

Introduction

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Chapter I

Introduction

Indian Aesthetics assigns a very high status to the poet. The Vedas and the Upanishads asserted that the poets were Gods. Ganesha, the Lord of obstacles, was addressed as *kavim kavinam* 'the poets' poet'. The word *kavi* signified an omniscient seer, a *rishi* 'a revealer of self-visions,' and a mediator between life and spirit. The *darsana* 'vision' implied the intuitive perception of *Brahman* 'the Absolute Reality' underlying the variegated objects of the universe, both animate and inanimate, with all their intrinsic characteristics. Sri Aurobindo was one such *rishi* or seer-poet. Prolific writer, literary critic, radical thinker, Extremist national leader, mystic, exponent of Integral Yoga, prophet of Life Divine, erudite scholar and interpreter of the Vedas and the Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo has been acclaimed, particularly by his followers, as a *mahayogi* and an *avatar* or a rare and singular phenomenon. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar notes how the various 'parts' that Sri Aurobindo played during the several decades of his terrestrial existence were integrally related to one another (Indian Writing in English 152). But, as the poet constantly reiterated, his life was lived inwardly most of the time (Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo v). Arabinda Basu highlights his enigmatic personality : "BRAHMAN defies description, mind and speech return baffled from it. Likewise Sri Aurobindo

defies description, no adjective, no epithet, no appellation seems to be adequate" ("Sri Aurobindo" 1). In short, Sri Aurobindo was the possessor of an extraordinary character, which, to use his own words, combined "an inner passivity and an outer action independent of each other" (The Synthesis of Yoga 389). Indeed, all his utterances and activities were parts of a most daunting odyssey to higher levels of intuitive perception. Scholars have attempted to capture the inscrutable personality and multifaceted genius of Sri Aurobindo in their biographies and critical writings, which constitute a very valuable contribution, for the bulk of the sage-poet's writings, as Manoj Das aptly observes, "is deeply involved in that adventure of consciousness" (Sri Aurobindo 7).

Brought up in an exclusively European atmosphere right from his childhood, upon the insistence of his father, a thorough Anglophile, Sri Aurobindo returned to his Indian roots in 1893, at the age of twenty one, when he had the experience of the Infinite descending upon his personality, that is, "the Infinite pervading material space" (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga 1:121). With reference to this experience Subhas Chandra Saha expresses a prophetic comment about the young man's future evolution: "That Sri Aurobindo would grow into a great sage who could realise within himself the Brahman is amply presaged by the mystical experience that he had when he touched the soil of India" (98). He studied and mastered the Vedas and the Upanishads. He attended seances or occult sessions which revealed to him the

existence of supraphysical agencies and planes of consciousness as well as the possibility of attaining them. Subsequently, he underwent a series of decisive spiritual experiences which established the direction of his future mission. In particular, he had two mystic experiences: his first realization of the *Vedantic Advaitic* experience of the Silent, Spaceless and Timeless *Brahman*, or the total silence of the mind, under the influence of Yogi Lele in 1908, and secondly, his ineffable mystic experience of cosmic consciousness and the direct apprehension of omnipresent Reality described as *Narayana Darsan* while he was detained for a year from 1908 to 1909 by the British government in Alipore Jail. Shuddhananda Bharati interprets this solitary confinement of the poet as fortuitous, for the Divine engaged the young political activist from within, "ripened his soul" and "opened his third eye" (24).

After his acquittal in 1910, Sri Aurobindo abruptly left for Pondicherry, following an *adesh* or an inner voice beckoning him to do so. The remaining forty years of his life were spent in seclusion, intense *sadhana*, 'penance,' silent yoga, meditation and other acts of austerities, when Sri Aurobindo experienced a third major breakthrough in his spiritual evolution. Joan Price describes it thus:

This realisation was a vision of the supreme Reality as the One and the Many, "simultaneously static and dynamic, characterized by silence and expression, emptiness and creativity, infinite and

yet composed of manifold forms". (13)

We have a description of this vision in "The Meditations of Mandavya," a short poem of Sri Aurobindo composed in 1913:

Not sound, nor silence, neither world nor void,
 But the unthinkable, absolute, unalloyed
 One, multitudinous, nameless, yet a Name,
 Innumerably other, yet the same.
 Immeasurable ecstasy where Time
 And Space have fainted in a swoon sublime!

(Collected Poems 92)

This description evokes in our mind the vision of Lord Dakshinamurti, the symbol of bliss and silence, beyond all time and space. His spiritual odyssey completely transformed Sri Aurobindo's perception of the earth as mere matter, and his principal interest now was in the realm of the spirit. Clearly, the sage poet was well evolving in Time and Space, transcending narrow spaces and limitations, and containing within himself all countries and all peoples. In other words, he attained the state of cosmic consciousness.

A significant landmark in Sri Aurobindo's upward journey was the arrival of the young French woman Mirra Richard in 1914, which eventually enabled the

inception of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. Mirra, who came to be known as the Mother, was to be the true collaborator in Sri Aurobindo's unique yoga for the evolution of mankind known as Integral Yoga, about which the poet remarks:

It is the way of a complete God - realisation, a complete Self-realisation, a complete fulfilment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature - and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere. ("What Is Integral Yoga" 33)

Evidently, this spiritual partnership between the Master and the Mother signified a most fruitful meeting of the East and the West, a fusing of all spaces in man's ultimate journey to his Timeless, Spaceless abode.

Sri Aurobindo seems to have been very conscious of the need to use time as efficiently as possible. In 1923, a visitor to the Ashram noted that Sri Aurobindo "appeared as one highly cognizant of the value of time" (qtd. in Purani, Life 189). After December 1926, Sri Aurobindo retired completely from the physical atmosphere in order to bring about the descent of what he termed the Supermind, the gateway to the Timeless, Spaceless *Brahman*. He attained *mahasamadhi* 'salvation' in 1950, transcending Time and Space altogether.

Sri Aurobindo was a prolific writer. He started composing verse from the tender age of thirteen and continued his literary and critical endeavours to the very end of his life. In the realm of literature, he has left a deep and indelible mark as an outstanding poet, a fine dramatist, a perceptive critic and the inaugurator of what he calls the Overhead Aesthesis. Some of his major works include The Life Divine, his philosophical masterpiece, The Synthesis of Yoga, his magnum opus on Integral Yoga, The Human Cycle, Letters on Yoga, The Secret of the Veda, The Upanishads, Essays on the Gita, The Future Poetry, his elaborate treatise on Overhead aesthesis, Collected Plays and Short Stories, Collected Poems comprising more than 15,000 lines, Savitri, a full-fledged monumental epic, and a plethora of correspondence with his numerous *sadhaks* or seekers on a wide range of subjects. Sri Aurobindo's compositions, obviously, constitute a staggering bulk even by modest standards. The yogi, the mystic poet and, above all, the visionary jostle in him to proclaim his literary splendour and to elevate him to a pre-eminent position among the Classical poets in World literature. In Rajanikanta Mody's estimate, Sri Aurobindo cannot be merely branded as ancient or modern. "For he is beyond Time: he accepts whatever is good from the past equally as whatever is good in the present. But pre-eminently he is a poet of the future" (372). The most astonishing fact about his writing is that none of it was pre-meditated. The poet himself has remarked that everything he wrote "came from Yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration" (On Himself 221). Over the years, he had assimilated the quintessence of the cultures

of the East and the West, achieved a command over the English language, and kept evolving to higher levels of inspiration and consciousness. Naturally, what came out of his pen was a spontaneous outpouring. Navajata sums up the transcendental quality of Sri Aurobindo's writings thus: "In the writings of Sri Aurobindo the past, the present and the future, the Divine and the creation, all become integrated in an experience and expression of an integrated consciousness. They are the boons of the Supreme to humanity" (Sri Aurobindo 113).

Of all his writings, the most painstakingly composed is the epic Savitri. It marks the culmination of Sri Aurobindo's long and intense poetic career. It is "the peak - or rather the many - peaked Himalaya - of Aurobindonian poetry" (Sethna, "Lights from Passages in Savitri" 200). It is the projection of its author's integral personality, his beliefs and his yogic experiences. The epic is indeed a poetic rendering of all the important concepts of Yoga, metaphysics and philosophy that are dwelt upon in The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga and several other works of Sri Aurobindo. As the poet evolved in Space and Time from a mere mortal to a *mahayogi*, the tenor and texture of his epic likewise underwent a transmutation. Evidently, an appraisal of the treatment of Time and Space in Savitri involves both the author and the entire corpus of his writings, as all these are emanations from the same soul, and are inextricably bound with one another.

Perhaps the most striking feature about this work is that all the utterances of

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother seem to merge in it like rivers and tributaries falling into the ocean. When we compare the other writings of Sri Aurobindo with Savitri, we feel that they were all preparations or tentative attempts pointing to the grand finale that was to follow. Three lines from his poem, "The Greater Plan," may be aptly cited to point out that these other writings were "the slow prelude of a vaster theme, / A sketch confused of a supernal plan, / A preface to the epic of the Supreme" (CP 147).

Savitri is the only epic poem by an Indian of repute writing in English. It is in this genre that Sri Aurobindo's evolving poetical consciousness and his splendid cosmic vision of the future find the most comprehensive expression. Raymond Frank Piper has described the work as "probably the greatest epic in the English language" (qtd. in Mitra, Liberator 258). The epic is a retelling of the well-known legend of Satyavan and his loyal wife Savitri, the beautiful daughter of King Aswapathy, how she rescues her husband from the clutches of Death, and thus demonstrates the potency or efficacy of her chastity. This story, which is recounted in about seven hundred lines in the *Vanaparva* in Ved Vyasa's Mahabharata, is hardly a theme fit for building a great epic; rather, it is a subject that may, at best, be treated in a love poem or a tragi-comedy. But, as the subtitle indicates, Savitri is both a legend and a symbol, and hence the story element is relatively less consequential. Sri Aurobindo has transmuted the Savitri - Satyavan legend of the

past and presented it as a symbol of the future. Pandit epitomises the thematic content of the epic :

Adapting the story of Savitri-Satyavan from the Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo portrays the entire history of man in the cosmos, his origin and his goal, the birth and the organisation of the universe, the growth of Consciousness and its several planes or worlds through which the spiritual evolution of the earth-being proceeds, and much more. ("Sri Aurobindo Literature" 135)

Savitri, with its appropriately 24,000 lines, like Valmiki's Ramayana, is the longest epic originally composed in English. While Paradise Lost is half its length, Faerie Queene remains incomplete. The epic is truly the outcome of 'silence and slow time'. Sri Aurobindo probably began the first version of Savitri around the turn of the twentieth century, but it took him nearly fifty years to complete it, for it was his practice, or rather his *tapasya* 'penance,' to revise and redraft whatever portion of the epic he had composed, until he was fully satisfied that the literary creation was the perfect expression at the level of consciousness he had attained at that point of time. Nirodbaran, a close associate, gives vent in a profound passage, to the sense of wonder and admiration he felt at the overwhelming task of the Master:

One fact alone makes me dumb with a reverent awe and exalted admiration: the colossal labour Sri Aurobindo put forth to build this unique structure. It reminds me of one of those majestic ancient temples like Konarak or of a Gothic architecture like Notre Dame before which you stand and stare in speechless ecstasy, your soul takes a flight beyond time and space. ("Savitri - A Factual Account of its Composition" 83)

Probably, no other work, either of Sri Aurobindo or of any other author, has been revised so meticulously and fastidiously as Savitri. During the five decades as he worked on the epic, Sri Aurobindo was continually progressing in his silent Yoga of transformation. Each major *siddhi* 'occult power' saw him on the peak of a higher level of consciousness, and he attempted to write the epic from that new level. He has explained this in one of his letters in Savitri:

I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I re-wrote from that level. [. . .] In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative.

(728)

During the last decade of his terrestrial existence, Savitri became a major preoccupation with Sri Aurobindo. Nirodbaran would patiently take down the cascade of hundreds of lines of blank verse that would flow out with unpremeditated ease from the sage-poet's quill. "By 1950, it was as though a sense of urgency had seized even the unhurried imperturbable Sri Aurobindo. "I want to finish *Savitri* soon," he told Nirod, and the dictations continued as if there was now a race with time" (Iyengar, "A Survey of Savitri" 276).

Savitri is a poetic demonstration of Sri Aurobindo's Overhead aesthesis summed up in The Future Poetry, and it incorporates the key concepts of his Integral Yoga. The poetics is remarkable for its spiritual and visionary character. In Sri Aurobindo's view there are four planes of being, between the mental and the highest consciousness, which, in the order of their ascending spiritual luminosity, he designates as Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind and Overmind, each producing poetry characteristic of its own specific intensity. He has explained these terms exhaustively in The Life Divine and The Synthesis of Yoga, besides picturesquely portraying them in Savitri. The epic is "unique in its sustained grandeur and sublimity revealing to us plane after plane of spiritual illumination and each plane a tier-terraced mountain" (Khanna 254). The first step of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, which is imperative for attaining to these higher levels of consciousness, is what is termed the psychic opening. By the expression "psychic

being" Sri Aurobindo means the inmost soul-being and the soul-nature of man, "the godhead small and marred; / In this human portion of divinity [. . .]" (Savitri 7.5. p. 527). It is an "incognito of the Imperishable," a "spirit that is a flame of God," which is "Immortal in our mortal poverty" (1.3. p. 23), and so on. The seer-poet postulates the doctrine of ascent and descent, indeed, a unique characteristic of his yoga. While the ascending soul aspires to greater planes of consciousness by rejecting the false and the low, and by resorting to intense concentration and meditation, it is helped by the Divine Grace from above like a magnet.

Savitri is an excellent blossom of Overmind poetry. In the poet's scheme, the Overmind is a plane of consciousness freed from all ignorance and falsehood, and characterised by an inherent light of knowledge and a natural experience of the infinite. In the process of composing the epic, both Sri Aurobindo and Savitri evolved and attained greater peaks of transformation or heightening of consciousness by breaking into "another Space and Time" at each stage, to use the poet's words (Savitri 1.5. p. 91).

The response of readers to Savitri is marked by much diversity. Three groups of readers can be distinguished. Firstly, there are those who summarily avoid the epic on the ground that it is too ponderous or obscure. The second group comprises the harsh critics, both in India and abroad. "I don't see Sri Aurobindo as a poet at all . . ." observes Kathleen Raine, an acknowledged British writer and critic. This

harsh verdict is upheld by other literati, among them William Irwin Thomson, who suggests that Yogis like Sri Aurobindo "should on principle be debarred from expressing themselves in verse, since they do it so badly [. . .]" (Shraddhavan 373). Indian critics of the likes of P. Lal, K. Raghavendra Rao and others take strong objection to the mental journeys and the philosophy embedded in the epic, thereby betraying a Johnsonian intolerance and a prejudicial attitude towards a poetry they cannot understand or appreciate (Nandakumar, "Aurobindonian Inspiration" 87). Sisirkumar Ghose, who praises Savitri as "the climax of Aurobindean creativity," is, however, quick to perceive that discouraging comments such as "A controversial work, the charge of obscurity, abstraction, non-poetry and monotony" continue to be heard. Probably, it is because the epic is "a work unlike all the others" ("Rare, Inward Fire" 44).

The third group of readers, clearly the most significant one, comprises the *sadhaks*, poets and critics, who have taken infinite pains to study the epic, and who have striven to fathom its mysteries and meanings. Prominent among them are Iyengar, Purani, Pandit, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sethna, Prema Nandakumar, Gokak, Deshpande, Ananda Reddy and a host of others. Every researcher on Savitri is indebted to these Aurobindonians for the light they shed on otherwise opaque or untractable parts of the monumental work.

Sri Aurobindo knew well that Savitri was not intended for the casual reader at

all. In one of his Letters on "Savitri" he suggests leaving the value of his mystical creation to be determined by the future, for "there are only two judges whose joint verdict cannot easily be disputed, the World and Time." He adds that "the world's verdict is secure only when it is confirmed by Time" (Savitri 806). Palit, a perceptive critic, dwells on the unique nature of the work:

Savitri is a work which has no parallel in English, perhaps in the world literature-for its whole turn, approach, its language, its imagery and symbolisms are of a radically different type we meet in the poets - past or present. This is because Sri Aurobindo deals with facts of consciousness, the vast drama of subtle realities, powers and truths. ("Sri Aurobindo's Savitri and Its Critics" 35)

In fact, the epic is an elitist poetical work and consequently envisages an ideal reader or a *sahridaya*. "The divided modern consciousness cannot experience, much less unify different levels of reality, it is this that largely explains the lack of response" (Sisirkumar Ghose, "Savitri - A Subjective Poem" 257). Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics requires that both the poet and the reader are souls. The true understanding and appreciation of Savitri presupposes a necessary minimum equipment of an openness of mind, a basic knowledge of Integral Yoga and Overhead Poetics as well as an aspiration to expand and to attain higher levels of perception by transcending body consciousness and the limitations of Time and Space.

One of the baffling and perplexing questions that has engaged the attention of thinkers throughout the history of human civilisation has been about Time and Space, for the problem arises naturally in the mind as it contemplates the external world of matter and change. These are elusive concepts, and the attempts at defining or describing them have often been frustrating. Hanlon, a Theosophist, quotes from a sonnet to bring out this point :

So I, too, lost in midnight contemplation
 Have sought to pierce the age-old mystery
 Of time and space, and felt myself upon
 The brink of some transcendent revelation
 When lo! intrudes one bright irrelevancy,
 And those immortal whisperings are gone. (7-8)

Several theories and concepts have been adduced by philosophers, scientists and spiritual seers on Time or Space or both. Works like Samuel Alexander's Space, Time, and Deity, F.H. Bradley's Appearance and Reality, Henri Bergson's Creative Evolution, and Time and Free Will, Norman E. Pearson's Space, Time and Self, Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics, Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time, James S. Perkins's A Geometry of Space-Consciousness, G.S. Herbert's Time - A Metaphysical Study, C.K. Raju's The Eleven Pictures of Time, anthologies of essays

like The Philosophy of Time, The Study of Time, etc, as their titles suggest, throw much light on the concepts under consideration, but the variety and diversity in the views are quite confounding, often contradictory, and therefore inconclusive. Hinduism, Greek philosophy, Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism mention both temporal and non-temporal aspects. Eternity and cosmological time were known to the ancient minds. Einstein's Relativity theories, Quantum Mechanics and the mind-boggling findings of Atomic Physics have blasted Newton's classical concept of Absolute time, rendering both Time and Space relative. With the immense development of psychoanalysis in the modern times these concepts have come to be associated with "mind," "memory," "ego," "dream," "consciousness," and so on. Contemporary thought, in general, favours the probings of the inner mind, and hence Time and Space have begun to assume a personal tone and significance.

Time constitutes a more frequent subject matter than space, although it is customary to treat the two concepts as a single unit. In Time and Man, Elton and Messel explain that it is possible to conceive spatial relations without an extension in time, while it is not possible to conceive temporal relations without an extension in space. To corroborate their view they cite Piaget: "Space is a still of time, while time is space in motion" (85). Einstein formulates a space-time continuum, where the three dimensions of space and one of time are accorded equivalent status. Bergson, on the other hand, advocates in Time and Free Will that the true nature of

time can be known only when we consider time apart from space (101). Bradley's view is that "It is usual to consider time under a spatial form" (Appearance and Reality 33). Indian Classical thought refers to our phenomenal world as characterised by time, space and causality. Time happens to be more puzzling than Space, which appears to be static for all practical purposes. It is because Time seems to flow and pass, or else we appear to advance through it.

Sri Aurobindo was not, strictly speaking, a time philosopher, nor did he write any exhaustive treatise on Time and Space. But his writings bear evidence that he was quite preoccupied with these metaphysical notions. There are several references to Time and Space and other related concepts like *karma*, death, fate etc. in The Life Divine and The Synthesis of Yoga. An entire chapter entitled "Towards the Supramental Time Vision" is included in the latter work (853-72).

Time and Space do not figure conspicuously in Sri Aurobindo's short stories and plays. The mystic vision is not predominant, although there are pointers to his future evolution. In a revealing passage Iyengar asserts :

Sri Aurobindo was thinking and poetising and dramatising at once: he was looking at life steadily and in its totality, he was also peering into the future, throwing out suggestions, hinting at possibilities, invoking inspiring visions of the future. Like the

poems, the dramas too were a part of Sri Aurobindo's life: the outer projections of the richer or quintessential part of his life - the imponderables of his "inner" life. (Sri Aurobindo 113)

In his play "Perseus the Deliverer," there is a reassurance that man will transcend time, and the earth will be divinised eventually, but certainly. In his concluding utterance Perseus declares: "Man must change who is a soul of Time," and adds: "But the blind nether forces still have power / And the ascent is slow and long is Time." Yet there is hope that cosmic consciousness will become a reality, since "little by little earth must open to heaven / Till her dim soul awakes into the Light" (Collected Plays and Short Stories Part I: 201).

Nandakumar states authoritatively that the concluding speech of Perseus is indeed "Sri Aurobindo speaking on the subject which was to be the base-plank of his sumptuous epic, *Savitri*" ("Savitri: A Spiritual Princess" 32). Clearly, the ideas of Time and Space which were to blossom into lucid visions in Savitri subsequently were beginning to sprout and germinate in this play.

Poetry preceded philosophy and metaphysics in Sri Aurobindo's literary endeavours. In his early poems composed in adolescence, which are mostly romantic, melancholic or lyrical effusions, there is little awareness or preoccupation with the concepts of Time and Space except for the fleeting nature

of mortal time and the consequent need to make the most of available time. The *yogic* experiences and *sadhana* of his adulthood paved the way for a gradual evolution of Sri Aurobindo's poetic vision, and deepened his comprehension of Time and Space. They did much to heighten his psychic awareness which, in turn, transmuted his poetry both in theme and temper. His mature poems started becoming more and more autobiographical. Sisirkumar Ghose aptly mentions that "in his maturer verse, his more intimate utterances Sri Aurobindo deals almost exclusively with states of being, subtle ranges of experience that are never easy to grasp, much less to judge" ("Sri Aurobindo - Poet as Seer" 43). "A God's Labour," "Thought the Paraclete," "Rose of God," "The Triumph-Song of Trishuncou," (CP 99-102, 582, 584, 53) are just a few poems in which there is the reiterated aspiration of the soul for the Infinite, and the yearning that the Eternal should manifest itself in Time. Likewise, most of Sri Aurobindo's sonnets including "Transformation," "Nirvana," "Evolution," "Cosmic Consciousness," "The Cosmic Spirit," (CP 133, 134, 136, 144, 161) are "snaps of spiritual autobiography, and what is essential in these has also gone to enrich the total content of *Savitri*" (Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo 626).

Sri Aurobindo's Bengali poem, "*Mahakal*," composed around 1918 and subsequently translated into English by Richard Hartz under the title "Time," is a clear indication of the epic poet's preoccupation with the Time theme. An added

evidence is the editorial note by Sethna: "There are several manuscripts of this poem, which in a shorter form was entitled *Kal*" (Mother India March 2004: 195). The poet wonders at the nature of Time: "We see your body, know your moods, O Time; / Where is your soul?" (197). The final dissolution is spoken of as Time arriving in the guise of Sleep when behind "the screen of space" World-mother gathers "all into her trance" (197). The cyclic nature of Time, and the possibility of the pilgrim-soul hearing "the grandiose call of the Beyond" are mentioned (pp. 198-99). Written in the form of an ode in a rapturously romantic vein, the poem depicts Time as *Kalapurusha* 'destroyer,' who is blissfully engrossed in his cosmic dance of creation and destruction, ruthlessly playing with the life of man, a puppet in his hands, like a happy child (Mother India April 2004: 270-74). Probably, Sri Aurobindo was already toying with the idea of transcending Time and death, which was to become the major concern of his epic. In short, the seminal ideas on Time and Space and related experiences, that lie scattered in the numerous poems, find the fullest treatment in Savitri.

"Judging from his writings one has no hesitation in saying that he certainly had *trikaladrsti*, the vision of the three times - past, present and future." Basu's comment ("Sri Aurobindo" 2) is especially true of Savitri, the inner epic, in which the poet's role is that of a successful pathfinder for evolving humanity. His poems, particularly his mature verse including his long poems like "Ahana" (CP 523-53)

and his sonnets are a transparent record of the evolution of his poetic vision with special reference to Time and Space, and thereby serve as a running commentary on the subtle, mystical experiences depicted in his epic. In a similar manner, The Life Divine and The Synthesis of Yoga provide a theoretical basis for Sri Aurobindo's ideas of Time and Space presented in the same work.

Mother declares authoritatively: "*Savitri* is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision" (qtd. in Nirodbaran, "Savitri - A Factual Account of its Composition" 68). It is a record of what the seer poet perceives with his inner eye, what he experiences through his yoga as he visualises them. In the words of Krishna Prem, himself a great yogi and open to occult communications, Savitri "is neither subjective fancy nor yet philosophical thought, but vision and revelation of the actual inner structure of the Cosmos and of the pilgrim of life within its sphere [. . .]" (qtd. in Nadkarni Savitri 14). The entire epic describes an endless journey, in which the soul is pictured as a pilgrim or a traveller in Time with Eternity as its destination. The voyages and encounters of the soul through the ocean of Time, Space and Causality are purely symbolic. To a lesser extent, Dante's The Divine Comedy and Milton's Paradise Lost also share this visionary quality. But, while the emphasis in the Western epics is on Theology or Christianity, the stress in Savitri is on the spiritual odyssey of the soul through mystic planes, higher and deeper, till the supramental plane beyond Time and Space is reached. Nandakumar

has a few illuminating observations to make on this score in her scholarly treatise,

A Study of Savitri:

Savitri may be said to be the third and final term in the series, of which the earlier terms are the *Commedia* and *Paradise Lost*. It is an attempt to "reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purposes of the Divinity in man and the universe". (450)

Similarly, Savitri shares this visionary dimension with the two Indian scriptures, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Sitaramayya extols Savitri as "the latest and the greatest of the Scriptures; it includes and transcends the essence and significance of all other Scriptures" (215). Evidently, like Valmiki and Vyasa, Sri Aurobindo too could look into the mystery of things and know the unknown.

Dwelling at length on the stature of the epic as a poetical form and its future possibilities in The Future Poetry, Sri Aurobindo asserts that the epic "need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action," and adds: "The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his [the poet of the future] greatest possible subject [. . .]" (254). Savitri bears testimony to Sri Aurobindo's theory, for he intended his poetical masterpiece to be an epic of the

soul or an inner epic. Lotika Ghose describes Savitri as "perhaps the greatest epic of the human soul yet written," in which "the poet records his knowledge of whatever wisdom the human soul is heir to" (412). Sisirkumar Ghose expounds the features of Savitri as an epic of the soul. He affirms that in enlarging awareness Sri Aurobindo has gone beyond Homer, Milton, and even Dante. To quote the critic:

It is the reality of the unseen that dominates the book and determines its nature, texture and structure. [. . .] Cosmic, impersonal, the poet does not fail to remind us that all the action takes place in 'soul-space', "where space is a vast experiment of the soul", "an unchanging muse of deep self-space". [. . .] These events do not take place in time but in an Eternal Now, beyond time. ("Rare, Inward Fire" 47)

It becomes clear that the concepts of Time and Space are interwoven into the fabric of the epic of the soul.

A unique feature of Savitri is that it is replete with references to Time and Space, unlike most other epics in which we do not find any serious preoccupation with these concepts. In such works these terms, wherever or whenever mentioned, are invariably employed in the conventional sense. Fleeting time, the destructive power of time, and the hope of Eternity find casual mention. The treatment of

Space as a concept is altogether neglected. On this score Sri Aurobindo's epic stands out most conspicuously. Statistics based on the computerised compilation Savitri Concordance by Jyoti and Prem Sobel reveal that the epic contains around two hundred references to Space, and about five hundred references to Time. On every second or third page, the poet uses these words, either singly or in combination, in various modes and aspects throughout Savitri to identify different planes of consciousness, their innate characteristics and their relations to man. All these ideas and observations properly arranged, collated, analysed and studied, can help us to formulate Sri Aurobindo's vision of Creation, Evolution and the divinisation of the earth with special reference to Time and Space, Eternity and Infinity. It is striking to note that the poet invariably begins the words "Time" and "Space" with capital letters, probably highlighting the importance of the two concepts.

Admittedly, a few critics including Purani, Pandit, Mehta and Reddy have made certain general references to the Time element in Savitri. These lie scattered in their critical writings, and there is no attempt at collating and systematising them. Purani touches on this aspect in his treatise Savitri: An Approach and a Study (41-44). To cite his words: "Throughout *Savitri* one finds the question of Eternity and Time and their relation constantly repeated in different contexts to bring out their interdependence, or rather, the dependence of Time - Eternity on

Timeless - Eternity" (41). Singh Shahi mentions casually that one finds in the epic both the temporal and the timeless (23). Albuquerque touches briefly on certain philosophic aspects such as the meaning of time, destiny, *karma*, the need to be conscious and so on. His view is that "The most appealing aspect in *Savitri* is basic human life, life that is seen in time that passes into eternity" (303).

No full-length or in-depth study of Time and Space in Savitri has come to light so far. Hardly any mention of the "Space" element is made whatsoever in any critical work. A serious research or a deep probe into the two metaphysical notions of Time and Space, their relationships, various aspects, their role in defining Reality, scientific, psychological and philosophic approaches to these concepts, all in relation to Sri Aurobindo's epic, is relevant and affords much scope for research. Time and Space are embedded into the framework of the epic so organically that a serious attempt can be made to study how they are integral to the structure and meaning of Savitri.