CHAPTER I

SAVITRI IN LEGEND AND AS A SYMBOL

Introduction:

Savitri has its subtitle: 'A Legend and a Symbol'. A legend is generally understood to be a popular tale with a basis in fact but including imaginative material. Its central character, derived from traditional sources, continues to inspire succeeding generations. Savitri is a legendary character who, from times immemorial, has been adored for her virtues.

Hindu legends are generally classified into two groups - the religious philosophical allegory and the genuine secular legend. The religious allegories of medieval Hinduism have delightful qualities of strangeness and refreshment. The secular legends of India also originally appeared to be simple and beautiful. But in course of time they were distorted and disfigured by the mediocre poets of our society. The story of Savitri is one of the secular legends of India.

To some critics, Hindu legends are the lifeless patterns of moral excellence. But they really deal with
living human beings who have devoted themselves to the pursuit of some ideals. Bringing out the beauty and charm of Hindu legends Sri Aurobindo observes:

"Yet - are Rama, Sita, Savitri merely patterns of moral excellence? I who have read their tales in the swift and mighty language of Valmiki and Vyasa and thrilled with their joys and their sorrows, cannot persuade myself that it is so. Surely Savitri that strong silent heart, with her powerful and subtly-indicated personality, has both life and charm."

Unlike the legend, a symbol is used in widely different contexts. It is commonly defined as 'something that stands for something else'. But a poetic symbol communicates the cosmic significance of a particular thing. To quote Coleridge, "A symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the species in the individual or of the general in the special ... above all, by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal".

Princess Savitri, for instance, symbolises a divine Force in the cosmos that guides the course of spiritual evolution.

In English poetry we find mainly two types of symbols - the private symbols of the poets like Blake and Yeats and the widely intelligible symbols of the past poets. Savitri uses the second type of symbols. For example, the symbolic meaning of Savitri is universally intelligible. The word 'Savitri' - which is derived from the root 'su' - 'to give birth to' - is easily understood as
the Solar Power which creates and sustains the universe.

A symbol, Sri Aurobindo says, is a poetic device to describe the subtle experiences of things. For a mystic poet it is an inevitable means to represent "a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images".

The symbol of Savitri suggests the central theme of the triumph of Love over Death. The Divine Mother, Savitri reveals, incarnates Herself as Savitri to establish immortality on the earth. Here one may ask: Is immortality possible for the death-bound humanity? If it is, how can we achieve it? The Vedic sages say that though immortality has not been given to man, he has received something similar to it in terms of biological succession. A sage prays, "May I be immortal through my children."

To some Vedic Rishis, the body is mortal and the soul is immortal. If one realises one's soul, one becomes immortal. For the realisation of the soul, one has to unite oneself with 'That'. It happens only when one shakes off one's body in death and the spirit is released to go to the realm of the immortals. Death is, thus, described as a passage from mortality to immortality.
Liberation, says the Upanishad, should be the principal aim of our life. Negatively, it means the breaking of the cycle of birth and death and positively, it is the realisation of oneness with Brahman. It is, in reality, an experience of Atman by knowing which everything is known. The Upanishadic sages emphasise that liberation is possible here in this world even while being embodied. The Katha Upanishad says:

Ya ima madhyadam veda atmanam jivam antikat, isanam bhuta-bhavyasya, matato vijugupsate etad vai tat.

He who knows this Self, the experiencer as the living spirit close at hand as the lord of the past and future – one does not shrink away from Him. This, verily, is that.

The Gita teaches the principle of disinterested action that does not cause bondage. It reveals that one must perform one’s allotted duty without taking any interest in the results of one’s action. For an average man it is too difficult to act without any attachment to its fruit. So the same idea is taught by the Gita from different perspectives. For instance, those who are temperamentally active, should perform their duties for the sacrifice alone. The word sacrifice denotes not only a ritual but also an action which is done for universal welfare:

Karmanai’va hi-samsidhim asthita janakadayah lakasamgraham eva’pi sampasyan kartum arhasi.
It was even by works that Janaka and others attained to perfection. Thou shouldst do works also with a view to the maintenance of the world.

If a person is temperamentally devotional, he must surrender himself to the Supreme and take refuge only in Him:

\[ \text{sarvadharmaṁ paritaâyāya mām ekam īsānām vraja āham sarvāpāpebhya mokṣa ayisyami mā sucah.} \]

Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils.

For those in whom thinking predominates, the Gita suggests that, while doing a work, they should free themselves from the notion of agency and think that it is only 'guna' which act upon the 'guna':

\[ \text{tattvavit tu mahābāho gunakarmavibhāgyaḥ gūna gūnasu vartanta iti matvā ma sajjate.} \]

But he who knows the true character of the two distinctions (of the soul) from the modes of nature and their works, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), understanding that it is the modes which are acting on the modes, does not get attached.

Expounding the idea of 'jivanmukti' Sankara affirms that liberation consists in recognizing one's own self as non-different from Brahman. The Vaisnava Vedantins contradict
the concept of 'jivanmukti' and assert that liberation is a spiritual pilgrimage to Brahmaloka which is possible only after departing from this body. They suggest five stages in ascending order for the 'Karmamukti':

1. **Salokya - Mukti**: The soul attains the world of Lord.
2. **Sarastti - Mukti**: The soul attains the 'aisvarya' of Lord.
3. **Samipya - Mukti**: The soul attains the nearness of Lord.
4. **Sarupya - Mukti**: The soul attains the similarity with Lord.
5. **Savutva - Mukti**: The soul enters the body of Lord.

To the Mahāyāna Buddhists, liberation is the destruction of all 'imagination'. It is a kind of change which is effected in the world of thought. But the Nyāya Vaisesikas consider that liberation is the absolute freedom from all pain, 'oharamdukha dhvarmsah moksah'. They insist that one must destroy all experiences painful as well as pleasurable to achieve one's personal salvation.

Sāṅkhya-Yoga believes in the conception of both Jivamukti and Videhmukti. After the realisation of the discriminative knowledge, 'Viveka', the Puruṣa remains embodied for a while to exhaust the prārabdha Karma, just like the wheel of the potter revolves for a while due to the previous momentum, even after the potter ceases to move it. At this stage, though the Puruṣa is embodied, it loses all interest in the body. When the 'prārabdha' karmas are exhausted by experiencing them, the Puruṣa gives up the body and attains the eternal, absolute isolation, 'Kaivalyam'.
Madhva is of the opinion that liberation consists in the Jivatman's knowledge of the infinite attributes of Brahman in relation to its own finitude as well as in the dawn of the Divine Grace. For him, knowledge without the Divine Grace will not bring salvation to us. When the soul has acquired the necessary knowledge, aparokṣa jñāna, and if there is delay for the dawn of the Divine Grace, it will continue to be in the body. At this stage he is called aparokṣa jñāny. The aparokṣa jñāny is expected to teach those who are inferior to him in spiritual perfection. He acts only for the sake of 'lokasangraha'.

Vallabha suggests two kinds of 'mokṣa' suited to the devotees of two different paths. The followers of the 'maryāḍā mārga', who regard Aksara Brahman to be the highest Reality, are said to have a gradual release. After departing from the body they travel by the path of gods which leads them to Brahmaloka. But the followers of 'pusti-mārga', are supposed to have an immediate release. They are first merged in Pūrṇa Puruṣottama, Lord, out of sheer grace, brings them out, gives them divine forms and allows them to participate in His eternal sport, 'rāsa-līlā'. To take part in the 'rāsa-līlā' of the Lord is thought to be the highest stage of mokṣa.

Immortality, according to Sri Aurobindo, is one of the possible results of supramentalisation. It does not mean that
there will be an eternal or indefinite prolongation of life as it is. To live in the Divine and have the divine consciousness is itself the state of immortality. Thus, the idea of immortality in its fundamental sense does not mean merely some kind of personal survival of the bodily death. It only suggests that we are immortal by the eternity of our self-existence, without a beginning or an end, beyond the whole succession of physical births and deaths through which we pass.

II

The legend of Savitri in The Mahabharata:

In the Vana Parva of The Mahabharata, the story of Savitri is narrated in the course of seven cantos which include about three hundred and three verses.

Canto 1:

Rishi Markandeya narrated the story of Savitri to console Prince Yudhisthira who was despondent over the abduction of Draupadi. He said that King Aswapathy was pious, high-souled, a good-giver, the protector of his people and so the well-beloved. In his old age he was sorrow-striken because he had no child. He resorted to austerities with a view to getting a child. He used to eat temperately at the sixth hour daily after offering ten thousand oblations, with the Gayatri Mantra, to the
sacrificial fire. After a lapse of eighteen years the goddess Savitri was pleased with him. She appeared before him out of the sacrificial to grant a boon that he will get a child by the grace of Brahma.

Consequently, a daughter was born to Aswapathy. Since she was a gift from the goddess Savitri, the king decided to name her Savitri. In her golden colour, young Savitri looked like Laxmi, the Goddess of Beauty. When she grew to age, no princes could come forward to wed her because they were dazzled by the lustrous light of her eyes.

On a certain auspicious day, having fasted and taken her bath and offered prayers to God, Savitri approached her father. After greeting him with reverence she stood silent by his side. Her father said: 'Daughter, since none came to wed you, I request you to go and seek a husband for you'. Accordingly Savitri, escorted by the veteran ministers of her father, set out to visit the delightful asylums of the royal sages.

Canto II :-

Once, when Aswapathy was seated with Narada in the midst of his court, engaged in conversation, Savitri returned to her father's palace. Narada said: 'O King, whence does she come? Why do you not give her to a husband?'. The King directed Savitri to answer.
Savitri said: 'Dyumathaena, the king of Salwas, who had only one son, became blind. Taking advantage of his blindness his enemy attacked and deprived him of his kingdom. Thereupon he, accompanied by his wife clutching her son to her breast, went into the forest. There he adopted great vows and practised austerities. His son, born in the city, began to grow in the hermitage. That youth, fit to be my husband, I have accepted in my heart for my lord. His name is Satyavan.'

Nāradawas quick to remark that Savitri had committed a great mistake in choosing Satyavan as her husband. Enumerating the virtues of Satyavan he said: 'In energy, Satyavan is like the Sun; in wisdom he is like Brihaspati; he is brave like Indra and forgiving like the earth herself. His only defect is that he is doomed to die within a year.' Perturbed by the prophecy of Nāradā Aswapathy asked Savitri to select some one else. But Savitri remained firm in her decision and refused to follow his behest. She said: 'Money can be distributed among the brothers but once, a daughter can be given away but once, and only once can a person say, 'I give away'. Indeed with a life short or long, possessed of virtue or bereft of them, I have for once, selected my husband. Twice I shall not do. Having first settled a thing mentally, it is expressed in speech and then it is carried out into practice. Of this my mind is an example.'
On an auspicious day, Aswapathy, with his daughter, went to the asylum of Dyumathsena and proposed the marriage of Savitri with Satyavan. Dyumathsena feared if Savitri, born and brought up in the palace, could undergo the hardship of the hermitage. But when Aswapathy assured him that Savitri was able to put up with any difficulties, Dyumathsena readily gave his consent to the marriage of Savitri and Satyavan.

Soon after her marriage Savitri put off all her ornaments and clad herself in barks and clothes dyed in red. By her service and virtue, tenderness and self-denial she pleased everybody. Though she never forgot the words of Nārada, she always looked to be happy and cheerful in the company of her consort.

Having ascertained that Satyavan would die on the fourth day following, Savitri fasted observing the 'triyatri vow'. On the fated day she finished her morning rites, offered oblations to the flaming fire and greeted the brahmanas. For her welfare, they uttered an auspicious benediction. Then she, after taking the permission of her parents-in-law, accompanied Satyavan to the forest. On the way she beheld the picturesque and delightful woods inhabited by swarms of peacocks. Satyavan invited her to see the rivers
of sacred currents and the excellent trees decked with flowers. But she continued to watch her lord in all his moods. Recollecting the prophecy of Narada she considered Satyavan as already dead.

Canto V:-

In the forest Satyavan suffered from a mortal headache while he was felling the branches of a tree. Afflicted with pain he came to Savitri and said that he had no power to stand. Savitri sat on the ground placing his head upon her lap. Then she saw a person clad in red attire with a diadem on his head. She identified him as the God of Death.

Death pulled out of the body of Satyavan a person of the measure of the thumb, bound it in his noose and proceeded towards the south. When Savitri started following him, he requested her to go back and perform the funeral obsequies of her dead husband. But Savitri insisted that she would pursue her lord wherever he is taken to. Pleased with her delightful speech Death granted her the first boon that her father-in-law would be able to regain his eyesight. He also promised to restore Dyumathasena to his kingdom. He was happy to solicit a third boon when Savitri informed him that the eternal duty of the virtuous towards all living creatures is not to injure them in thought, word and deed. Savitri demanded one hundred brave sons for her father Aswaphathy. Enlightened by the moral speeches of Savitri Death granted two other boons
to her. Savitri asked for one hundred illustrious sons born through her womb and requested him to restore Satyavan to life. She said: 'Let Satyavan be restored to life. Deprived of my husband I am as one dead. Without my husband I do not wish for happiness, without my husband I do not wish to live'. In response to his fifth boon Yama released the life of Satyavan from his noose. Consequently, Satyavan returned to consciousness and rose up like one who had enjoyed a sound sleep.

Canto VI:--

Having regained his eyesight Dyumathsena could see everything. He was extremely distressed when he did not find Satyavan there. Along with his wife he went about searching in asylums, rivers and woods. Their feet were torn, cracked and wounded. The ascetics came to console them. Suvarobhas said, 'Considering the austerities, self-restraint and behaviour of his wife Savitri, there can be no doubt that Satyavan lives'. Meanwhile, Savitri and Satyavan came back to the hermitage. Savitri told them how she encountered death to save the life of her lord. A sage observed: 'O chaste lady of excellent disposition, observant of vows, by thee has been rescued the race of this foremost of Kings'.

Canto VII:--

When the night had passed away and the solar orb had risen, the ascetics, having performed their morning rites,
gathered together. Then there came a large body of people from Salwas to inform that the usurping king had been slain by his own ministers. They requested Dyumathsena to rule them once again. Dyumathsena agreed to become their king.

Having worshipped those revered ascetics and honoured by them in return, he, with his wife, son and daughter-in-law, went back to his kingdom. Markandeya concluded:

"Thus, O. son of Pritha, did Savitri raise her parents, her parents-in-law and the race of her husband from pitiable plight to high fortune. And like Savitri, Draupadi will rescue you all".9

III

Sri Aurobindo's treatment of the legend :-

As a Yogi Sri Aurobindo has a vision that Death, the extreme Power of the Inconscient that intersects the individual soul from the cosmic and transcendent Self, obstructs the emergence of what he calls the Supermind. It must, therefore, be radically transformed by the Power of Love that links us with God. This vision has perhaps inspired Sri Aurobindo to select the story of Savitri who snatches her husband from the clutches of Death by the strength of her virtues. Sri Aurobindo, however, translates this legend into a significant symbol and portrays Savitri as an incarnation of Love who confronts Death to establish immortality on the earth. His treatment of the original source is different from that of Shakespeare, for example. Unlike Shakespeare, he does not interpolate any
imaginative material to enrich the original story. He takes pains to bring out the symbolic meaning of the legend which people forgot in course of time. It is, therefore, neither wise, nor desirable to separate the symbol from the legend. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar is justified when he says: "Death, Love, Truth - Yama, Savitri and Satyavan - the symbols and the legendary characters simultaneously fill the expanse of the epic and it is not easy, it is not wise to separate the symbol from the legend". Here, an attempt is made to point out how the poet rendered the legend into a living symbol.

The character of Aswapathy is originally described in only seven verses. He is said to have resorted to austerities for the personal motive of getting a child. But in Savitri he practises Yoga to achieve his own self-perfection as well as to liberate all mankind. The legend says that Aswapathy was one of the greatest followers of Dharma, 'paramdharimikah' and Self-controlled, 'jitendriyah'. Elaborating the implications of these two epithets Sri Aurobindo describes the sadhana and siddhi of Aswapathy in about twenty three cantos. Aswapathy is praised for living according to the law of Dharma. But the question is, what is Dharma itself? To Sri Aurobindo, the real Dharma is the rule of living consciously in the Divine and acting from that consciousness. He emphasises that the followers of Dharma must be "equal in soul, abandon all desires of the fruits of work, rise above
the intellectual notions of sin and virtue, live and act in
Yoga with a mind in samadhi, firmly fixed, that is to say in
the Divine alone". The epithet 'paramadhārmika', thus,
suggests that Aswapathy might have practised the Yoga of
surrendering himself to The Divine in order that he could
attain his infinity. So Sri Aurobindo represents Aswapathy as
a liberated being:

He thought and felt in all, his gaze had power.
He communed with the Incommunicable,
Beings of a wider consciousness were his friends,
Forms of a larger subtler make drew near;
The Gods conversed with him behind Life's veil.12

Aswapathy is said to be also self-controlled, 'jitendriya'.
Certainly self-control cannot be easily acquired by a being
of finite consciousness. Even holy sages are seen, after
living a life of sadhana for a number of years, carried away
by the senses. Therefore, Lord Buddha says: If a man were
to conquer in a battle a thousand times a thousand men and
if another conquers himself, the latter is the greatest
conqueror".13 A rigorous sadhana of mind, life and body
is required for achieving perfect self-mastery. Explaining
the way of self-control, Sri Aurobindo writes:

"This cannot be done perfectly by the act of the
intelligence itself, by a merely mental self-
discipline; it can only be done by yoga with some-
thing which is higher than itself and in which calm
and self-mastery are inherent. And this Yoga can
only arrive at its success by devoting, consecrating,
by giving up the whole self to the Divine, "to me",
says Krishna, for the liberator is within us, but
it is not our mind, nor our intelligence, nor our
personal will - they are only instruments".14
Aswapathy devotes himself to the Divine to divinise his physical being. Consequently his soul is released from Ignorance and a higher Knowledge, Power and Bliss descend into his finite consciousness and raise him to the realm of infinity. Now he sees a stair of subtle worlds and decides to undertake an upward journey to explore their mysteries. He travels from the kingdom of the Subtle Matter to the plane of the Overmind. His journey resembles that of Dante through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. But unlike Dante's, Aswapathy's travel is really the yoga of ascent which is done for the descent of the Divine Grace. Prema Mandakumar aptly remarks: "The journeys of Aswapathy and Savitri, on the other hand, though resembling to some extent Dante's, are entirely new creations carrying wider significances." 15

The legend says that Aswapathy performed 'sacrifice'. The word 'sacrifice' stands for journey in the Vedic sense of the term. As Sri Aurobindo explains it:

"The image of this sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or voyage; for it travels, it ascends, it has a goal - the vastless, the true existence, the felicity and it is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal, the arduous, yet joyful road of the Truth. It has to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will... its aim is to arrive at the far-off ocean of light and infinity."16.

It is possible that Sri Aurobindo might have received an inspiration from Dante's journey, but it was really the
Vedic interpretation of the word *sacrifice* which helped him a good deal to narrate the experiences of Aswapathy in course of his travel.

In the legend Aswapathy is said to be one who worked for the universal welfare of his people, 'Sarvabhūtahiteratah'. Sri Aurobindo, too, delineates Aswapathy as the saviour of mankind. As such he approaches the Divine Mother and implores Her to descend into this dark world to break the iron law of Fate. The Divine Mother advises him to forget hostile humanity and remain content with his personal salvation:

Ask not the imperfect fruit, the partial prize.
Only one boon, to greaten thy spirit, demand,
Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire. 17.

Aswapathy replies thus:

How shall I rest content with mortal days
and the dull measure of terrestrial things,
I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face?
Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons! 18

He reiterated:

Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate! 19

His prayer is ultimately granted by the Divine Mother:

One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power. 20
The character of Aswapathy may be identified with the description of the Horse of the Worlds which occurs in the beginning of the Brhad–aranyaka Upaniṣad. It is translated into English by Dr. Radhakrishnan thus:

1. Aum, the dawn, verily, is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun the eye, the wind the breath, the open mouth the Vaisvanar fire, the year is the body of the sacrificial horse, the sky is the back, the atmosphere is the belly, the earth the hoof, the quarters the sides, the intermediate quarters the ribs, the seasons the limbs, the months and the half-months the joints, days and nights the feet, the stars the bones, the clouds the flesh, the food in the stomach is the sand, the rivers are the blood vessels, the liver and the lungs are the mountains, the herbs and the trees are the hair. The rising (sun) is the forepart, the setting (sun) the hind part, when he yawns then it lightens, when it shakes himself, it thunders, when he urinates then it rains, voice, indeed, is his voice.

2. The day, verily, arose for the horse as the vessel called mahiman appeared in front (of the horse). Its source is in the eastern sea. The night, verily, arose for the horse as the vessel called mahiman appeared behind (the horse). Its source is in the western sea. These two vessels, verily, arose on the two sides of the horse as the two sacrificial vessels. Becoming a steed he carried the gods, as 'dr stallion the Gandharvas, as a runner the demons, as a horse men. The sea, indeed, is his relative, the sea is his source. 21.

The symbolic meaning of the word 'Aswa' is to be carefully understood. In its root significance it means to exist pervading and so to possess, have, attain or enjoy.

It is the Sanskrit 'as'. It also stands for the strength, solidity, sharpness, speed as suggested by the words 'asan', 'asma' etc. Its original meaning is, therefore, pervading existence, enjoyment, strength, solidity and speed. To the
Rishis, it denoted the unknown power made up of force, speed, solidity and enjoyment that constitutes the material world.

The Horse appears as 'Haya' to the Gods, 'Aryan' to the Asuras, Vajin to the Gandharvas, 'aswa' to men. Now the question arises: Why is 'aswa' particularly for men? 'Aswa' is given to men because they are subject to the mystery of death and destruction which the Titans bear with difficulty and Gods and Gandharvas entirely overcome. Besides, it helps man to move towards Brahman and become the sons of Immortality, 'amritasya, putrāh'. Commenting on 'the Horse of the Worlds' Sri Aurobindo observes:

"The Horse of the worlds comes to us from that divine source—we appearing bound, mortal, limited are manifestations of a free and infinite reality and from that from which we were born comes friendship and assistance for that which we are, towards making us that which we shall be. From our kindred heavens the love descends always that works to raise up the lower to its brother, the higher." 22.

Like the Horse of the Worlds, Aswapathy comes down from the higher spheres of consciousness to lift ephemeral humanity to the summit of its divinity:

His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres,
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality. 23

In the legend, Savitri is said to be a gift from the goddess Savitri. But Sri Aurobindo says that the Divine Mother incarnates Herself in the form of Savitri:
A Mother wisdom works in Nature's breast
To pour delight on the heart of toil and want
And press perfection on life's stumbling powers,

It came into the sky of mortal life
Bright like the crescent horn of a gold moon
Returning in a faint illumined eve. 24

The legend does not throw light on her growth; but Sri Aurobindo narrates it in a Wordsworthian vein. Savitri grows, the poet says, imbibing the forces of Nature:

An invisible sunlight ran within her veins
And flooded her brain with heavenly brilliancies
That woke a wider sight than earth could know. 25

She endeavours to uplift her ignorant people to a divine status, but they do not respond her favourably. Frustrated by human beings she begins to live intimately in the company of the phenomena of Nature:

She joined the ardent-hued magnificent lives
Of animal and bird and flower and tree.
They answered to her with the simple heart. 26

The legend only mentions the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan in a hermitage. But Sri Aurobindo elaborates it to sing the glory of Love and suggest the virtues of Satyavan. In the epic, the meeting between Savitri and Satyavan appears to be a unique episode of spiritual love. To quote Professor V.K. Gokak: "Not only has this episode the purity of the love scenes in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Kālidāsa's Sakuntala; it is distinguished by a Platonism whose lusture makes even Shelley's splendours somewhat mawkish and immature." 27
In the forest, when Savitri happens to see Satyavan, she first does not care for him. But suddenly she recognises him as her soul – maté. Then Satyavan sees her and finds the gaze of his future in her eyes. In these two inspired beings, Love leaps down to earth but still keeps its nature of infinity:

Love is a glory from eternity's spheres. 
Abased, disfigured, mocked by baser mights 
That steal his name and shape and ecstasy, 
He is still the Godhead by which all can change. 28

Love speaks himself in many hearts and minds and living forms. But the dim corporeal mind has grown forgetful of its celestial insight. He, therefore, seizes on some sign of outward charm – a look, a touch, the meaning of a face – to guide him to heavenly truth:

Rare is the cup fit for love's nectar wine, 
As rare the vessel that can hold God's birth; 29

Satyavan first asks who she is and whence she has come. Savitri replies that she is the princess of Madra and enquires who he is. Satyavan introduces himself to Savitri as the son of Dyumathsena who was forced to live in a forest. He also informs her that in the solitude of the asylum he has cultivated an inner vision that inspires him to carve, paint and sing. His spirit is liberated as he realised the strange portions of the Divine in man. Though his body is still attached to the law of Death, he is not worried
because Savitri has come to change everything. When he appeals to her to alight from the car, Savitri speaks:

O Satyavan, I have heard thee and I know; I know that thou and only thou art he.

The poet says that their meeting is celebrated on a cosmic scale too. Fate ties a knot with morning's halo threads on the high glowing cupola of the day. They are heart-bound before the sun who is their marriage-fire. The priest wind mutters the sacred verses amid the choral whisperings of the leaves. Their marriage is really the wedding of the Purusha and the Prakriti:

The wedding of the eternal Lord and Spouse
Took place again on earth in human forms:
In a new act of the drama of the world
The united Two began a greater age.

Love has transformed the personality of Savitri so much that Narada is unable to recognise her. He asks:

Who is this that comes, the bride,
The flame-born, and round her illumined head
Pouring their lights her hymeneal pomp
Move flashing about here? From what green glimmer of glades
Retreating into dewy silences
Or half-seen Verge of waters moon-betrayed
Bringest thou this glory of enchanted eyes?

In the legendary story, the queen of Aswapathy is merely a name; but in Savitri she is portrayed as a living character. Having known the fate of her daughter she raises all those questions of life which are usually asked by the agnostics.
to prove the non-existence of God. Narada wisely answers all her doubts. This dialogue between the queen and Narada may be identified with the colloquy between Draupadi and Yudhisthira which takes place in the Vana Parva of The Mahabharata. Draupadi says that Yudhisthira is not in a position to discriminate between the right and the wrong actions because his intelligence is tarnished by attachment (moha), which is nothing but a creation of God. She speaks sarcastically:

\[
\text{namo dhatre vidhatre ca yo moham sakratustava}
\text{pitripaitamahe vrite Vodhabye tenyatha matih}
\]

Salutations to both the Creator and Destiny that have conspired along with the forefathers to cause confusion in your thinking and behaviour.\(^{33}\)

The queen of Aswaphathy also alleges that man has been given only a seeming freedom to choose, but he is deprived of an ability to make a right choice.

He walks by his own choice into Hell's trap,
This mortal creature is his own worst foe.
His science is an artificer of doom;
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;
He slays his happiness and others' good. \(^{34}\)

Draupadi is annoyed to see Yudhisthira, the follower of 'Dharma', suffering and Duryodhana, the follower of 'adharma', prospering. The queen, too, is deeply moved to imagine the future — suffering of her innocent daughter. She wants to
know the source of pain and suffering:

By what random accident or governed chance
That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,
Made destiny from an hour's emotion, came
The direr mystery of grief and pain? 35.

She surmises:

Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream, 36
Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance.

Yudhishthira warns Draupadi not to blame God stupidly:

ato mārhasi Kalyani dhātāram dharma eva ca
rajni mudhena manasa kṣeptum shankitum eva ca

Oh the auspicious one (Draupadi), you, owing to the
stupidity of your mind itching for action, are not qualified
to question the divine plan of the Creator and the ways of
Dharma. 37

Similarly, Nārada replies:

O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.

Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come. 38

He adds that pain and suffering are not to be condemned, for
they help us to march towards the Divine:
The root cause of pain and suffering is said to be Ignorance. But what is Ignorance itself? To Sri Aurobindo, Ignorance is an adversary Force which has no moorings either in Sachchidananda or in the Supermind. It appears when the Consciousness - Force, the 'chit-sakti' of Sachchidananda, is apparently absorbed in some partial movement and concentration of itself. All other planes of consciousness are put behind the concentrated form. So the concentrated form becomes ignorant of the other planes of existence. This distortion of the Consciousness - Force takes place at the stage of mind. When the Spirit makes a descent from the Supermind to mind, there emerges the principle of Ignorance. A veil existing in the Overmind severs the mind from the Supermind.

The concentration of consciousness does not stop with the mind. When the Consciousness - Force makes a descent into the vital and physical planes, it is reduced to the Inconscient. The principle of Ignorance lies between the Supreme Consciousness and the total Inconscience. Thus, Ignorance is nothing but the self limited form of the Consciousness - Force of Sachchidananda. It shall be
transformed into knowledge after the descent of the Supermind.

Savitri of the legend observes the 'triyatri Vrata' before she encounters the God of Death. She is also said to be devoted to dhyānyoga, 'dhyānyogaparāyana'. A dhyānayogi is he who realises his soul, becomes one with Brahman and enjoys the supreme Bliss. The Gītā says:

prasāntamanasaṁ jy etam yoginam sukham uttamaṁ 
apaiti santarajasam brahmabhūtaṁ akalmaśam.

For supreme happiness comes to the Yogi whose mind is peaceful, whose passions are at rest, who is stainless and has become one with God.  

The realisation of the soul is said to be a significant step in the sādhanā of a Dhyānyogi. For this purpose he has to go deep within his heart desiccating the world of senses. Savitri undertakes an inward journey in search of her secret soul. On her way she feels all statuses of the Spirit — the transcendent, the universal, the static and the other ascending planes of consciousness. But what she actually realises is her own soul. Passing through "a tunnel dug in the last rock", she arrives at a house made of flame and light. There she meets her secret soul:
Here in this chamber of flame and light they met;  
They looked upon each other, knew themselves,  
The secret deity and its human part,  
The calm immortal and the struggling soul.  
Then with a magic transformation's speed  
They rushed into each other and grew one. 41

'The tunnel dug in the last rock' symbolises the passage from  
'āgnāchakra' to the space within the heart where the soul  
is supposed to reside in the human body. Professor V.K.  
Gokak construes this phrase thus:

"Now the tunnel dug in the last rock is the passage  
from 'agnāchakra' or the centre between the eyebrows  
in Savitri's body to the space between the seventh  
and eleventh rings on the spinal cord or the space  
beneath the heart, where the soul is supposed to  
reside in the human body. Having perceived all  
other statuses of the Divine through vision Savitri  
comes here to realise and to be one with the secret  
soul in its own cavern". 42.

Savitri, in reality, identifying the universal Self and  
becomes a Jivanmukta:

She was no more herself but all the world.  
Out of the infinitudes all came to her,  
Into the infinitudes sentient she spread,  
Infinity was her own natural home. 43.

It appears in the legend that Savitri impresses Death  
with her virtues and Death obliges her granting five boons.  
But in the epic, she defies Death, wrestles with him and  
defeats him by the strength of her divinity:

Eternity looked into the eyes of Death, 44  
And Darkness saw God's divine Reality.
A Voice from infinity declares Death as the creator of the world:

O Void, that makest room for all to be,
Hunger that gnaweth at the universe
Consuming the cold remnants of the suns,
And eateth the whole world with thy jaws of fire.
Waster of the energy that has made the stars,
Inconscience, Carrier of the seeds of thought,
Nescience in which All-knowledge sleeps entombed.

This description of Death obviously derives from Brhadāranyaka Upanishad where it is represented as the creator:

1. There was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning. By death indeed was this covered, or by hunger, for hunger is death. He created the mind, thinking 'let me have a self (mind). Then he moved about worshipping. From him, thus worshipping water was produced. 'Verily', he thought, 'while I was worshipping water appeared, therefore water is called arka (fire). Water surely comes to one who thus knows the reason why water is called arka (fire).'

2. Water, verily, is arka. That which was the froth of the water became solidified; that became the earth. On it he rested. From him thus rested and heated (from the practice of austerity) his essence of brightness came forth (as) fire.

Unlike in the legend, Savitri and Satyavan, after the conquest of Death, rise to the realm of the Everlasting Day. This episode enables the poet to emphasize that a liberated being must not renounce the world nor aspire to enter into Heaven. He must prefer the earth to work for universal welfare. Savitri is asked by the Voice of the Divine to enter into the transcendental fields of light:
Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home.
Here in the playground of the eternal Child. 47

But she refused:

I climb not to thy everlasting Day
Even as I have shunned the eternal Night. 48

She asked for Peace, Oneness, Energy and Joy of the
Divine for earthly creatures. Her prayer is granted by the
Divine because she has chosen execute His supreme Will of
raising earthly beings to the divine height.

This episode also provides the poet with an opportunity
to prophesy that in the hour of God the Mighty Mother will
incarnate to divinise the earthly life:

But when the hour of the Divine draws near,
The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time
and God be born into the human clay
In forms made ready by your human lives.
Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men. 49

Rishi Markandeya stresses that he who listens to the story of
Savitri will suffer no pain and prosper in his life.
Similarly, it may be said that he who reads Savitri sincerely
will have concrete spiritual experiences of the higher
consciousness. The poet reveals that Savitri, the person as
well as the poem, will lead one to God:

O Savitri, thou art my spirit's power,
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God. 50
The legend glorifies Savitri as an illustrious 'pativrata'.
The 'pativrata' is a woman who adores the portion of divinity in her husband. She shares all the experiences of her lord in the life. The following verse defines a 'pativrata' thus:

र्तार्तेन सूधिष्ठेः प्रोसिते मलिनाः क्रिषा,
मर्तिन स्रीयेत् यो पत्यो शात्री नं ज्योत्य पाधरताः

That woman, who feels unhappiness when her husband is distressed, feels happy when he is glad, becomes unkempt and lean when he is abroad and dies when he is dead, is known as pativrata.

In the epic, Savitri is sketched not only as an incarnation but also as a typical Hindu pativrata. She adores her husband as lord and surrenders herself to his will:

She bowed and touched his feet with worshipping hands;  
She made her life his world for him to tread  
And made her body the room of his delight;  
Her beating heart a remembrancer of bliss.

A pativrata seems to have a great spiritual power of transformation and destruction. It is a well-known story that Anusuya, the wife of Rishi Atri, could transform Brahma, Vismu and Maheshinto innocent infants and Damayanti could burn into ashes the excited butcher by the power of devotion to their husbands. The epic also reveals that Savitri will destroy the evil forces of Ignorance and transform the
earth-consciousness into the child-like consciousness of the
Supreme:

O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light
And bring down God into the lives of men;
Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,
My garden of life to plant a seed divine. 53.

IV

Savitri in the Veda:—

Like the Vedas, Savitri deals with the struggle between
the forces of Light and Darkness and shows the victory of
Truth over Falsehood. Its central character — Savitri
resembles Aditi who is known as the Mother of the Devas.
Aditi, in fact, stands for the pure consciousness of infinite
existence. She remains eternally present in all the three
levels of consciousness. Transcendent, she gives birth to
Bhūkṣuṇas who symbolise the discriminating and distributing
Thought of the Divine Mind. In the cosmos, she is the
undivided infinite unity of things, free from the duality.
In the lower being, she is manifested as the earth-principle.
In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “Aditi is the supreme or
infinite Consciousness, mother of the gods ... In a more
general aspect she is the source of all the cosmic forms of
consciousness from the physical upwards”. 54

Like Aditi, Savitri also is always present on the three
levels of consciousness. Transcendent, she stands above the
Worlds and links the creation to the Supreme:

Above the stretch and blaze of cosmic sight,
Above the silence of the wordless thought,
Formless creator of the immortal forms,
Nameless, investiture with the name divine,
Transcending Time's hours, transcending timelessness
The Mighty Mother sits in luscent calm
And holds the eternal Child upon her knees
Attending the day when he shall speak to Fate.

Universal, she creates the earthly beings and supports and
conducts them to spiritual way:

A Spirit who is one and immeasurable,
The one mystic infinite person of his world
Multiplies his myriad personality
On all his bodies seals his divinity's stamp
And sits in each immortal and unique.

Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways
of her existence and mediates between the human personality
and the divine Nature:

She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God,
She is the force, the inevitable word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent.

Savitri has a close affinity with the Vedic god Savitr.
Savitri is preeminently a golden deity. He has golden eyes,
golden hands, golden tongue etc:

Rise up, O Savitri, whose hands are golden
and hear this man while sacrifice is offered...

Savitri, too, has golden limbs:
Descend, O Happiness, with thy moon - gold feet,
Enrich earth's floors upon whose sleep we lie. 59

Savitri illumines air, heaven, earth and conveys the
departed soul where the righteous dwell. He offers
immortality to gods and men and stimulates our intellect.
The Gayatri Mantra reveals: "We contemplate that adorable
glory of Savitri, that is in the earth, the sky, the heavens.
May he stimulate our intellect". 60

The epic also says that Savitri will bring Immortality,
Truth, Power, Bliss, Goodness to men. She is not only to
stimulate our intellect but also make us experience the joy
of the Divine which pervades the universe.

Men seeing thee shall feel my hands of joy
In sorrow's pangs feel steps of the World's delight,
Their life experience its tumultuous shock
In the mutual craving of two opposites. 61.

Savitri seems to be closely related to the Surya Savitri
of the Veda. "Surya Savitri", says Sri Aurobindo, "stands
between the Infinite and the created worlds within us and
without". 62 Savitri, a spiritual Force, also works between
the two extremes of "the spirit's night and day":

You are my Force at work to uplift earth's fate,
My self that moves up the immense incline
Between the extremes of the spirit's night and day. 63
Toru Dutt's Version of the Legend:—

Toru Dutt chooses the story of Savitri to sing because Savitri had been the child of a society that valued the freedom of women:

In those far-off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed semanoe. 64.

Sri Aurobindo is not primarily concerned with the social freedom of women. To him, a woman is a 'Shakti' or the creative power of the Supreme. So he represents Savitri as an incarnation:

"Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother. This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to "hew the ways of Immortality". 65

Toru Dutt endorses Sankara's belief that this world is an illusion:

I know that in this transient world
All is delusion - nothing true;
I know its show are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joy, be magic bound
In Maya's network frail and fair
Is not my aim! The gladsome sound
Of husband, brother, friend, is air
To such as know that all must die,
And that at last the time must come
When eye shall speak no more to eye
And love cry - lo, this is my sum. 66
Unlike Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo explains this world as the veritable expression of the Spirit:

The world was a conception and a birth
Of Spirit in Matter into living forms,
And Nature bore the Immortal in her womb,
That she might climb through him to eternal life.

Toru Dutt presents the fatalis\itiy view of Indian society. She believes that imminent fate cannot be challenged:

I know in such a world as this
No one can gain his heart's desire,
Or pass the years in perfect bliss;
Like gold we must be tried by fire;
And each shall suffer as he acts
And thinker - his own sad burden bear!
No friends can help, - his sins are facts
That nothing can annul or square,
And he must bear their consequence.
Can I my husband save by rites?
Ah, no, that were a vain pretense,
Justice eternal strict requires.

Sri Aurobindo upholds that Fate is not the ultimate reality of life. It can be altered or cancelled by the strength of our spirit:

Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny's book.
Man can accept his fate, he can refuse;
Even if the One maintains the unseen decree
He writes thy refusal in thy credit page.

Toru Dutt's poem is written in the ballad meter; while Sri Aurobindo uses the blank verse of iambic pentameter. Thus, Toru Dutt and Sri Aurobindo represent two different views of human life in living poetry.
Symbolism of Savitri:

Savitri is a metaphysical poem cast in an epic mould. It translates the philosophy of The Life Divine into poetic terms so completely that it can be placed in the direct tradition of Indian classical poetry from the Vedas and Upanisads downwards. Sri Aurobindo uses the legend as a symbol which involves the whole human species in the emergent evolution. As a symbol Savitri traces the evolution of the Spirit from the Inconscient Matter to the superconscient Divine.

On the metaphysical level, Savitri indicates how the blind forces of Nescience would be transmuted into the higher Nature of the Gnostic Being when the Supermind is made to descend into the lower nature. Further, on a higher metaphysical plane, it suggests the distinct Aurobindonian thesis that the individual escape from the world is not the ultimate goal of Yoga. There should, in fact, be a return to the field of action after the fullest realisation of the Life Divine. Savitri refuses to enter into the realm of the Everlasting Day and returns to the earth to labour for the liberation of mankind.

The principal symbols of the epic are Aswapathy, Yama, Satyavan and Savitri. Aswapathy is said to be the Lord of
Life, ‘aswa’ (horse) being the Vedic symbol of life-energy. His character suggests that one has to control his physical, vital and mental energy to ascend to the higher realms of consciousness. Yama, according to the Veda, is "the binder, "restrainer". Restraining or binding is the feature of lower nature. Vital consciousness is restricted and so it becomes Ignorance. Death is, in reality, the form of Ignorance that separates us from Knowledge. Satyavan is the seeker of Truth, Truth being God-Knowledge. He is an aspirant soul that passes through the throes of becoming. His death signifies that the aspirant soul, in the pursuit of the Supramental Gnosis, crosses through the veil of Death. Savitri, the Divine Grace, has to come to his rescue. Savitri is the mystic power of the Word, the mantra which is connected with Gayatri. She is, in the Aurobindonian scheme of metaphysics, the descending principle of the Divine Grace that alone can transform our physical nature into the gnostic consciousness. Commenting on the symbols of his epic, Sri Aurobindo writes:

"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; Aswapathy, the lord of horse, her human father, is the lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of the spiritual endeavor that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumathena, Lord of the shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the divine Mind, here fallen blind losing its celestial kingdom of glory."
"The death of Satyavan", says the Mother, "becomes the symbol of the earth's creation, of its fate and through Savitri, of its liberation. She faces the doom in order to give the solution." 71

Savitri is the Avatar (incarnation) of the Divine Mother. She struggles, not to fulfil a personal need or to resist a personal danger, but to hasten the cosmic evolution. She is also the Power of Love that has come down to conquer Death:

For this she had accepted mortal breath;
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. 72
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