CHAPTER: III

THE PRINCIPAL MOTIFS OF SAVITRI

I

The Descent of the Absolute:

Sri Aurobindo regards the Absolute to be the fundamental Reality of our existence. In itself, the Absolute is undeterminable and unknowable by our finite mind, but it can be identified by our immortal soul. In moments of intuition it manifests itself to our consciousness as Sachchidananda. In the conception of Sachchidananda we find three terms, namely, Sat or Existence, Chit or Consciousness and Ananda or Bliss.

It is, however, to be noted that Sachchinanda is an indivisible Reality. What we call Existence is also Consciousness and what is Consciousness is also Bliss. The Consciousness of the Absolute is realised as Power or Force. Here an attempt is made to study the Absolute in its aspects of Existence – Consciousness – Force – Bliss.

Sat or Existence:

Existence is the omnipresent Reality. It is pure, indefinable, infinite and absolute. Philosophers like
Heraclitus, Buddha and Bergson consider Becoming as the supreme Reality; but the Vedantic philosophy reveals Becoming as the movement of Being or pure Existence. Sri Aurobindo, though he does not regard Becoming as unreal, perceives Being or Existence as the substratum of Becoming.

"The very conception of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose and portrays itself as an activity of some existence; the very idea of energy in action carries with it the idea of energy abstaining from action; and an absolute energy not in action is simply and purely absolute existence." ¹

Iṣṭa-Upaniṣad affirms:

"It moves and It moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and it is also outside all this".²

Existence is said to be essentially indeterminate. Svetāsvatara-Upaniṣad calls It, "without parts, without activity, tranquil, irreproachable, without blemish, niskalam niskriyam śāntam nirvadyam nirādhasam".³ The Ṛgveda describes it as "unmanifest, unthinkable and unchanging, 'avayakto 'yam acintyo 'yam avikākyo 'yam ucyate".⁴ Existence is thus without any quality, quantity and form.

Here it is to be understood that Existence is undeterminable by any determinants; but It is capable of self-determination. The undeterminability of the Existence
is natural and necessary. Without being undeterminable, it would not have been able to create infinite self-determinations out of its being. The indeterminate Existence can manifest manifold determinations because it cannot be identified with them.

In Indian philosophy there are two aspects of the supreme Reality — the indeterminate or Nirguna and the determinate or Saguna. To Sankara, Nirguna Brahman is the absolute Reality and Saguna Brahman has merely a relative existence. But Ramanuja believes that the Absolute is determinate or Saguna. It is inclusive of all determinations. Sri Aurobindo thinks that the indeterminato and the determinate, the Nirguna and the Saguna, the impersonal and the personal are the fundamental aspects of the Absolute and so both of them are real in their own ways.

Consciousness — Force:

The Absolute is not only Existence, but also Consciousness — Force. Now the problem is: How can pure Existence be a Force at the same time? Sri Aurobindo answers that Force is already inherent in Existence:
"Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none the less and it is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered."

The Absolute is possessed of Force, but it is not subject to it. It manifests itself as Force both in its static and dynamic aspects and at the same time it transcends both the aspects. Here the question is: What is the nature of Force? Is it conscious or unconscious? To Sri Aurobindo, Force is conscious because the phenomena of consciousness cannot be explained if the ultimate creative Force is thought to be unconscious. Here the strikes at the very root of materialism. Whereas the materialists hold that consciousness is the product of material energy, Sri Aurobindo contends that matter itself is the form of Consciousness — Force. The Absolute, Savitri, reveals, has created this universe through its Consciousness — Force:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his one Force
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has entered with his silence into space:
He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;
He lives in all who lived in his West alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he. 6.
Existence manifests itself in relation to the universe in three aspects: Self or Ātman, Spirit or Purusa and God or Iśvara. Similarly, Consciousness - Force manifests itself as Māyā, Prakṛti and Sakti, corresponding to the three aspects of Existence. So there are, Ātman - Māyā, Purusa - Prakṛti and Iśvara - Sakti.

Let us point out how they bridge the gulf between the transcendent Brahman and the relative universe.

**Ātman - Māyā:**

Brahman expresses itself in the universe as a Self of all existence, Ātman or the Cosmic Self. Ātman is perceived as the individual - universal in each being. Māyā is said to be the self-power, Ātman - Sakti of the Ātman:

He whose transcendency rules the pregnant Vasts, Prescient now dwells in our subliminal depth, A luminous individual Power, alone. 7

**Purusa - Prakṛti:**

Purusa is the Conscious Being of the Absolute; while the Prakṛti is its Consciousness-Force. Purusa is seen to be intimately related to Prakṛti. He supports Nature:

His soul, silent, supports the world and her, His acts are her commandments registers. 8
He witnesses the acts of Nature:

A witness and student of her joy and dole,
A partner in her evil and her good,
He has consented to her passionate ways,
He is driven by her sweet and dreadful force.

He also enjoys the forms and works of Nature:

He rejoices in her every thought and act
And gives consent to all that she can wish;
Whatever she desires he wills to be.

In the State of Ignorance, Purusa is so identified with his body-mind organism that he is always led away by the powerful forces of Nature. But when he realises his independent identity, he keeps himself back from the movements of Nature. Then he frees himself from the subjection of Nature:

At last he wakes to a memory of Self;
He sees within the face of deity,
The Godhead breaks out through the human mould
Her highest heights she unmasks and is his mate
Till then he is a plaything in her game.

Sri Aurobindo’s conception of Purusa-Prakrti appears to be more comprehensive than that of Sankhya philosophy. According to the Sankhya philosophy, the Purusa and the Prakrti are two distinct entities, though they are eternally interrelated to each other. Apart from Purusa Prakrti is inert, mechanical and inconscient. Purusa is conscious but inactive, while Prakrti is active, but devoid of all
consciousness. Moreover, the Sankhya system believes in the plurality of the souls. To Sri Aurobindo, these are the pragmatic truths of Purusa – Prakriti. Prakriti, though apparently inconscient, conceals a secret consciousness. Similarly, Purusa seems to be many in his individual soul, but he is originally One and the same in all. Purusa and Prakriti, says Sri Aurobindo, are not two separate entities. Prakriti imposes its forms on Purusa because she is the Force of the Being. The Being can control Nature because he is his own nature. Even in the state of ignorance and passivity, Nature acts only when she has the consent of Purusa. Therefore, Savitri reveals:

The Two who are one are the secret of all power,
The Two who are one are the might and right in things. 12

Īśvara – Śakti—

Īśvara is the Lord of the creation. In the first aspect of Reality, we have seen that Maya created the world by the support of the Atman. In the second aspect, Prakriti is said to act with the consent of Purusa. In these two aspects the Being does not appear outwardly to be the master of Nature. But in the third aspect, Īśvara is overtly seen as the omnipresent ruler of Nature. He is supracosmic as well as intracosmic. He is the divine Inhabitant of all the individual beings, the underlying reality of the universe
and the transcendent Being, Sakti is itself the Power of Isvara. He is the Lord of Sakti and of all things:

He is the substance, he the self of things; She has forged from him her works of skill and might: X X
He is the Maker and the world he made, He is the vision and he is the seer,
He is himself the actor and the act; He is himself the knower and the known,
He is himself the dreamer and the dream. There are Two who are One, and play in many worlds. 13

The Absolute as Bliss:

Bliss is the basic principle of the existence. It is for bliss and out of bliss that the Absolute created the world. The soul is said to be the eternal portion of bliss. The presence of pain and evil does not contradict the universality of bliss:

Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives,
Even pain and grief are garbs of world-delight,
It hides behind thy sorrow and thy cry. 14

Taittiriya Upanishad says:

"He knows that Brahman is bliss. For truly, beings here are born from bliss, when born, they live by bliss and into bliss, when departing they enter". 15

The Absolute assumes the form of Ignorance which causes our sorrow and suffering:

The All-Consciousness ventured into Ignorance, The All-Blissful bore to be insensible. 16
But the problem is: Why does the Absolute assume the mask of Ignorance? Why does he take the form of human beings? For Sri Aurobindo, Brahman becomes human to enable humanity to grow towards the Divine:

A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme: His nature we must put on as he put ours; We are sons of God and must be even as he: His human portion, we must grow divine. 17

**The Life Divine Reveals:**

"Brahman is in this world to represent itself in the values of life. Life exists in Brahman in order to discover Brahman in itself. Therefore, man's importance in the world is that he gives it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. To fulfill God in life is man's manhood. He starts from the animal vitality and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective". 18

The Absolute descends, Sri Aurobindo says, through Existence - Consciousness - Force, Bliss and also through the medium of the Supermind into the Overmind, Mind, Psyche, Life, Matter and the Inconscient. In the manifestation, Existence becomes Matter; Consciousness - Force becomes Life; Bliss becomes the Psyche and the Supermind becomes the Mind. In course of evolution the Inconscient is supposed to manifest Matter, Life, Mind and Supermind.
The Ascent or Evolution of the Spirit:-

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Spirit is involved into the Inconscient and it is evolving itself to establish the Life Divine on the earth. So the physical world is nothing but the evolution of the involved Spirit. This process of evolution follows a triple character - a widening, a heightening and an integration. Firstly, when the evolution starts, the forms of Matter proceed from simple to more complex shapes. Secondly, there is a heightening from grade to grade, from the lower to the higher grade. Thirdly, as soon as the evolution reaches a higher grade it takes up all the lower grades and transforms them according to its own principles. Therefore, there is not merely ascent from a lower to a higher grade, but a rising up and transformation of the lower grades as well. This is called the process of integration.

Sri Aurobindo says that two factors are particularly responsible for the emergence of a new principle in terrestrial nature. One is the intensification of consciousness from below and the second is the pressure from a flame above that of material existence:
"What is necessary is a working that brings the lower gradation of being to a point at which the higher can manifest in it; at that point a pressure from some superior plane where the new power is dominant may assist towards a more or less rapid or decisive transition by a bound or a series of bounds. . . . It is in some such way that the transition from the lower to the higher grades of consciousness seems to have been made in Nature". 19

The Inconscient is described as the starting-point of evolution. It appears to be a void, a zero that includes the whole infinity within its fold:

At first was laid a strange anomalous base,
A void, a cipher of some secret whole,
Where zero held infinity in its sum
And All and Nothing were a single torn,
An eternal negative, a matrix brought: 20

The Vedā presents it thus:

Darkness was concealed in darkness there
And all this was indiscriminate chaos,
that One which had been covered by the Void,
through the might of Tapas was manifested: 21

The Taittiriya Upanisad affirms:

"Non-existent, verily, was this (world) in the beginning. Therefrom, verily, was existence produced. That made itself a soul. Therefore is it called the well-made". 22

The Inconscient belches out the gaseous matter which whirls through aeons and forms the cosmos:
A gas belched out from some invisible Fire, Of its dense rings were formed these million stars. Upon earth's new-born soil God's tread was heard Across the thick smoke of earth's ignorance A Mind began to see and look at forms And groped for knowledge in the nascent Night. Caught in a blind stone-grip Force worked its plan And made in sleep this huge mechanical world. That matter might grow conscious of its soul And like a busy midwife the life-power Deliver the mere carrier of the All.23

Matter is not inert as the materialists think it to be. The Upanisad says that Matter is Brahman, 'amam Brahmeti Vyajanat'. Even the modern physics proves that Matter is nothing but the form of energy. Besides, Einstein's theory of relativity has established an important fact: matter can be converted into energy. The mathematical relation between the energy 'e' and the 'mass' 'm' is given by the famous equation $E = mc^2$ where 'c' is the speed of light. Einstein deduces that the mass of any body (matter) depends on the speed (energy) with which the body is moving. Thus, energy supports matter and matter embodies energy.

Indeed, Matter has its own soul or consciousness. Arouse Matter, awaken the consciousness in it and Matter will be capable of manifesting God. In the realm of Subtle Matter, Aswaphathy perceives that both Matter and Spirit exist in perfect harmony:

In its antechambers of splendid privacy
Matter and soul in conscious union meet
Like lovers in a lonely secret place: 24
The Life Divine affirms:

"Matter reveals itself to the realising thought and to the subtilised senses as the figure and body of Spirit - Spirit in its self-formative extension. Spirit reveals itself through the same consenting agent as the soul, the truth, the essence of Matter. Both admit and confess each other as divine, real and essentially one". 29

Matter has evolved the principles of Life. There is first the plant life:

Alive and clad with trees and herbs and flowers
Earth's great brown body smiled towards the skies,
Azure replied to azure in the sea's laugh; 26.

Then comes the animal-creation:

Amid the tedious crawl of drab desires
She writhed, a worm mid worms in Nature's mud,
Then, Titan-statured, took all earth for food,
Ambitioned the seas for robe, for crown the stars
And shouting strode from peak to giant peak,
Clamouring for worlds to conquer and to rule.27

Life has evolved the principles of Mind. Mind is half-lit and ignorant, but it pretends to be the lord of creation.
It reasons to trace the mystery of the universe, but it fails to solve the enigma of life:

For not by Reason was creation made
And not by Reason can the Truth be seen. 28

It is generally believed that mind is not capable of grasping the Reality. But this is only partly true.
It is the analytic, dialectic, argumentative mind, a mind impelled by desires and dominated by a separate ego-sense that cannot know Reality. But mind can be made free from these defects. Mind is a derivative power of the Supermind which possesses a knowledge of unity inherently. Since it is fallen from a higher consciousness, it can be made free, pure, capable of receiving and reflecting the knowledge, power, peace, bliss descending from that plane of consciousness.

Mind, however, is not capable of realizing all the aspects of Truth integrally. So man must evolve in himself another level of consciousness which has the integral knowledge of the Absolute. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind. The Supermind is the Conscious Creatrix of the world, the Truth-Consciousness or Real Idea:

There is a world of everlasting Light, 
In the realms of the immortal Supermind 
Truth who hides here her head in mystery, 
Her riddle deemed by reason impossible 
In the stark structure of material form, 
Unenlightened lives, unmasked her face and there 
Is Nature and the common law of things. 29

The Supermind, Savitri reveals, shall be the next manifestation of the Spirit. However, it will emerge only when Truth dictates life and mind aspires for the divine Light. The poet prophesies that even Truth will be established on earth by the Supermen:
And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head
And Truth shall be the guide of Nature's steps
And Truth shall gaze out of her nether deeps.30

The supermind will radically transform Matter, Life and Mind. Matter shall, then, reveal the Spirit:

The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face.31

Truth shall dictate Life:

The Truth shall be the leader of their lives
Truth shall dictate their thought and speech and act.32

And Mind will aspire for the divine Light:

Minds lit, inspired, the occult summoner hear
And lives blaze with a sudden inner flame...
And human wills tune to the divine will.33

Moreover, the body shall respond to the divine call:

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill.34

Ultimately, man shall be able to conquer death:

Even there shall come as a high crown of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.35

Sri Aurobindo's Supermind is different from the concept of Deity. For Alexander, deity is a general term indicating the next higher principle. When Matter is
evolved, deity is the principle of Life and when Life is evolved, deity is the principle of Mind. Now when Mind is evolved, what will be the next deity? Alexander fails to give a satisfactory answer. He simply says that the next deity will be something different from Mind. But Sri Aurobindo has a definite idea of the Supermind. To him, the Supermind radically differs from Mind and it shall make a descent into the mind, life, body to transform them in accordance with its own light and power.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's Superman is different from that of Nietzsche. The Superman of Nietzsche is an embodiment of a Titan or Asura. He has physical strength, indomitable will, ruthlessness, egoism and so on. But Sri Aurobindo's gnostic being is a divine personality possessed of the higher qualities of goodness, beauty, love, bliss, divine strength and the like.

The emergence of the Supermind is not merely a hope, but a certainty:

If in the meaningless Void creation rose,
If from a bodiless Force Matter was born,
If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,
If green delight break into emerald leaves
And its laughter of beauty blossom in the flower,
If sense could awake in tissue, nerve and cell,
And Thought seize the grey matter of the brain,
And soul peep from its secrecy through the flesh,
How shall the nameless light not leap on men,
And unknown powers emerge from Nature's sleep?
Jalaluddin Rumi recites:

I died from the mineral and became a plant,
I died from the plant and reappeared in the animal,
I died from the animal and became a man
Wherefore then should I fear?
When did I grow less by dying?
Next time I shall die from the man
That I may grow the wings of the angel. 37

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin affirms:

"Over the centuries an all-embracing plan seems in
truth to be unfolding around us... something is
afoot in the universe... the birth of a spiritual
reality formed by the souls of men and by the
matter which they bear along with them".38

Savitri, thus, traces the process of spiritual
evolution. The idea of evolution is not something new.
It has always been a dominant principle in Western
philosophy. Plato refers to it for explaining the creation
in his Timaeus. For Aristotle, evolution is teleological,
it seems to be the gradual transformation of the potential
into the actual.

In the nineteenth century, the theory of evolution
developed from different view-points. For Darwin,
evolution was a mechanical process and the progressive
adjustment of the individual with his environment. Hegel
considered it to be spiritual and said that evolution was
the gradual unfoldment of the universal reason in Matter,
Life and Mind. Sri Aurobindo takes with Hegel the spiritual
view of evolution, but he does not equate the Spirit with Reason. To him, there are several rungs in the spiritual ladder which are higher than Reason.

Bergson enunciated the theory of Creative Evolution. He explained it with an example of the work of a painter:

"The finished portrait is explained by the features of the model, by the nature of the artist, by the colours spread on the palette, but, even with the knowledge of what explains it, no one, not even the artist, could have foreseen exactly what the portrait would be, for to predict it would have been to produce it before it was actually produced - an absurd hypothesis which is its own refutation. Even so with regard to the moments of our life, of which we are the artisans. Each of them is a kind of creation. And just as the talent of the painter is formed or deformed - in any case, is modified - under the influence of the works he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of its issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the new form that we are just assuming". 39

Bergson means by creativity simply the absence of all control, even the control by oneself. Sri Aurobindo contradicts Bergson and remarks that creative evolution is one in which every movement bears on its face the stamp of its spiritual origin.

Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the Spirit's return to itself. Just as in involution Spirit projects itself out of itself, so in evolution it comes back to itself. It is, thus, the home-coming of the Spirit.
Besides, evolution is not only an ascent from a lower to a higher grade, but also an integration of the higher with the lower state. Further, to Sri Aurobindo, evolution is both cosmic and individual. On the cosmic plane, Nature is evolving the principles of Matter, Life, Mind and the Supermind, and on the individual plane, each one of us has to evolve the psychic being which dwells within our heart. The psychic being is the spark of the Divine, the 'Chaitya-puruśa'. Evolution stands for the development of this psychic being in order that the pure light from it may flood the whole of our surface life, mind and body.

III

Fate and Free - Will:

Savitri attempts to solve the riddles of Fate and Free - Will. Describing the fate as an inevitable force, it stresses that man has a free-will to mould his destiny. It expresses the popular notions of Fate. For example, Fate is a dominant phenomenon which determines the course of man's life:

Our days are links of a disastrous chain,
Necessity avenges casual steps; 40

Fate is the certainty, 'niyati'. One has to reap what one has sown:
It is decreed and Satyavan must die;  
The hour is fixed, chosen the fatal stroke. 41

Fate is unknown, unseen, 'adrastra':

The Future's road is hid from mortal sight; 42
He moves towards a veiled and secret face.

Man appears to be a puppet in the hands of Fate:

And man lives like some secret player's mask,  
He knows not even what his lips shall speak.  
For a mysterious Power compels his steps  
And life is stronger than his trembling soul.  
None can refuse what the Stark Force demands,  
His eyes are fixed upon her mighty aim; 43.

Nevertheless, Savitri, suggests, Fate is not the  
ultimate Reality:

Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny's book.  
Man can accept his fate, he can refuse. 44

The force of Fate is undeniable. But it can be changed  
or cancelled by the strength of the soul:

But greater spirits this balance can reverse  
And make the soul the artist of its fate.45

In Indian philosophy, Fate is also known by the term 'Karma'.  
According to the law of Karma every act, good or bad,  
produces a certain result which cannot be escaped. It  
suggests, in fact, three things. First, it regards the  
present existence as a sort of expiation for the deeds of
previous existence or existences. Secondly, it implies that an evil deed cannot be expiated by works of merit; its punishment must be borne. Thirdly, it stresses that the punishment for the wrong action is automatic and personal.

This law of Karma leads on to the law of transmigration. The results of a man's action may not happen at once or in the present life. His action in the past existences determines the course of the present existence and actions in the present existence taken along with the residue of past actions will determine the course of future existence. This is, in short, the principle of rebirth.

The law of Karma also implies that a man cannot suffer the sins of others. But in the *Rig-Veda* there are allusions to the belief that God might inflict punishment on the sons for the sin of their fathers. Vasistha, for instance, prays to Varuna: "Cast away from us the transgression of our fathers and those that we committed in our own person." 46 The Santi Parva of The *Mahabharata*, however, affirms that a man has to suffer for his own actions:

"Whatever deed a man does in four ways, viz., with eye, thought, speech and action, he receives in turn that same kind of action; a man does not experience the results of the good deeds or evil deeds of another; a man attains a result in consonance with the actions done by himself." 47
Three kinds of Karma are said to determine the way of our life. They are 'sanchita', 'prārabdha', and kriyamāna. The first is the total accumulated deeds of past existences, the fruits of which have not been experienced. The second is the strongest part of the Karma among the group of 'Sanchita' deeds of a person. The third is that action which a person accumulates during the present existence. The next existence or 'āgāmi' is determined by the prāyabda and kriyamāna Karmas put together.

This doctrine of Karma is represented even by the renowned sages and poets of ancient India. In Valmiki's The Ramayana, when Rama leaves Ayodhyā as an exile, Kausalya laments:

"I believe indeed in a past life; I must have made many persons lose their sons or I must have harmed living beings. It is, therefore, that sorrow has befallen me. I think beyond doubt that in former life I, a wretched woman, must have cut off the breasts of cows when their calves desired to drink the milk of their mothers". 48

In Raghuvamsa Kālidās writes:

"Rama became restless in mind, though not remembering his actions in the former existence as Vaśishta". 49

The Padma Purāṇa declares:
"There is no destruction of Karma except by reaping the fruits thereof, no one can set aside the bondage due to the Karma of the past life". 30

Indian philosophy, however, provides us with a chance to mould our future by means of meritorious works. It holds that a man is free, during the present existence, to lead a good moral life. Lord Krishna, after a long discourse, gives Arjuna a permission to do as the latter likes - 'yathecchasi tathā kuru'. He promises:

"Even if a man of the most vile conduct worships me with undistracted devotion, he must be reckoned as righteous for he has rightly resolved". 51

The Gītā reveals:

"Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself; for the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self. 52.

Though the general drift of The Gītā is in favour of free - will, there are some verses that substantiate the law of Karma. For instance:

"For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature". 53

"Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish?". 54
"That which, through delusion, thou wishest not to do, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), that thou shalt do even against thy will; fettered by thy own acts born of thy nature". 55

Sri Aurobindo holds that man is the architect of his own fate. His (man's) past and present actions shape the future birth and determines the course of his future life:

"The past man was the father of man that now is, the present man is the father of man that will be. Each being reaps what he sows; from what he does he profits; for what he does he suffers". 56

Sri Aurobindo, however, suggests that this law of Karma can carry its function only to a certain extent. It is not the ultimate determinant of the life of man. It is, in reality, his soul that chooses its own evolution. Human self is far greater than the law of Karma.

Commenting on Fate Sri Aurobindo writes:

"Fate, whether purely mechanical or created by ourselves, a chain of our own manufacture, is only one factor of existence; Being and its consciousness and its Will are still more important factors. In Indian astrology which considers all life-circumstances to be Karma, mostly pre-determined or indicated in the graph of the stars, there is still provision made for the energy and force of the being which can change or cancel part or much of what is so written or even all but the most imperative and powerful bindings of Karma. This is a reasonable account of balance; but there is also to be added to the computation in fact that destiny is not simple, but complex; the destiny which binds our physical being, binds it so long or in so far as a greater law does not intervene...Behind our surface is a freer Life-Power, a freer Mind-power which has another energy and can create another destiny and bring it in to modify the primary plan, and when the soul or self emerges, when we become consciously spiritual beings,
that change can cancel or wholly remodel
the graph of our physical fate. 57

Savitri resolves to alter her pre-determined
destiny:

Let Fate do with me what she will or can;
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;
Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will. 58

She knows that her real fate is the strength of her
soul:

My fate is what my spirit's strength can make; 59
My fate is what my spirit's strength can bear;

IV

The Finding of the Soul:—

Asked by a divine Voice Savitri undertakes an inward
journey to rediscover her secret soul. Controlling her
physical, vital and mental desires she goes deep in her
heart. In a reflective mood, she witnesses the course of
evolution from matter to mind. This mind has no rest:

This mind no silence knows nor dreamless sleep——
It toils like a machine and cannot stop. 60

Savitri realises that man has not only the mind but also
a latent soul within himself. So she goes deep in her
to find out her soul. She passes first through a plane where unrestrained life-force is giving a free play of sensations. It is a state of utter confusion:

- A horde of sounds defied significance,
- A discordant clash of cries and contrary calls,
- A mob of visions broke across the sight,
- A jostled sequence lacking sense and suite,
- Feelings pushed through a packed and burdened heart,
- Each forced its separate inconsequent way,
- But cared for nothing but its ego's drive. 61

There are the ceaseless movements of the senses but she does not identify herself with any of them. Then she goes to a plane where the life-force is chained and mind is trying to govern life:

- Here life no more was all nor passion's voice;
- A cry of sense had sunk into a hush,
- Soul was not there nor spirit, but mind alone;
- Mind claimed to be the spirit and the soul. 62

Thence she moves to another zone where she meets three universal Energies - The Mother of Sorrows, the Mother of Might, and The Mother of Light. Each of these cosmic powers tells her that she herself is Savitri's soul. But Savitri identifies with them partly. She finds that each one of them is imperfect. For instance, the Mother of Sorrows has not the divine strength to prevent cruelty and violence in the world. Similarly, the Mother of Might has no divine Knowledge. Therefore, Savitri promises to
help them when she returns there after realizing her soul.

Savitri travels from one inner country to another in search of her soul. These inner countries stand for the six 'chakras' of the Tantra. After crossing the passage of 'ajna chakra' she enters into a chamber of flame and light where she meets her immortal soul:

And crossing a wall of doorless living fire
There suddenly she met her secret soul.63

The soul is said to be a 'thumblike' being:

A being no bigger than the thumb of man
Into a hidden region of the heart...64

According to Sri Aurobindo, the soul is the spark of the divine fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical by means of the psychic being until it is able to transform the Prakṛti of Ignorance into a Prakṛti of Knowledge. It is 'a subliminal psychic entity' which differs from 'the desire soul'. Explaining the nature of the soul Sri Aurobindo writes:

"So too we have a double psychic entity in us, the surface desire soul which works in our vital cravings, our emotions, aesthetic faculty and mental seeking for power, knowledge and happiness, and a subliminal psychic entity, a pure power of light, love, joy and refined essence of being which is our true soul behind the outer form of psychic existence we so often dignify by this name. It is when some reflection of the larger and purer psychic entity comes to the surface that we say of a man, he has a soul, and when it is absent in his outward psychic life that we may say of him, he has no soul."65
Tagore explains the realisation of the soul in terms of moral and spiritual values:

"Therefore the realisation of our soul has its moral and spiritual side. The moral side represents the training of unselfishness, control of desire; the spiritual side represents sympathy and love. They should be taken together and never separated," 66.

The finding of the soul, technically known as psychicisation, is considered to be a significant step in the Integral Yoga. It alone can transform the physical being into the gnostic being:

But for such vast spiritual change to be,
Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
The heavenly psyche must put off her veil,
And step into common nature's crowded rooms;
And stand uncovered in that nature's front
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life. 67

Sri Aurobindo's description of the soul obviously derives from the Katha Upanisad where Yama explains the secret of death to Nachiketas thus:

"Beyond the senses are the objects (of the senses) and beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the understanding and beyond the understanding is the great self".

"Beyond the great self is the unmanifest; beyond the unmanifest is the spirit. Beyond the spirit there is nothing. That is the end (of the journey); that is the final goal". 68
"The person of the size of a thumb resides in the middle of the body. After knowing him who is the lord of the past and the future, one does not shrink (from Him). This, verily, is that*. 69

"The person of the size of a thumb, the inner self abides always in the hearts of men. Him one should draw out with firmness, from the body, as (one may do) the wind from the reed. Him one should know as the pure, the immortal, Yea, Him one should know as the pure, the immortal".70

V

Love Conquering Death:

Death casts a dark shadow over life. If death ends everything, people have asked, what is the meaning of life. Sri Aurobindo stresses that death is not the complete cessation of life, it is just a change of individual form or the annihilation of a material body. Death is, in reality, a power of Ignorance; and Ignorance is the experience or realisation of the individual being as isolated from the universal Spirit and transcendent Self. The conquest of death, therefore, would mean the experience of the human soul as one with the Divine which is really the realisation of the higher consciousness. To quote Malini Kanta Gupta, "To grow into consciousness, to
rise two-wards the light is the way to the conquest of Death. To rise in consciousness means to rise out of the shades of egoism; it is the ego that ties man down to his lower consciousness, which is the domain of death, and the only antidote of egoism is love, love human or divine.  

Love, as the principle of harmony, is said to be a sure means to approach God. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "Love leads us from the suffering of division into the bliss of perfect union, but without losing that joy of the act of union which is the soul's greatest discovery and for which the life of the cosmos is a long preparation. Therefore to approach God by love is to prepare oneself for the greatest possible spiritual fulfilment."  

Savitri seems to be the embodiment of Love. Her love is said to be wider than the universe itself: 

Love in her was wider than the universe,  
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.  

Love, however, comes to her overshadowed by death. She marries a person who is fated to die within a year. So she is forced to conquer death in order that she can live and love in the world. She encounters the God of Death in the forest and pursues him against his will. Death threatens her that she will have to suffer the wrath of the Furies
if she tries to transgress his law. Describing himself as the supreme Lord, he tells her that it is he who gives a shelter to the departed soul:

I am the Ilimitable, the mute Alone.
I, Death, am He; there is no other God.
Man has no other help but only Death;
He comes to me at his end for rest and peace. 74

He advises her that if she desires to be immortal she must forget Satyavan:

If thou desirest immortality,
Be then alone sufficient to thy soul;
Live in thyself, forget the man thou lov'st. 75

Savitri does not like to argue with him, but she asserts her right to live and love:

O Death, who reasonest, I reason not,
I am, I love, I see, I act, I will. 76

Following the God of Death, Savitri enters into the dream-land of the Ideal where she atones for her 'original sin', that is, 'the will to be':

In that tremendous darkness heavy and bare
She atoned for all since the first act whence sprang
The error of the consciousness of Time,... 77

Describing the futility of ideals Death says:

The ideal dwells not in heaven, nor on the earth,
A bright delirium of man's armour of hope
Drunk with the wine of its own phantasy. 78
To Death, Savitri's love for Satyavan is only a vital passion:

It is a passion of thy yearning cells,
It is flesh that calls to flesh to serve its lust;
It is thy mind that seeks an answering mind.
And dreams awhile that it has found its mate.

Death argues that the ideal cannot be established on earth where life is only a labour and a hope. The Avatars have attempted to do it, but they failed:

The Avatars have lived and died in vain,
Vain was the sage's thought, the prophet's voice;
In vain is seen the shining upward way.

Irritated by the exciting speech of Death, Savitri orders Death to remain silent:

But I forbid thy voice to slay my soul.
My love is not a hunger of the heart;
My love is not a craving of the flesh;
It came to me from God, to God returns.

She tells him that though man is subjected to the laws of matter, life and mind, he is able to experience joy in all things:

Indifferent to the threat of Karma law,
Joy dares to grow upon forbidden soil,
Its sap runs through the plant and flowers of Fate.

Death describes the world as a myth, a tale told by a conscious mind. There is neither God nor truth:
Truth comes not there but only the thought of Truth. God is not there but only the name of God.

Savitri reiterates that the world is not devoid of Truth and God:

Already God is near, the Truth is close: Because the dark atheist body knows him not But the sage deny the Light, the seer his soul.

Death now requests Savitri to honour his ancient laws:

Touch not the seated lines, the ancient laws, Respect the calm of great established things.

But Savitri defies the iron laws of Death:

I trample on thy law with living feet; For to arise in freedom I was born.

Death invites Savitri to show him the body of the living Truth so that he can obey and worship her:

Show me the body of the living Truth Or draw for me the outline of her face That I too may obey and worship her.

Savitri replies that Truth cannot be shown to Death, because if he sees Truth, he will immediately cease to be:

O Death, if thou couldst touch the Truth Supreme Thou wouldst grow suddenly wise and cease to be.

Death thinks that Savitri has no spiritual strength to conquer him and hence he asks her to show her power:
O human claimant to immortality,
Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force,
Then will I give back to thee Satyavan. 89

Savitri looks at Death and stands silent for a while. In a flash she appears to be an incarnation:

In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil,
Eternity looked into the eyes of Death,
And darkness saw God's living Reality. 90

Death is not ready to accept this defeat yet. He seeks the help of Night, Hell and Matter, but none of them comes to his rescue. He is now forced to disappear:

The dire universal Shadow disappeared
Vanishing into the Void from which it came. 91

But he reappears soon in the form of the God of Light. As such he seems to have four aspects. First, he is Virat or Subtle Matter which exists as the substratum of the dense physical Matter:

Virat, who lights his camp-fire in the suns
And the star-entangled ether is his hold,
Expressed himself with Matter for his speech: 92

Secondly, he is Hiranyagarbha:

Hiranyagarbha, author of thoughts and dream,
Who sees the invisible and hears the sounds
That never visited a mortal ear,
He is the leader on the inner roads: 93


Thirdly, he is the supramental consciousness:

A mass of superconscience closed in light,
Creator of things in his all-knowing sleep.
All from his stillness came as grows a tree,
He is our seed and core, our head and base. 94

Lastly, he is the sheath of bliss:

The bliss that made the world in his body lived,
Love and delight were the head of the sweet form,
In the alluring meshes of their snare
Recaptured the proud blissful members held
All joys outrunners of the panting heart
And fugitive from life's outstripped desires. 95

The four aspects of the transformed Death may be identified
with the 'pranamaya Kosá', 'manomaya Kosá', 'vijnanamaya Kosá',
and 'anandamaya Kosá' of the Upanishad.

Savitri is here directed by the Voice of Ecstasy
to choose between the Heaven and the Earth. She prefers
the Earth because:

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls,
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield. 96.

She aspires to divinise the earthly life. Death has a
doubt about the success of her mission:

How shall earth-nature and man's nature rise
To the celestial levels, yet earth abide? 97
Savitri replies that God has involved Himself into the earth consciousness and the earth, in return, is striving to manifest God in the terrestrial existence:

Since God has made earth, earth must make in her God; what hides within her breast, she must reveal. 98

Then she rises to the realm of Timelessness to meet the supreme Divine. Here is an end to Death's journey:

He ended and upon the falling sound
A power went forth that shook the founded spheres...99

Thus, Savitri, the Power of Love that links the individual self with the Divine, triumphs over Death; the Power of the Inconscient. In the state of Ignorance, a person is not aware of his higher or divine status of Consciousness and so he is symbolically said to be dead. But when he realises his oneness with God he becomes immortal. As a liberated soul Savitri ascends to the realm of Timelessness where Death cannot approach because he is only the lord of Time. Death is, therefore, forced to accept his defeat in the hands of a greater being.

The story of Savitri resembles the Greek tale of Admetus and Alcestis. In this story, the wife dies so that her husband may live. When Admetus's parents refuse to die in his place, his wife agrees to sacrifice her life
to save him. But Alcestis is not a Savitri. She is a virtuous woman who accepts death as her duty. Savitri, on the other hand, is a Power of the Divine Grace who confronts Death to save mankind.

It also reminds us of the descent myth of Orpheus. Orpheus, after the death of his beloved wife Eurydice, descends into the Hades. He moves Pluto to pity with the sweet notes of his lyre. He seeks and receives a permission to bring back Eurydice to the land of the living on one condition that Orpheus should precede her and not look back till they arrive on earth. But alas, just before reaching the final limit, his love overcame him. He looked around and lost her for ever. Orpheus thus loses his beloved because he has no self-control. Savitri differs from him in this respect. She is calm, cool and patient. She does not weep or beg before any gods. She chases Death heroically and returns with her lover to the earth.

In our own tradition, the legend of Savitri has an affinity with the story of Nachiketas. Rishi Vajrasrava was busy in a sacrificial ritual and he was giving away many cows to the priests. His little son, Nachiketas, thought that his father was going to give away everything. He pestered his father with the question to whom he was going to give his son. The father did not take the question
seriously, but when pressed, he gets irritated and said that he was going to donate Nachiketas to Yama.

To keep his father's words Nachiketas decided to go to Yama. Without taking food or water, he waited for three days because Yama was not present at his abode. On his return, Yama regretted his unwilling lapse from the law of hospitality and offered the boy three boons as compensation. First, Nachiketas wishes to see his father free from anger and to be greeted by his father in life. Secondly, he desires to know the secret of Celestial Fire. Lastly, he requests Yama to tell him whether man exists after death or not. Yama advises Nachiketas to choose another boon because the question about death is a riddle:

"Whatever desires are difficult to attain in this world of men, ask freely for all of them. But, O Nachiketas, do not question me about death". 100

Nachiketas replied:

"No man can be satisfied with wealth. We shall enjoy wealth when we see you! We shall live as long as you are in power! That alone is the boon to be chosen by me". 101

There is a similar dialogue in Awitri.

Death says:
"Then I will give thee all thy soul desires,
All the brief joy earth keeps for mortal hearts...
And Satyavan can never again be thine". 102

Savitri replies:

Give what thou wilt or what thou must, O Death.
Nothing I claim but Satyavan alone. 103

Despite this similarity, Savitri differs from Nachiketas.
Unlike Nachiketas, she is not condemned to Death by her
provoked father, but she voluntarily chooses to confront
Death.

Savitri, in fact, appears to be in the predicament
of Dante who finds that he has strayed from the right road
and is lost in a dark wood:

Midway this way of life we're bound upon,
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
where the right road was wholly lost and gone. 104

Savitri is also left alone in the dense forest:

So was she left alone in the huge wood,
Surrounded by a dim unthinking world,... 105

Dante seems to be fearful and fear is said to be the
precursor of Death. He has to traverse the three worlds
of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven before he finds his answer
to this fear in Beatrice and Love. But unlike Dante,
Savitri has to conquer Death because Death is an evil in
the cosmos which ties mankind to Ignorance. Further, Bante is just an awakened human soul, but Savitri is a powerful agent of Love and as such she transmutes the Lord of Darkness into the Lord of Light.

Savitri, thus, interprets the descent and the ascent or the involution and the evolution of the Spirit, and stresses that both Matter and Spirit are simultaneously real. It reveals that the ultimate Reality is three in One: Existence, Consciousness - Force and Bliss. Creation begins when this triune Reality stands back in the operation of its consciousness and projects Force downwards. This aspect of Force in the Divine is the Supermind, the Para Pakrti. As the Force plunges downwards it moves through the planes of Overmind, Intuitive Mind, Illumined Mind, Higher Mind, Mind, Life and Matter, till it loses itself further down and becomes its very opposite - Inconscience. Spirit, then, slowly begins to emerge from these depths and retraces its way back to the supermind and the Divine. It is only when man realises the Supermind that he will be able to live in the heart of the real vision and act unerringly from that centre of Truth. The realisation of the Supermind is said to be inevitable for the divinisation of man and Nature.
At this stage of evolution, man is subjected to Death and Destiny because he has separated himself from the universal and transcendent Self. But pain, suffering or death does not seem to be his ultimate destiny. He embodies the eternal soul within himself. If he realises it and brings it to the forefront to govern his mind and life, he will be able to experience truth, beauty, goodness, love, bliss and power of the Divine. The hidden soul may be realised, through the process of aspiration, rejection and surrender to the Divine Mother.

Savitri is, indeed, a spiritual poem of hope which reveals that the God of Death shall be transformed into the God of Life by the Power of Love. It also prophesises that the Superman will emerge to establish the divine life on the earth:

The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven
And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart.
And lift towards godhead his mortality. 106
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