communication or disclosure. c. that which is disclosed. d. that which contains such disclosure, as the Bible'.

These dictionary meanings of the terms "apocalypse" and "apocalyptic" no doubt, provide us with some clarification but not all. Therefore, for a far more adequate and helpful elaboration of any meaningful conceptual framework of "apocalyptic literature" we have to consult the various encyclopaedias. For example, 

*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* has the following to say on the term "apocalyptic literature":

*Apocalyptic literature, literary genre that flourished from about 200 BC to about AD 200, especially in Judaism and Christianity. Written primarily to give hope to religious groups undergoing persecution or the stress of cultural upheavals, apocalypses (from the Greek *apokalypsis: "revelation") describe in cryptic language understood by believers, the sudden, dramatic intervention of God in history on behalf of the faithful elect. Accompanying or heralding God's dramatic intervention in human affairs will be cataclysmic events of cosmic proportions, such as a temporary rule of the world by Satan, signs in the heavens, persecutions, wars, famines, and plagues.

Although apocalyptic writers do examine the present, determining whether current afflictions are fulfillments of past apocalyptic prophecies, such writers generally concentrated on the future - on the future overthrow of evil, on the coming of a messianic figure, and on the establishment of the Kingdom of God and of eternal peace and the righteousness. The wicked are described as consigned to hell and righteous or elect as reigning with God or a messiah in a renewed earth or heaven.


Apocalyptic themes have been revived in modern literature and frequently appear in science fiction.
Continuing this very trend of giving a rather inclusive description of the various characteristics of "apocalyptic literature", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) includes one elaborate entry on "Apocalypse". Some portions of this article relevant to the purpose of this thesis are as follows:

APOCALYPSE. [This entry consists of three articles, an introduction to the nature of apocalypse as a literary genre and two companion articles that discuss in greater depth the apocalyptic in Judaism: Jewish Apocalypticism to the Rabbinic Period and Medieval Jewish Apocalyptic Literature.]

An Overview

*Apocalypse*, as the name of a literary genre, is derived from the *Apocalypse of John*, or *Book of Revelation*, in the New Testament. The word itself means "revelation." but it is reserved for revelations of a particular kind: mysterious revelations that are mediated or explained by a supernatural figure, usually an angel. They disclose a transcendent world of supernatural powers and an eschatological scenario that includes the judgment of the dead.

The *Book of Revelation* (about 90 CE) is the earliest that calls itself an apocalypse (Rv.1:1), and even there the word may be meant in the general sense of "revelation." The usage as a genre label became common from the second century on, and numerous Christian compositions are so titled (e.g., the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*). The title is found in some Jewish apocalypses from the late first century CE (e.g., 2 Baruch and 3 Baruch), but may have been added by later scribes. The ancient usage is not entirely reliable. The title was never added to some major apocalypses (e.g., those contained in 1 Enoch).

The Jewish Apocalypses. The genre is older than the title and is well attested in Judaism from the third century BCE on. The Jewish apocalypses are of two main types. The better known of these
might be described as historical apocalypses. They are found in the Book of Daniel (the only apocalypses in the Hebrew scriptures), 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and some sections of 1 Enoch. In these apocalypses, the revelation is given in allegorical visions, interpreted by an angel. The content is primarily historical and is given in the form of an extended prophecy ... but the emphasis is on the replacement of the present world order by one that is radically new ... These apocalypses often had their origin in a historical crisis. The Book of Daniel and some sections of 1 Enoch were written in response to the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes... 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch were written in the aftermath of the war against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem.

The second type of Jewish apocalypse is the otherworldly journey. In the earliest example of this type, the "Book of the Watchers" in 1 Enoch (third century BCE), Enoch ascends to the presence of God, following which the angels take him on a tour that ranges over the whole earth to the ends of the universe. More characteristic of this type is the ascent of the visionary through a numbered series of heavens. [See Ascension.] The standard number was seven,... More mystical in orientation, these apocalypses often include a vision of the throne of God. The eschatology of these works is focused more on personal afterlife than on cosmic transformation, but they may also predict a general judgment. 6

Origins of the Genre. The origins of this genre remain obscure. Descriptions of journeys to the heavens or the netherworld were fairly common in antiquity....7

The Genre in Christianity. The apocalyptic genre declined in Judaism after the first century CE, although heavenly ascents continued to play an important part in the Jewish mystical tradition. By contrast, the genre flourished in Christianity. The Book of Revelation in the New Testament has its closest analogies with the Book of Daniel and the historical apocalypses... apocalypses of Peter, Paul, and others proliferated into the Middle Ages. The genre was also adapted by the gnostics... The gnostic apocalypses differ from Jewish and Christian ones in their emphasis on salvation in the present through gnosis, or saving knowledge...

The mystically oriented ascent-type apocalypse continued to exist in Christianity quite apart from
gnosticism and left an imprint on world literature in Dante's *Commedia*. The historical apocalypticism of the Middle Ages was more widely influential. A crucial figure here was Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century abbot who looked for a new age of the Holy Spirit, to be ushered in by the defeat of the Antichrist. Historical apocalypticism merges easily into millenarianism, where the emphasis is less on supernatural revelation than on the coming utopian age.

**Other Usage.** Some scholars apply the terms *apocalypse* and *apocalypticism* to the study of millenarian and eschatological thought in various cultures. The modern colloquial use of the word *apocalypse* to denote a catastrophic disaster retains one motif associated with the word in antiquity, but loses the context of revelation that was decisive for the original meaning of the word.8

**Jewish Apocalypticism to the Rabbinic Period**

Although scholars have found it extremely difficult to reach consensus with regard to the question of the point of view that will render a clear and overall definition of the term *apocalypticism*, it is safe to say that the term can be applied to a group of writings that pertain to the revelations (The Greek term *apokalupsis* means "revelation") of divine cosmological and historical secrets. These writings were composed ... from the fourth century BCE onward. The history of apocalypticism can be divided into the following parts: (1) Jewish apocalypticism until the institutionalization of rabbinic Judaism (about 100 CE); (2) Jewish apocalypticism in the Mishnaic and Talmudic period until the Islamic rise and conquest of the Orient (from C.100 to 600 CE); (3) Christian and gnostic apocalypticism in the early centuries of the common era; (4) medieval Jewish and Christian apocalypticism (from the early days of Islam until the thirteenth century); and (5) apocalypticism from the thirteenth century onward. For the sake of brevity, the focus of discussion here will be on the first type of apocalypticism. It is here that the major features and characteristics of apocalypticism have been shaped, although later types of apocalypticism have developed several new qualities.
The point of view in this discussion of apocalypticism is that of scripture. Since scripture, in its variety of books and views, shaped the Jewish mind and worldview in antiquity, any religious corpus of writings that was created in subsequent generations annexed itself to scripture and sought scripturelike authority...

Apocalypticism is gradually shifting from the back-stage position it so often used to occupy in scholarship to the front of the stage. Scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of apocalypticism for a better understanding of certain concepts and religious positions maintained in the Hebrew scriptures, for a more profound evaluation of certain historical and ideological processes in the so-called intertestamental period; ... and for a deeper comprehension of the rise of Christianity and gnosticism.

Apocalypticism is first of all a series of writings bearing special literary qualities, but it is also a religious point of view. In recent years it has become customary to speak of apocalypticism in terms of a literary genre. However, curiously enough, the more attention scholars give to the subject the more difficult it becomes for them to gain an overall picture and characterization of the phenomenon... it is in the context of the scriptural world, in the widest sense of the term, that apocalypticism is best understood and most adequately evaluated... 9

Major Features of Apocalypticism. Although the scope of apocalyptic writings is not great, it is a highly complex corpus of writings with some rather idiosyncratic features. The major difficulty in any attempt to draw the features of apocalypticism is its close resemblance to scripture. But... the only way to do justice to apocalypticism is by realizing the novelty of the positions taken compared to the point of view of scripture. There are several components that are totally absent from scripture but definitely present in apocalypticism. Focusing on those components is vital for defining the origins of apocalypticism...

There are three subjects the concentration upon which here will most clearly bring out the major features of apocalypticism. These are the two concepts of vision and knowledge and the new modes of dualistic thinking that developed in the framework of apocalypticism. Although one could with equal justice refer to other components in
apocalypticism that were operative in singling it out in comparison to scripture—such as apocalyptic angelology and the periodization of history—the three components referred to above seem to be of major importance... 10

Vision and Knowledge.... Several apocalyptic writings contain descriptions of visions experienced in heaven by visionaries who have been translated up to heaven in order to gain firsthand information of the heavenly domains and of the return to earth of those visionaries in order to report their experiences. Such heavenly or otherworldly journeys are reported in the cases of the apocalyptic visionaries whose literary names are "Abraham," "Isaiah," "Zephaniah," and in the "testaments" attributed to Abraham..., Levi..., and Jacob; in the Christian apocalypses, the Revelation to John and the Apocalypse of Paul; and in several gnostic writings, such as the Paraphrase of Shem (the list is by no means exhaustive). It is important to notice in this connection that early Jewish apocalypticism does not contain visions of the underworld.

A later development of apocalypticism can be found in the heikhalot ("heavenly palaces") literature, which incorporates the writings of Jewish mystics of the Talmudic period and also contains descriptions of heavenly ascensions. The heikhalot writings are of utmost importance to the student of apocalypticism not only because they reflect the ongoing process of apocalyptic activity but also from another point of view: they contain detailed descriptions of the practices—magical (or theurgic) and ascetic—that the mystics have to apply as preparatory techniques for achieving heavenly ascents. In addition to that, these writings specify the measures one has to take during those ascensions to protect oneself from all the dangers lying in wait. The basic assumption here is that people who undergo such experiences are exposed to all kinds of physical and psychic risks, such as hostile angels, destructive (supersonic?) voices, and psychic breakdowns. It is therefore of utmost importance to be well prepared for that heavenly journey and to observe all kinds of rules and regulations in the course of it. The main idea here is that the soul of man, as well as his body (both externally and internally), has to be ritually cleansed before entering the heavenly domains...
From the religio-phenomenological point of view, the type of revelation that entails a heavenly journey is of utmost importance ... People are always interested in what the heavens, or outer space, look like, in what they contain, and in how atmospheric, astronomical, and meteorological changes come about. In the scriptural worldview man is conceived of as a remote observer of those matters. In this respect matters changed radically in the framework of apocalypticism: with ascensions in the center of its experiential core, apocalypticism revolutionized the scriptural worldview. Most heavenly ascents in apocalypticism entailed a vision of the godhead seated on his throne of glory in the heavenly throne room, surrounded by hosts of angles. These visions of the divine throne room may be classified as the mystical core of apocalypticism: they point to a new direction in the manner in which God is revealed to man. While in scripture God reveals himself in an earthly environment, ... in apocalypticism the visionary sees himself as being transferred to heaven so as to see God there. An ascent that is undertaken as a private initiative ... is principally a mystical experience. In scriptural prophecy, however, the experience of the prophet does not allow for an ascent; consequently, God is conceived as himself descending to terrestrial domains.

...Apocalypticism, rather than being a literary epigone of scriptural prophecy and wisdom literature, displays a religious temperament that not only has its own interesting literary qualities but also engenders original forms of religious experiences and thinking that result in the attainment of new modes of cognition.

The kind of knowledge displayed in apocalypticism is a total reversal of the kind of knowledge known from scripture...

Apocalypticism is almost by definition preoccupied with the revelation of secret knowledge. "Secret Knowledge" means any kind of knowledge that was not accessible to people who had previously been dependent for its acquisition on scripture and on the modes of cognition presupposed therein, including prophecy and inspired wisdom. Thus, the ultimate knowledge of nature, ... reaches its highest degree in apocalypticism when it comes in the form of either heavenly ascents or the revelation granted to visionaries through the mediation of angels.
But the knowledge of nature is not the only area in which apocalypticism was alleged to offer a more profound understanding than scripture. Another such area is the knowledge of history and the awareness of its undercurrents, which link together events from the creation of the world to the final acts of redemption so as to become a coherent whole in which the purposeful direction of God becomes manifest... Once again, the apocalyptic milieu facilitates a new kind of knowledge. That which had purposefully been hidden away in scripture, in particular in regard to the unfolding of the divine plan in history, became known through apocalyptic activity. In other words, the esoteric attitude maintained in apocalypticism toward scripture entailed an expectation to receive additional stages of revelation, that allegedly had been hidden away even from the scriptural writers themselves.

Dualism. Another major aspect of the radical break of apocalypticism with scripture is the apocalyptic concept of dualism. Briefly, good and evil as conceived of in scripture are two ways of life (Dt. 30:15). They relate to the moral choice that confronts man in his daily behaviour. In scripture, evil as such is no independent metaphysical entity. Even satan, as he is conceived of in scripture, is not the rebellious, mythical figure he becomes in apocalypticism... In apocalypticism, on the other hand, we find a clear dualistic outlook. In fact, there are two types of dualism in apocalypticism. The first is more mythological in nature and we find it, for instance, in the Enoch cycle (and most specifically in the first part of 1 Enoch), where a rebellious group of angels led by Satan challenges the supremacy of God...

Another type of dualism is found in the Qumran writings,... The theory expounded there tells of how God divided dominion over this world between the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness. The chosen Sons of Light are under the dominion of the former, while the rest of mankind, particularly the wicked Sons of Darkness, are under the rule of the latter. The role of the Angel of Darkness,... is to tempt the Sons of Darkness into wickedness and evildoing and thus bring destruction upon them. This schematic theory has a more metaphysical quality than in the case of the first type of dualism. In both cases, however, we find that the dualism maintained is of a rather moderate nature: God is in control of events. In 1 Enoch the rebellious angels are punished and kept in a
desolate place until the days of the final salvation, and in the Qumran writings the theory is that the Angel of Darkness and all of his forces will be destroyed before the eschatological salvation of the Sons of Light. This moderate type of dualism should be compared with the gnostic type of dualism,... This gnostic dualism is much more radical in its outlook than its counterparts in apocalypticism. When compared to scripture, apocalyptic dualism is much more outspoken and sharply phrased than the good-evil dichotomy in scripture.11

Medieval Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

From a literary point of view, the apocalyptic treatises are, like their themes, extravagant. They revel in fantastic descriptions of their heroes and antiheroes, richly narrating the events that they reveal, and often regard their protagonists as symbols for the cosmic forces of good and evil. Another feature of apocalyptic literature is its revelatory character; knowledge of heavenly secrets and mysteries not attainable through ordinary means are revealed,...12

These rather exhaustive extracts selected and quoted from the two encyclopaedias enable us to identify the various essential features of apocalyptic literature.

The quotation from *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* highlights the following as conceptual features of apocalyptic literature as a genre:

1. Apocalyptic literature is religious since it is 'written primarily to give hope to' 'religious groups' of 'believers' 'undergoing persecution or the stress of cultural upheavals'. It is understood by believers and accepted uncritically.
2. It effects "disclosure", "unveiling", or "uncovering" by describing 'the intervention of God in history,' 'the inbreaking of God in human affairs'. This in turn, would render apocalyptic literature not merely religious but also occult, mystical, prophetic and visionlike.

3. It employs 'cryptic language' which is nevertheless 'understood by believers'.

4. It presents 'current afflictions' but generally concentrates on 'themes such as the future overthrow of evil, the coming of messianic (salvatory) figure' 'and the establishment of the Kingdom of God and eternal peace and righteousness', 'a renewed earth or heaven'.

5. While doing so, apocalyptic writings also present 'cataclysmic events of cosmic proportions, such as a temporary rule of the world by Evil' 'and demonic spirits, signs in the heavens', etc.

6. Apocalyptic literature is symbolic, allegorical or metaphoric in its presentation of the struggle between Good and Evil. In the course of such presentation, it creates its own myths and mythology, and mythical or mythological characters identified by believers as meaningful.
7. Apocalyptic literature shows the wicked as punished and the righteous as saved and rewarded. Thereby it seeks to assert the fulfilment of preordained divine purpose or divine justice.

In the same manner, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* also emphasises numerous generic qualities of apocalyptic literature such as the following:

1. Apocalypse (as applied to the *Book of Revelation*) means in the general sense "revelation".
2. Apocalyptic literature envisages the end of the world.
3. It presents the leading characters in it as persons undertaking otherworldly journeys and ascending to the presence of God. Such ascents are 'mystically oriented'.
4. Apocalyptic literature lays 'emphasis on salvation' of humankind 'in the present through gnosis, or saving knowledge'.
5. 'The revelations' made by apocalyptic literature are 'of divine cosmological and historical significance.' Apocalypticism offers "secret knowledge" in the areas of Nature and history and its undercurrents, 'which link together events from the creation of the world to the final acts of redemption so as to become a coherent whole in which
the purposeful direction of God becomes manifest' and 'the secret ways of God and his ultimate plan with regard to the history of his people' are revealed.

6. 'Apocalypticism is best understood and most adequately evaluated' 'in the context of the scriptural world in the widest sense of the term', because it has 'close resemblance to scripture.'

7. 'Apocalyptic writings contain descriptions of visions experienced in heaven by visionaries who have been translated up to heaven in order to gain firsthand information of the heavenly domains and of the return to earth of those visionaries'.

8. Apocalyptic literature states 'that people who undergo such experiences are exposed to all kinds of physical and psychic risks, such as hostile angels, destructive (supersonic?) voices, and psychic breakdowns.' Therefore, they are 'well prepared for that heavenly journey and' 'observe all kinds of rules and regulations in the course of it. The main idea here is that the soul of man, as well as his body (both externally and internally), has to be ritually cleansed before entering the heavenly domains.' In this way, it 'is of utmost importance' that 'the type of revelation' made in apocalyptic literature 'entails a heavenly journey'.
9. The 'heavenly ascents in apocalypticism' entail 'a vision of the godhead seated on his throne of glory in the heavenly throne room'.

10. Apocalyptic literature 'displays a religious temperament that not only has its own interesting literary qualities but also engenders original forms of religious experiences and thinking that result in the attainment of new modes of cognition.'

11. Apocalyptic literature is characterised by 'the apocalyptic concept of dualism' regarding 'good and evil'.

12. This 'apocalyptic dualism is much more outspoken and sharply phrased' in apocalyptic literature 'than the good-evil' dichotomy in scripture.'

The seven characteristics emerging from the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* can be easily discerned in *Savitri*. Both as "A Legend" and "A Symbol" Sri Aurobindo's poem is 'religious'. He himself makes it obvious in "The Tale of Satyavan and Savitri" by saying that

The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the *Mahabharata* as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down
and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.13

Needless to say, both the Veda and the Mahabharata (mentioned by Sri Aurobindo) are part of the sacred writings of India. In this sense they are religious. Since Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is based on them it is, as apocalyptic literature, 'religious', 'written primarily to give hope to' 'religious groups' of 'believers' 'undergoing persecution or the stress of cultural upheavals'. As "A Talk of the Mother on Savitri" makes it abundantly clear, Sri Aurobindo's poem is meant for the 'believers' in him and his teachings as well as in the Mother and her teachings. The reading of Savitri gives to these devotees and followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother infinite 'hope', solace and succour. It is understood by them and accepted uncritically as demonstrated by the quotations furnished in Chapter I from the critical observations made by various scholars and readers of Savitri.

Secondly, as apocalyptic literature, Savitri effects "disclosure", "unveiling", or "uncovering" by
describing 'the intervention of God in history', 'the inbreaking of God in human affairs'. Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy revealing the apocalyptic nature of the whole universe by means of the primordial Sachchidananda and its involution and evolution from the Inconscient to the Superconscient is nothing but an occult, mystical, prophetic and visionlike description of 'the intervention of God in history', 'the inbreaking of God in human affairs'.

As far as the 'cryptic language' in which apocalyptic literature is written is concerned, it is the experience of numberless common readers of Savitri that its language is extremely difficult, almost beyond comprehension. Yet, it is 'understood by believers' in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their teachings.

Savitri deals with 'current afflictions' in the form of the problem of pain, suffering, misery and death inflicted on humankind as a whole. It deals with the problem of all such evil and concentrates on 'the future overthrow' of all evil in the form of pain, suffering and death when human beings consciously participate in Nature's preordained ascent from the Inconscient to the Superconscient through Matter, Life, Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind and Supermind. Sri Aurobindo has introduced the character of Savitri as 'a messianic (salvatory) figure', as an Avatar, in fact.
'the only feminine Avatar in the world' as the heroine of his epic. Departing from the original story in the Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo has conceived and introduced Savitri in his poem as the very Divine World Mother descended into earth-consciousness for the purpose of 'the future overthrow of evil' and for 'the establishment of the Kingdom God' in the form of the Divine Life or the Supramentalised Life and 'eternal peace and righteousness', an entirely 'renewed earth'.

By way of 'cataclysmic events of cosmic proportions, such as a temporary rule of the world by Evil' 'and demonic spirit, signs in the heavens', etc., Sri Aurobindo has introduced in Savitri terrifying events, scenes and characters in several Cantos, notably in Book Two, Canto VII: "The Descent Into Night" and Canto VIII: "The World of Falsehood, The Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness".

Savitri is a symbolic, allegorical and metaphoric presentation of the struggle between good and evil represented by the Inconscient (Ignorance or Avidya) and the Superconscient (Knowledge or Vidya) which forms are assumed by Sachchidananda for its delightful play (Līla) in the form of Involution-Evolution of Consciousness. In dealing with all these themes Savitri, like all apocalyptic literature, operates within the scope of its own myths and mythology and mythical and mythological
characters introduced throughout the poem. Note, for example, 'A dwarf three-bodied trinity' (Thought, Intelligence and Reason) introduced in Book Two, Canto X\textsuperscript{15}, and 'The Triple Soul-Forces' of Savitri consisting of the three Madonnas with their respective attendants ('The Mother of the seven sorrows' or 'Madonna of suffering, Mother of grief divine,' 'the Mother of Might and 'Madonna of Light, Mother of joy and peace') introduced in Book Seven, Canto IV.\textsuperscript{16}

By way of asserting the fulfilment of preordained divine purpose and divine justice, *Savitri* as apocalyptic literature introduces the idea of the salvation of the whole cosmos by means of a cosmic transformation of Inconscience into Superconscience which would establish on earth Life Divine putting an end to all pain, suffering, evil, unrighteousness and wickedness.

It needs to be noted here, however, that for the purpose of satisfying the fourth and the seventh characteristics mentioned above *Savitri* makes use of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Integral Yoga propounded systematically in his epoch-making prose work, *The Life Divine*. (A gist of this philosophical and spiritual basis of *Savitri* will be furnished in the next Chapter: "The Spiritual Basis of *Savitri* as an Indian Illustration of Apocalyptic Literature".)
Equally adequately, *Savitri* fulfils the twelve characteristic requirements of apocalyptic literature extracted from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. However, quite a few of the twelve characteristics are common to the entries in both the encyclopaedias.

For example, the first feature mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* deals with the characteristic of apocalypse as a term meaning "revelation".

The second feature mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* is similarly common: it says that apocalyptic literature envisages the end of the world. As we have just seen, *Savitri* satisfies this characteristic by introducing the idea of the transformation of the earthly life into the Life Divine thereby putting an end to the world as it is now.

The third feature of apocalyptic literature mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, however, is new. (It points out that apocalyptic literature presents persons undertaking otherworldly journeys and ascending to the presence of God.) Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* fulfils this requirement by presenting not only the central character of Savitri but also her human father, Aswapathy, as undertaking otherworldly journeys and ascending (or descending inwardly) to the presence of the Divine Mother and 'The Calm immortal' in various ways. Aswapathy, for example, undertakes heavenly journeys
first as "The Traveller of the Worlds" in the whole of Book Two, and then ascends to the presence of "The Divine Mother" in Book Three. Savitri, likewise, undertakes an inward journey into the realms of her inner being in search of her soul. She is presented as launching herself upon this inward journey in Book Seven, Canto III: "The Entry into the Inner Countries". This journey of hers concludes in Book Seven, Canto V: "The Finding of the Soul". 17 Of course, Savitri's journey into the Inner Countries of her being and the journeys Aswapathy undertakes both as the Traveller of the Worlds and as the adorer and seeker of the Divine World Mother are inward journeys and not outward ascents to heaven and to the presence of God. There is this variation in the journey motif in Savitri because, after all, it is an Indian specimen of apocalyptic literature though undoubtedly apocalyptic through and through. At the same time, however, this Indian specimen fulfils the Western requirement by introducing another type of journey in the case of Savitri which is outward. In the middle of Canto I: "Towards the Black Void" of Book Nine 18 she is presented as travelling 'in her lover's steps,... Into the perilous silences beyond', the various parts of the vast kingdom of Death. This is a clearly outward ascent and lasts until the end of Book Ten of the poem. 19 More significantly, she is presented as going through still more obviously outward ascents
into the higher and highest parts of the Realms of the Supreme (God) in Book Eleven which consists of only one canto, viz., Canto I: "The Eternal Day: The Soul's Choice and the Supreme Consummation". It is important to note that in this context she, the heroine of the apocalyptic poem, is in the very presence of God (the Supreme) in His Eternal Abode at the highest heights of the celestial worlds. Therefore, like Aswapathy's contact with the Divine Mother, Savitri's arrival in the presence of the Supreme satisfies the third characteristic regarding the otherworldly journeys mentioned in The Encyclopedia of Religion as a characteristic feature of apocalyptic literature. All the otherworldly journeys and ascents of Aswapathy and Savitri are 'mystically oriented' as required by The Encyclopedia.

The next characteristic is regarding 'emphasis on salvation of humankind in the present through gnōsis or saving knowledge'. Savitri satisfies this requirement in ample measure by emphasising the importance of the 'adventure of consciousness' to be undertaken by each and every human being in order to collaborate with Nature who is carrying on her evolutionary ascent from the Inconscient to the Supersonscient. As has been rightly pointed out, 'According to Aurobindo's theory of cosmic salvation,... enlightenment comes to man from above (thesis), while the spiritual mind (supermind) of man
strives through yogic illumination to reach upward from below (antithesis). As a result, 'a gnostic individual is created (synthesis).' The gnostic individual... eventually 'leads to the freeing of the individual from the bonds of individuality and, ... all mankind will eventually achieve moksha (liberation).22 This theory of salvation of humankind through gnosīs is elaborately expounded as a philosophical system in Sri Aurobindo's prose work, The Life Divine, no doubt. But Savitri is nothing but a supremely poetic presentation of the same spiritual system of philosophy emphasising the importance of acquisition of gnosīs or saving knowledge by means of Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on salvation by saving knowledge is further indicated in the case of Aswapathy's Yoga— "The Yoga of the King"— which includes the attainment of "The Secret Knowledge" to which the whole of Canto IV of Book One of Savitri is devoted.23 This knowledge enabled Aswapathy to develop his ordinary mental consciousness into the Supramental consciousness which endowed him with the ability to ascend to the presence of the Divine Mother in Her Heavenly Abode. Similarly, Savitri also is required to attain to Supramental gnosīs in order to be able to find out her own soul which was attended by the supreme 'being' who 'stood immortal in transience,/ Deathless dallying with momentary things,' 'Comrade of the universe, the Transcendent's ray'. The apocalyptically perfect and
effective quality of the saving knowledge acquired by Aswapathy and Savitri is convincingly brought out through Aswapathy’s appeal to the Divine Mother and through all the dialogue of Savitri with Death as well as in her glorious encounter with the Supreme.

The fifth characteristic of apocalyptic literature, according to *The Encyclopedia of Religion* stipulates that the revelations made by it should be of divine cosmological and historical significance and should offer secret knowledge in the areas of Nature and history and its undercurrents 'which link together events from the creation of the world to the final acts of redemption so as to become a coherent whole in which the purposeful direction of God becomes manifest' and 'the secret ways of God, and his ultimate plan with regard to the history of his people' are revealed. As the Mother's "Talk on Savitri" explains, this requirement is also fully satisfied by Sri Aurobindo in his poem. *Savitri* presents in a mystical manner the whole history of the universe including the history of the evolution. Encyclopedic knowledge has gone into the composition of the poem. In the result, *Savitri* has become all-inclusive. In his systematic and over-elaborate explorations of the various worlds through which Aswapathy, the Traveller of the Worlds, moves, as also in Savitri's finding of her soul and her ascent first into the kingdom of Death and then into the transcendental realms of the Supreme, Sri
Aurobindo has endowed all his apocalyptic revelations with the required 'divine cosmological and historical significance'. Almost in each one of the forty-nine cantos of his epic, he continually goes on explicating the significance of 'Nature and history and its undercurrents', 'which link together events from the creation of the world to the final acts of redemption' of the whole cosmos in the form of the Life Divine. All these accounts of Sri Aurobindo clearly 'become a coherent whole in which the purposeful direction of God becomes manifest', 'the secret ways of God and his ultimate plan with regard to the history of his people' are revealed.

In the words of the Mother (already quoted), 'Savitri... is the supreme knowledge above all human philosophies and religions. It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga, Tapasya, Sadhana everything'; 'it is of immense value—spiritual value and all other values; it is eternal in its subject, and infinite in its appeal, miraculous in its mode and power of execution;' 'it is a quest of the Infinite, The Eternal.' Others also have noted Savitri's 'close resemblance to scripture'. For example, it is rightly observed that 'Savitri realises' the 'secret truth of the Upanishads for the earth, by transforming' its heroine 'into the golden bride of God through an act of Grace.'

It 'is an epic of
affirmative spirituality with the descent of the Divine as its oft-repeated refrain. Its objective is not nirvana or kaivalya or moksha or any particular brand of mukti or bliss of Brahman: it is the fulfilment of the very heavens upon the earth. 28 In Savitri, Sri Aurobindo presents a synthetic and integral vision of the essentials of yogic and religious realisations of the world. 29 What is more, 'there is a spiritual affinity between the poetical expression of the Veda and that of Savitri ... the subject-matter of Savitri has an affinity with the subject-matter of the Veda ... The vision of Savitri is surcharged with a constant play of the light of inspiration and revelation from which the Vedic seers received their hymns'. 30 Most importantly, Sri Aurobindo himself has called attention to the close affinity between his poem and 'the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle' in his note on "The Tale of Satyavan and Savitri" which has already been quoted in full. These observations are just a few of innumerable similar observations made by many other scholars, critics, readers and admirers of Savitri. As is clear from their tone, these observations go to prove that as apocalyptic literature Savitri bears a 'close resemblance to scripture' as required by The Encyclopedia of Religion. Needless to add that the 'apocalypticism' of Savitri 'is best understood and most adequately evaluated' in the context of the scriptural world in the widest sense of
The only point to be emphasised in this context is *Savitri*'s 'close resemblance' is to the scripture and scriptural writings of India. But this is as it should be. After all, *Savitri* is an Indian specimen of apocalyptic literature. In this way, it satisfies the sixth characteristic extracted from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*.

*Savitri* fulfils quite adequately the seventh characteristic of apocalyptic writings since it contains in abundance 'descriptions of visions experienced in heaven by visionaries who have been translated up to heaven in order to gain firsthand information of the heavenly domains and of the return to earth of these visionaries'. The Aurobindonian (and therefore Indian) equivalents of such 'descriptions of visions experienced' 'by visionaries' are contained (1) in the whole of Book Two of *Savitri*; (2) in Book Three, Canto II: "The Adoration of the Divine Mother" and Canto IV: "The Vision and the Boon"; (3) in Book Four, Canto IV: "The Call to the Quest"; (4) in the first six Cantos of Book Seven; (5) in the whole of Book Nine; (6) in all the four Cantos of Book Ten; and (7) in Book Eleven. The 'descriptions of visions' presented in these parts of *Savitri* may not be those which are 'experienced in heaven' only. They include visions experienced in heaven as well as visions experienced in other realms, external like the various parts of the Kingdom of Death and the
vast Infinity of the Supreme. But they go to show that Savitri does contain 'descriptions of visions'.

Both Aswapathy and Savitri as 'people who undergo' occult and mystical 'experiences' are presented by Sri Aurobindo as persons 'exposed to all kinds of physical and psychic risks, such as hostile angels, destructive (supersonic?) voices, and psychic breakdowns.' In his account of Aswapathy's experiences as "The Traveller of the Worlds", Sri Aurobindo shows the various 'kinds of physical and psychic risks, such as hostile angels, destructive (supersonic?) voices, and psychic breakdown.' In his account of Aswapathy's experiences as "The Traveller of the Worlds" Sri Aurobindo shows the various 'kinds of physical and psychic risks' to which Aswapathy is exposed. Particularly in Canto VII: "The Descent into Night" and Canto VIII: "The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness" of Book Two Aswapathy faces 'hostile angels, destructive...voices, and psychic breakdowns.' Similarly, Savitri is exposed to 'physical and psychic risks' first in her search for her soul described in Book Seven, Canto II, Canto III, Canto IV and Canto V, and then again in all her experiences in the company of Death described in Book Nine and Book Ten as a whole. In addition to these 'physical and psychic risks'in facing 'hostile angels.' she also hears, from time to time, 'destructive (supersonic?)voices', as in Book Seven, Canto I, Canto II, Canto III and Canto VI.
But both Aswapathy and Savitri are 'well prepared' for their respective journeys and observe all kinds of rules and regulations in the course of them, so that they ultimately remain unharmed. As characters presented in apocalyptic literature they thus fulfil 'the main idea ... that the soul of man, as well as his body (both externally and internally), has to be ritually cleansed before entering the heavenly domains.' All this proves that Savitri satisfies the eighth characteristic of apocalyptic literature (emerging from the entry in The Encyclopedia of Religion) as adequately as it does the other characteristics.

The ninth characteristic stipulates that the 'heavenly ascents in apocalypticism' entail 'a vision of the godhead seated on his throne of glory in the heavenly throne room'. Savitri fulfils this requirement but in a modified form. Both Aswapathy and Savitri, as characters in apocalyptic literature, achieve, 'a vision of the godhead'. In Book Three, Canto II and Canto IV, Aswapathy is granted 'a vision of the godhead' in the form of the Divine Mother. But the godhead is not 'seated... in the heavenly throne room'. Similarly, Savitri comes face to face with the Supreme as 'the godhead' in Book Eleven: "The Book of Everlasting Day". But the Supreme, again, is not 'seated on his throne of glory in the heavenly throne room'. Savitri's 'vision of the godhead' takes place in several parts of the
Supreme's Infinity which is transcendental. In this way, the 'vision of the godhead' granted to Aswapathy and Savitri is different but only slightly. The difference does not affect the fundamental requirement regarding 'a vision of the godhead'.

Savitri can be described as pre-eminent in fulfilling the tenth requirement of apocalyptic literature for, as numerous scholars and critics have repeatedly pointed out, Savitri 'displays a religious temperament that not only has its own interesting qualities but also engenders original forms of religious experiences and thinking that result in the attainment of new modes of cognition.' Once again, the Mother's unforgettable pronouncements on Savitri in her "Talk" become relevant here. The Mother lays bare the all-inclusive nature of Savitri's religious temperament in such utterances as those quoted in Chapter I. The utterances selected from "A Talk of the Mother on Savitri" abundantly prove that as apocalyptic literature Savitri 'displays a religious temperament that not only has its own interesting literary qualities but also engenders original forms of religious experiences and thinking that result in the attainment of new modes of cognition.' The 'new modes of cognition' emerging from Savitri are as much from the spheres of 'mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of man, the history of the gods and the history of creation, as from the areas
of the latest theories of Emergent Evolution and the accounts of the origin of the universe propounded by the most modern scientists in the twentieth century. With regard to the 'interesting literary qualities', 'original forms of religious experiences and thinking' and 'new modes of cognition', it is rightly observed that:

The most outstanding power of Savitri as poetry is its power of Truth, its Light of Knowledge... for the poet does not speak from the ground of mind nor does he primarily deal with what is understood as "thought"... This is not to say that there is no thought element in Savitri only the thought is not analytical or even imaginative mental stuff but is present in compressed form,... the form of condensed light of Truth which can reveal or cast its light upon various lines or masses of thought... This concentrated expression when taken up by the mind goes on revealing and suggesting chains or lines of thought concerning not only the particular field covered by the Vision but various other fields of knowledge, sometimes covering the whole of life. The expression and the words when taken up by the mind do not end by yielding an intellectual sense only, but go on reverberating in the mind, sinking and coming to the surface with a wealth of suggestions that are like overtones in a rich musical note ...31

As apocalyptic literature characterised by 'the ... concept of dualism' regarding 'good and evil', Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is distinctly Indian. In the Veda which is simultaneously scripture and apocalyptic literature, the dualism regarding good and evil is expressed in terms of Vidya and Avidya, i.e., Knowledge (Gnosis) and Ignorance. Vidya and Avidya, however, are, in the concept of the Veda, both contradictory and complementary at one and the same time. The dualism
between them is quite pronounced as they represent respectively the Superconscient and the Inconscient. They are not merely complementary but, at the highest level, identical with each other in being manifestations of *Sachchidananda*. In its Involution-Evolution, *Sachchidananda* assumes the form of Inconscience. But it assumes this form not in order to continue as entirely contradictory to Superconscience. On the contrary, *Sachchidananda* becomes the Inconscient in order to undertake 'the adventure of consciousness' through evolution with a view to reassuming its original status of *Sachchidananda*. As repeatedly pointed out, after its involution into the Inconscient, *Sachchidananda* goes on evolving from the Inconscient (or Nescient) into the Subconscient, from the Subconscient into the Physical (Matter), from the Physical into the Vital (Life), from the Vital into the Mental (Mind) and then progressively into the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind, the Overmind and the Supermind. At this level of its evolution, *Sachchidananda* as the Inconscient fully evolves into a status capable of ultimately transforming itself back into itself. In this way, the dualism between the Inconscient and the Superconscient (the equivalents of 'evil' and 'good' in Sri Aurobindo) is quite sharp and seemingly irreconcilable until *Sachchidananda* or Divine Consciousness reaches its evolution from the Inconscient to the higher levels of
the Mind. When the evolution is complete, however, the so-called dualism between the Inconscient (evil) and the Supersonscient (good) turns into complete and integral identity of the two. This, in fact is the 'dialectics' of Sri Aurobindo's system of the Integral philosophy elaborately propounded in *The Life Divine* and apocalyptically introduced into the supremely poetic form of *Savitri*. Nevertheless, the opposition between the Inconscient and the Superconscient at the beginning of evolution satisfies the requirement regarding 'good and evil' as 'the apocalyptic concept of dualism'.

Lastly, this 'apocalyptic dualism is much more outspoken and sharply phrased' in *Savitri*, the Indian specimen of twentieth century apocalyptic literature, 'than the good-evil dichotomy in scripture', in the form of the Indian Puranas for example. This is best illustrated in Book Nine and Book Ten in which Sri Aurobindo introduces Death as an apocalyptic character trying to prevail against Savitri who stands for and demands immortality.

This twelfth characteristic of apocalyptic literature laid down in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, however, is not entirely satisfactorily fulfilled by Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. The reason for this is simple. *Savitri* is an Indian specimen of apocalyptic literature largely based on the ancient Indian apocalyptic writings.
such as the Veda and the Upanishads. As already seen, in all these examples of Indian apocalyptic literature, the concepts of Vidya and Avidya play an important role. The dichotomy or 'dualism' between evil and good prevails only until Consciousness in the form of Avidya finally succeeds in transforming itself into Vidya through the evolutionary means. Since Sri Aurobindo introduces in Savitri not only the essence of the apocalypticism of the Veda and the Upanishads but also the essence of the entire corpus of writings on Emergent Evolution produced all over the world in the twentieth century, Savitri becomes simultaneously an Indian specimen as well as a universal specimen of twentieth century apocalyptic literature. Its dialectical synthesis is that when the Divine Consciousness, Sachchidananda descends, an evolving Consciousness ascends from its Inconscient plane so as to achieve union with the descending Sachchidananda, the dualism or dichotomy between Vidya and Avidya ceases to be and the Gnostic Man emerges to bring about cosmic emancipation.

The foregoing analysis of the seven features of apocalyptic literature extracted from The New Encyclopædia Britannica as also the twelve characteristic features taken from The Encyclopedia of Religion, and their applications to Savitri as a frame of reference emphasises two important points: (1) the generic features of apocalyptic literature are, no doubt,
numerous; but (2) the one most predominant and fundamental feature is that apocalyptic literature is a "revelation", "unveiling", "disclosure", "unfolding" of the mystery and meaning of the various aspects of life both as it is at present and as it is going to be in the future. For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, it will be most fruitful and meaningful to exclusively dwell upon the characteristic of *Savitri* as apocalyptic literature unravelling the occult, mystical, spiritual as well as scientific "unveiling", "disclosure" and "revelation". Such revelations made in *Savitri* can be variously classified since this supreme poem of Sri Aurobindo is so all-inclusive that everyone of its aspects cannot be covered in any exposition, however exhaustive it tries to be. Secondly, all revelatory features of *Savitri* cannot be understood by the human mind at the present juncture. To remind ourselves once again, of the Mother's "Talk", *Savitri* is apocalyptic literature more of the future than of the present. As such, greater and more significant aspects of the epic are going to be unravelled in the future. In view of this, it is the purpose of this thesis to restrict itself to the revelatory nature of *Savitri* only in the following areas:

1. The Revelatory Nature of Human Life Recorded in *Savitri*

2. The Mystery of Man and Apocalyptic Nature of
his Being

3. The Apocalyptic Aspects of Consciousness on the Physical Plane of Existence
4. Unveiling of the Mystery of Consciousness on the Vital Plane
5. The Mental Plane of Consciousness and its Apocalyptic Qualities
6. The Hidden Meaning of Consciousness on Levels beyond the Surface Mental Plane: the Higher Mental Plane, the Illumined Mental Plane, the Plane of Intuition, the Overmental Plane and the Supramental Plane.

These aspects of *Savitri*’s apocalypticism will be with reference to certain representative passages selected from most of the forty-nine cantos of the poem. However, it shall not be exhaustive since it is impossible to examine all the 23,813 lines. Our study shall therefore, be necessarily selective. Hopefully, it will serve the purpose of illustrating the point that the explication of *Savitri* as revelation can be multifarious.

Before commencing our explication of the revelatory nature of *Savitri* with reference to the selective and limited areas mentioned above, however, we shall briefly examine “The Spiritual Basis of *Savitri* as an Indian Specimen of Apocalyptic Literature”, as already resolved by us.
Chapter Notes:


2. Ibid. p.62.

3. Ibid. p.1129.

4. Ibid.


7. Ibid. p.335.


10. Ibid. p.339.


12. Ibid. p.343.


17. Ibid. pp.488-531.

18. Ibid. pp.577.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid. p.5.
