CHAPTER V

AUROBINDO AND GODDESS SAVITRI
**AUROBINDO AND GODDESS SAVITRI**

The *Aranyā Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* has the legend of *Sāvitri-Satyavān* which has inspired succeeding generations since time immemorial. Savitri has been adored as a virtuous wife devoted to her husband (*Patibratā*). In some parts of Bengal, Hindu wives still fast for three days and worship *Sāvitri* in the month of May-June praying for long lives for their husbands. During the fast they read the *Sāvitri-Satyavān* episode from the *Mahābhārata*. The story goes as follows:

Asvapati, the king of *Madra*, was childless. In order to have a child he resorted to austerities and a life of celibacy, fasting every sixth day. Simultaneously he performed a hundred thousand sacrifices. After a period of these austerities lasting eighteen years, the goddess *Sāvitri*, was propitiated and appeared before him out of the sacrificial fire. She declared herself pleased and said that his desire for having an issue would be satisfied by *Brahmā*, the God of creation. From her own self, as her *prasād*, her special grace, she bestowed upon him a daughter. In consequence of the boon, a daughter was born to him and as she was a gift of the goddess *Sāvitri*,
Aswapati gave her the name 'Savitri'. She was beautiful like Laxmi, the Goddess of Beauty and of golden colour, more like a daughter of a god than of man. In course of time, she grew to age and the parents found it difficult to get her married because no prince came forward to ask for her hand as her personality was known to be too strong and brilliant. Aswapati was pained at this and he asked her to go round the country and choose her own partner. He sent her out to travel with an old minister as an escort. After travelling over the country for more than two years when she returned to her father's place, the great seer, Nārad, happened to be there. She disclosed her choice of Satyavān, son of King Dyumatsen who was living in a hermitage in the forest. Dyumatsen was living in exile because his enemies had taken advantage of his blindness and driven him out of his kingdom. The young prince Satyavān was brave, intelligent, generous, forgiving. The parents therefore approved of her choice. But Nārad disapproved of the choice because he knew that Satyavān was fated to die after one year. In the face of this reading of the future Savitri persisted in and clung to her choice, saying that one makes the choice once only. The parents consented to her choice and she was accordingly married to Satyavān. Immediately after marriage she betook to the simple and hard life of the
hermitage where Satyavan live. Even though she was extremely happy to have married Satyavān, the man of her choice, she could not for a moment forget the dire prophecy of the great sage, Nārad. She was preparing herself for the great crisis and for the last three days of the year she resorted to complete fast, standing at one place all the time.

On the fateful morning, Satyavān wanted to go to the forest in order to bring fuel for the sacrificial fire. Savitri insisted on accompanying him to the forest, as she did not want to undertake the risk of letting him go alone to face his death. Satyavān's parents were obliged to consent to her going by her entreaties. The excuse she had given for accompanying Satyavān was that she wanted to see the forest. In fact, she was so occupied with the idea of Satyavān's fate that while going with him she hardly looked at the forest. They reached a certain place well known to Satyavān and stopped there to cut wood. After cutting some wood, Satyavān complained of a severe pain in the head and Savitri offered her lap for him to rest his head. After a short time, Satyavān fell asleep, and Savitri saw the God of Death standing before her. He declared that he had come to take the life of Satyavān and accordingly took it. Savitri followed the spirit of
Satyavān separated from his physical body and captured in the noose of the God of Death. She conversed with Yama, the God of Death, while following him, and her conversation so pleased him that he granted her several boons, the last of which was the restoration of the life of Satyavān. Thus Sāvītrī triumphed over Death as well as fate and returned to her hermitage.

The episode of Sāvītrī-Satyavān of the Mahabharata was a great source of inspiration to Aurobindo. He had taken all the main characters of the said episode symbolically and explained their implication in his Philosophy. Scholars regard 'Savitri' as a master piece of Aurobindo's writings where Sāvītrī is the symbolic presentation of the ideal woman.

In Sāvītrī, we have an image of a woman devoted to her husband who confronts Yama, the God of Death. This image of Sāvītrī conquering death suggests 'the vision of the triumph of love over death'.

Besides an incarnation Sāvītrī is pictured by Aurobindo as a typical Hindu wife who worships 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." 3

While for the Vedic seers, Sāvitri is the Solar Power that creates, sustains and guides the Universe, for Aurobindo, she is the incarnation of the Divine Grace and aims to liberate man from the clutches of death and fate. As a matter of fact Sāvitri is the love of Divine Mother that comes down to transmute Death to "hew the ways of immortality". 4

Above the stretch and blaze of cosmic sight Above the silence of the worldless thought, Formless creator of the immortal forms, Nameless, investitured with the name divine, Transcending Time hours transcending Timelessness The Mighty Mother sits in lucent calm And holds the eternal child upon her knees, Attending the day when he shall speak to fate. 5

On this level she represents Kāli. She is the earth principle in the lower being. In a general way she is the source of all cosmic forms — right from the physical.

Sāvitri becomes glorious in her encounter with death. She is destined to destroy death so that she can

bring immortality for man. She prefers earth to heaven so that she can work for the liberation of man. Love comes to Sāvītri overshadowed by death. Sāvītri loves and marries Satyavān knowing fully well that Satyavān will die within a year. She is advised by her father to change her mind and to choose some other prince. Here she faces an existential problem. She has a freedom to choose between life and death. She can escape the hard truth. But she prefers to confront the God of Death to assert her right to live and love. Because according to Aurobindo, love is the force of harmony. It is a gift of God which alone can lead man to God. It also can transform the force of division (death) into the "bliss of perfect union". So Aurobindo's Sāvītri, from a 'violent heart' says in a calm voice:

"Once my heart chose and chooses not again
The word I have spoken can never be erased...
Death's grip can break our bodies, not our souls;
If death take him, I too know how to die,
Let fate do with me what she will or can;
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me
Helpless against my immortality.
Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will."?

So, Sāvītri recognises Satyavān as her eternal soul-male. Satyavān also reciprocates her love and hopes that this love will spiritualise his body.

7. Sri Aurobindo, op. cit., p. 432.
Sāvitri has a strong personality. Aurobindo calls her very often as "The Flame". She not only opposes death rather annihilates it. And death turns itself into immortality. In the legend we find Sāvitri defeats Yama by her wise debate and Yama grants her four boons of which the last is the life of dead Satyavān.

Aurobindo claims that Yama in his part also wants to see the embodiment of the Flaming Truth. Though he is an agent of Divine Mother he has not seen the Mother before. He addresses Sāvitri as the "claimant to immortality" and the "Mighty Mother". He wants to see her face to worship her. "Let deathless eyes look into the eyes of Death .... Transform earth's death into immortal life." And the Great Mother responds to Yama's request with supreme enlightenment - as if 'Eternity looked into the eyes of Death'.

Though Death is the black annihilation of life - utter nothingness - absorbs himself with glorious radiance of white embrace (Sāvitri). And Sāvitri infuses into Death the love-energy of her divinity. When Sāvitri assumes her original form of infinite splendour (like Prakṛti)

Death returns to its native Reality. After that a luminous transcendence emerges which transforms Satyavan and he goes above the law of limitation and absolute darkness. 9

Aurobindo's Sāvītrī is a Yogini. Like a dhyāna yogī she goes down inside her heart in search of her soul. There she perceives the various aspects of the spirit and the different levels of consciousness. Sāvītrī knows that Satyavan is going to die within a year. Yet she marries him because she has faith in herself, that she will reshape her destiny. So she says,

My fate is what my spirits' strength can make.
My fate is what my spirits' strength can bear. 10

The yoga of Sāvītrī, is a means to know the real nature of herself. She goes deep in her heart through meditation and contemplation. There she witnesses the course of evolution from matter to mind. She also meets three universal energies. The Mother of Sorrows, the Mother of Might and the Mother of Light within her heart. Sāvītrī moves from one inner reality to another in the search of her soul. These inner realities stand for the six chakras of the Tantra. At the end the psychic being of Sāvītrī identifies her soul and she lives in infinity. 11

9. Ibid., p. 96.
10. Ibid.
She was no more herself but all the world.
Out of the infinitudes all come to her,

She was the single self of all those selves
She was in them and they were all in her. 12

The union of Savitri and Satyavan is seen by Aurobindo as really very much on the lines of the union between Purusa and Prakrti. Let me elaborate:

The Samkhya Purusa is divided into Asvapati (Sāviti's father) and Satyavan (her husband). For Aurobindo, 'Sāviti is the testament of the transcendent gifted to the individual to help the universal in its self-realisation .... Sāviti is the portrait of humanity's gnostic future.' 13 It is with Sāviti that Aurobindo makes it possible for the earth to launch on the yoga of transformation. 14 Sāviti is Mahā Prakrti. Sāviti, literally means the energy (sakti) of the Sun - the symbol of eternal vitality - the source of life. Satyavan is the symbol of soul which is in slumber (of ignorance) which is equivalent to death. Sāviti - the conscious Prakrti - defeats yama (the king of death) in debate (i.e. by wisdom) and fearlessness) and thus brings Satyavan back to life. Satyavan represents Siva or Purusa (when Siva was a corpse).

14. Ibid., p. 79.
The word Satyavin literally means "one who possesses the Truth" and Asvapati signifies "the Lord of Life". (In the Veda, Asva means horse which is the symbol of life-energy or vital power). Aurobindo uses the symbol as the aspiring soul of man.\textsuperscript{15}

The life of the childless King Asvapati performing tapasyā in order to have a child is interpreted by Aurobindo as a symbol of the human soul having descended on earth from divine heights and trying to acquire knowledge of the self and the world.\textsuperscript{16} Asvapati 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. According to the legend, Asvapati performs sacrifice to obtain a child. Now, in the Vedas, the word sacrifice stands for journey. Accordingly, Asvapati's journey is towards the occult worlds – for the welfare of all people. After a successful sadhana he meets the Divine Mother and prays for her descent into the world to help suffering humanity.\textsuperscript{17} The Supreme Mother in her infinite grace gives

\begin{flushright}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{15} Purani, A.B. \textit{Savitri - An Approach and a Study}, (1952), pp. 2-3. \\
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 5. \\
\end{tabular}
\end{flushright}
Asvapati a boon that a human manifestation of her grace would be born on earth "A new light shall break upon the earth, a new world shall be born, things that were promised shall be fulfilled".  

Aurobindo's Sā vitri resembles Prakrti as she creates the earthly creatures, supports and sustains them. Like Prakrti she assumes different forms while retaining the essential oneness. She also resembles Aditi - the mother of the Devas.

Like Aditi, Sā vitri is eternally present in all levels of consciousness. In pure consciousness she is transcendent. She stands above the world and links the creation to the Supreme. She is formless, nameless and cannot be perceived by the physical eyes.

As an individual, she is the Prakrti. In the form of a seed, she is the essence of the cosmic and supra-cosmic Truth. And in this respect, Sā vitri acts as a bridge between man and his God. Aurobindo writes:

"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...."
The descent of Śāvitrī can take place into the world if there is a genuine aspiration for it on the part of human consciousness. Asvapati's yoga is the yoga for self perfection. His yoga is an upward journey for the divine descent of Śāvitrī. Satyavān's death points to the fact of the inevitability of death which is preceded by ignorance and suffering. The resurrection of Satyavān becomes necessary for a purified and transformed world.22

Both Asvapati and Satyavān are representatives of human soul. Both want to taste immortality. Like Vedic sages Asvapati becomes immortal ("May I be immortal through my children"). Asvapati and Satyavān like Purusa of Samkhya enjoy the play of Prakṛti and consent to do all those that Prakṛti likes. Asvapati's yoga is for self-perfection. Every individual soul is the soul of Satyavān - not aware about the inevitable. In a sense, Śāvitrī synthesises the two modes of Purusa. Satyavān enjoys the result of her yoga. The effort of Śāvitrī as Prakṛti, hence, is for others, symbolising the point I made earlier about Aurobindo's obsession with Śāvitrī as a self-sacrificing wife and mother.

The yoga of Asvapati (to become Siva) and of Satya-vān (to become a corpse - Śiva or Śava) get fulfilment by the yoga of Savitri. Of course, for the sacrificing image he has no hesitation in calling her as Mahādevi who grants liberation, vision and ascent by her own descent and transformation. Thus life on earth is crowned by the life of the Divine.

Now, a word about the philosophy of Arubindo who has interpreted the universe from the standpoint of consciousness. Aurobindo, as we know, looks at the whole universe from the standpoint of the highest consciousness which he calls Sachchidānanda.

He claims that existence is really the substratum of becoming.

"The very conception of movement carried with it the potentiality of repose and betrays itself as an activity of some existence; the very idea of energy in action carried with it the idea of energy abstaining from action; and an absolute energy not in action is simply and purely absolute existence." 23

Unlike Sankara and Ramanuja, Aurobindo believes that existence is both indeterminate and determinate, Nirguna and Saguna simultaneously and like Upanisadic seers, he believes that force is inherent in existence.

"Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Sakti 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 is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered."24

The Absolute possesses Force, but it is not subject to Force. It manifests itself as force in both its static and dynamic aspects and at the same time it transcends both the aspects. Aurobindo holds that matter itself is the form of consciousness. The Absolute creates the cosmos out of its Consciousness-Force.

"The Absolute, the Perfect the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute 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 oneself;
He lives in all, who lived in his vast alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he."25

Thus Existence manifests itself in relation to the universe in three aspects: atman (self), purusa (spirit) and Isvara (God). Similarly, Consciousness-Force appears as Māyā, Prakṛti; and Sakti corresponding respectively as

24. Ibid., pp. 82-83.
to the three aspects of existence. Māyā is the force of the Absolute Consciousness, conceptually creative of all things. Prakṛti is Nature or Force as dynamically executive, working out of all things under the supervision of the Supreme Spirit. Sakti is the conscious Power of the Divine Being which is both conceptually creative and dynamically executive. And the fundamental determinates of Bliss are Love, Joy and Beauty.26

Purusa is said to be the conscious Being of the Absolute; Prakṛti is its consciousness force. Purusa is intimately related to Prakṛti. In fact, Purusa supports Prakṛti and witnesses the acts of Prakṛti. He also enjoys the works of Prakṛti and becomes what she wants him to be.

"His soul, silent supports the world and her,
His acts are her commandment's registers.
......
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 rejoices in her every thought and act.
And gives consent to all that she can wish,
Whatever she desires he wills to be."27

Here the main points of my thesis get strengthened. Prakrti, the female power, at the disposal of male who humours and plays with her and till he is in the state of ignorance he is always led by her power. But when he realises his independent identity, he keeps himself back from the movements of Prakrti. So,

"At last he wakes to a memory of Self; 
He sees within the face of deity, ....
Till then he is a play thing in her game."\(^{28}\)

There is a difference between Samkhya Conception of Purusa-Prakrti and that of Aurobindo's. According to Samkhya Philosophy, Purusa and Prakrti are two distinct entities. Purusa is conscious but inactive, while Prakrti is active but unconscious. But Aurobindo thinks that Purusa and Prakrti are essentially one. Prakrti conceals a secret of consciousness. Purusa seems to be led by Prakrti, but in reality, Purusa controls Prakrti. Even in the state of ignorance and passivity, Prakrti acts only when she has the consent of Purusa.

Isvara, is recognised as the Lord of Creation. He is the divine inhabitant of all the individual beings and the underlying reality of the universe. Sakti itself is the power of Isvara. Thus in the first aspect of Reality,
Atman creates out of His Māyā. In the second aspect Purusa does what Prakṛti wants him to do. In these two aspects Reality is not perceived in any definite form. In the third aspect, Reality can be seen as the Lord of his Sakti and of all things.²⁹

"He is the substance, he the self of things: 
She has forged from him her works of skill and might.  
He is the Maker and the world he made, 
He is the vision and he is the seer, 
He is himself and 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."³⁰

Aurobindo describes the nature of Omniscient Reality as Sat (existence), Chit (consciousness force), Ānanda (Bliss) and Supermind (real idea). The world has originated from Sachchidānanda and its goal is to return to Him. According to Aurobindo, the world does not evolve of itself in a continuous process. It requires the intervention of Divine at every critical stage in the shape of a direct descent of the Divine consciousness. This radical change (Divine Descent) assures man the descent of the infinite Power of God.

This Philosophy of Aurobindo centres round the theory of evolution. Evolution is the movement which is

the reverse of the movement of involution or creation. It is because of the descent of the Spirit into matter, life and mind, that these can ascend to the higher regions of the Spirit. Because the Spirit in creation has involved itself in matter, life and mind, therefore, matter, life and mind feel an impulse to rise to their source. Evolution thus, 'is a sort of home-sickness of the Spirit'.

The Spirit has descended into the lowest particle of matter; therefore, matter seeks to evolve into something higher than itself i.e., Mind. Similarly, there is a descent of the Spirit into mind, and consequently mind must ascend to something higher than itself, namely Super-mind. The highest principle so far evolved is mind. But mind is not the last word that evolution can stop. It must move further up and come to the next stage, namely Super mind. With the emergence of the Super mind, the process of evolution becomes a process of knowledge which previously was a process of ignorance.

In the Synthesis of Yoga, Aurobindo has given a practical guide to live and realise this philosophy. Yoga being "the union of that which has become separated in the play of the universe with its own true self, origin and universality," several methods have been formulated and perfected to achieve this union. This is not a mere
"escape from the world to God" but a "transformation of our integral being into the terms of God-existence". This requires a synthesis of all yogas. For Aurobindo, one can attain personal salvation by following a single yoga. Since all the yogas are interconnected in some way or other, a synthesis of all the yogas will lead to the salvation of the rest of humanity.

Besides the three classical paths (i.e., action, knowledge and devotion — karma, jnana-bhakti), Aurobindo prescribes the integral yoga of self-perfection which is a sunlit path, a life of \textit{Ananda} — consciousness, an existence in Beauty.\textsuperscript{31} In the Synthesis of Yoga, Aurobindo says:

"The God lover is the universal lover and he embraces the all blissful and All-beautiful. When universal love has seized on his heart, it is the decisive sign that the Divine has taken possession of him; and when he has the vision of the All-beautiful everywhere and can feel at all times the bliss of his embrace, that is the decisive sign that he has taken possession of the Divine."\textsuperscript{32}

Therefore, union with the Divine is the ideal of integral yoga of Aurobindo. The ascent to the supermind is the first aim, while descent of the same is the second

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Nanda Kumar, Prema. \textit{Sri Aurobindo: A Critical Study}, pp. 59-60.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Sri Aurobindo, \textit{The Synthesis of Yoga}, (1955), p. 17.
\end{itemize}
aim of integral yoga. The ascent is achieved by a progressive hightening and expansion of the being of man. The descent of the supermind into the human transforms the mind, life and the body of man into sublime channels of Light, Love and Power and Luminous means of divine action. The ascent to the supermind and its subsequent descent inevitably lead to the third aim of the Integral yoga—the full and perfect manifestation of the Divine.33

Aurobindo says in 'Savitri' that when Truth dictates life and mind aspires for the divine light and supermind reveals. After the manifestation of Supramental consciousness, matter life and mind will be radically transformed. They will be the vehicle of truth and God. Matter shall reveal Spirit and Truth will dictate Life. When mind will aspire for the divine light, the body will carry out the force of the divine. Ultimately man will be able to conquer death.34 The example here to man is of the grace incarnate namely Savitri laudable as her achievements and performances have been,35 she remains, besides being a link between man and God only prakrti, never the supreme goddess even in the imagination and creativity of Aurobindo.