

Scaling the Heights

V. Uma "Time and space in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri" Thesis. Department of English , St. Thomas College, Trichur, University of Calicut, 2004

Chapter IV

Scaling the Heights

In the symbolic, time - transcending epic, there are primarily two elaborate movements towards self-realization and cosmic consciousness, namely Aswapathy's Yoga and Savitri's *sadhana*. If one is a flight that scales greater and greater spiritual heights into the Spaceless, Timeless abode of the Absolute, the other is an inward, deepening journey which plunges into the occult depths of material existence. The exalted purpose of both the yogas is the same, namely, to "hew the ways of Immortality" (*Savitri* 1.2. p. 17), but the processes and intermediary experiences vary. Also Aswapathy's Yoga is a prelude to Savitri's Yoga, which enables mankind to conquer Death, under whose ominous shadow lies the phenomenal world of Time and Space, chafing and groping in ignorance. Indeed, as R.K. Singh observes, Aswapathy's yoga is "actually the search for a creative principle of which Savitri is the answer" ("The Structure of *Savitri*" 75).

In the original Mahabharata story, Aswapathy is the virtuous and pious monarch of Madra who observes charity and performs severe penance for eighteen years to propitiate Goddess Savitri. Consequently, the Divine Mother bestows upon him the boon of a daughter, who would be a portion of her self. In Sri Aurobindo's epic this seemingly insignificant episode becomes the subject matter of twenty two

cantos spanning three Books and comprising over a ten thousand lines, that is, constituting almost half the epic. Manifestly, the yogi-poet discerned the spiritual significance of the legendary material; he transformed and transmuted it so as to make it a means for conveying his revolutionary concept of Integral Yoga in poetical language. R.K. Singh elaborates about this process of restructuring:

Sri Aurobindo reconstructs the legendary Aswapathy through his action of psychic and mental disciplining, which has a transforming influence, in that, instead of the goddess being propitiated, the yogic consciousness raises him to the wideness of the Eternal and he experiences an accession of strength down "into his mortal limbs". ("The Structure of *Savitri*" 26)

Aswapathy in Savitri is not a King who is childless. Purani asserts that he is "a representative of the human race trying to fulfil the inmost aspiration of the human being by bringing down to the earth a kind of perfection in life" (Lectures on Savitri 10). Sri Aurobindo portrays him variously as a "colonist from immortality," who was affiliated to "cosmic Space and Time" (Savitri 1.3. p. 22), "a shining Guest of Time" (1.3. p. 25), who retained mighty memories of the past, and so on. Thus, Aswapathy's soul lived as "eternity's delegate" (1.3. p. 23), who had modelled his rhythmic parts in inward Time (1.3. p. 25) in order to demonstrate that human life was:

An endless spiral of ascent and fall
 Until at last is reached the giant point
 Through which his Glory shines for whom we were made
 And we break into the infinity of God. (1.3. p. 24)

Aswapathy's Yoga is spread over Cantos Three, Four and Five of Book One: *The Book of Beginnings*, the whole of Book Two: *The Book of The Traveller of the Worlds*, comprising fifteen cantos, and Book Three: *The Book of the Divine Mother*, made up of four cantos. Sri Aurobindo elucidates the triple yoga of the King in one of his "Letters" in Savitri:

Aswapati's Yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as the individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother. (Savitri 778)

The processes undertaken by Aswapathy to expand his consciousness are the same as the steps of Integral Yoga. The King in-gathered all his energies with an

intense concentration; hearing the call of the Beyond, he let his mind expand into infinity. The petty, self-separated, self-centred egoistic individuality, so rigidly established in the human being, gradually disintegrated and dissolved and became one with the transcendent One. In the poet's superb phrasing: "The landmarks of the little person fell, / The island ego joined its continent" (Savitri 1.3. p. 25). In the first part of his yoga, Aswapathy realised his psychic being, went beyond Reason and Mind, and underwent both a psycho-spiritual and a spiritual transformation with an ascent to a supreme power (Savitri 778). The Serpent Force was awakened in his being. There are several references to this phenomenon in the epic. To cite a few:

In hands sustained by a transfiguring Might
 He caught up lightly like a giant's bow
 Left slumbering in a sealed and secret cave
 The powers that sleep unused in man within. (1.3. p. 26)

and:

Lifting the heavy curtain of the flesh
 He stood upon a threshold serpent-watched,
 And peered into gleaming endless corridors,
 Silent and listening in the silent heart
 For the coming of the new and the unknown. (1.3. p. 28)

Gradually, Aswapathy was endowed with many supernormal powers. Even miracles became a common feat with him. He became a witness soul, his inner sight was opened, and he "owned the house of undivided Time" (1.3. p. 28). He was no longer harassed by fleeting time or the transience of earthly life, for it dawned on him that subtler spaces existed beyond. Sri Aurobindo dwells at length on Aswapathy's *sakshi avastha* or 'witness-state' in the following lines:

His soul stood free, a witness and a king.
 Absorbed no more in the moment-ridden flux
 Where mind incessantly drifts as on a raft
 Hurried from phenomenon to phenomenon,
 He abode at rest in indivisible Time. (1.3. p. 33)

Aswapathy acquired astral clairvoyance, which enabled him to view what was hidden from ordinary physical sight. As a result :

A door parted, built in by Matter's force,
 Releasing things unseized by earthly sense:
 A world unseen, unknown by outward mind
 Appeared in the silent spaces of the soul. (1.3. p. 27)

The partition between his external sense of awareness and the dormant regions of subtler consciousness was removed, and Aswapathy consciously experienced

those ranges of existence which lay extended in the domains of the soul, beyond the pale of the mind's realm of thought and logic. According to the Theosophist Leadbeater, an observer [like Aswapathy] who has left behind the physical plane, and has gained astral vision "finds a new and transcendent sense opening within him, which unfolds to his enraptured gaze yet another and a higher world [. . .]". It is a subtle world "where the omnipresent life which pulsates ceaselessly around and within him is of a different order altogether [. . .]" (The Devachanic Plane 15-16).

Breaking through the shell of egoistic separativity, Aswapathy continued to expand all the more till his "inner self grew near to others' selves" (Savitri 1.3. p. 27). He crossed the earth zone and soared to higher and still higher occult planes. This "aspirant to supernal Timelessness" (1.3. p. 26) experienced thus: "While there, one can be wider than the world; / While there, one is one's own infinity" (1.3. p. 32). His mystic eye (*Ajna chakra*) was opened, and his astral vision disclosed to him his cosmic past; that is to say, he could see the past as well as the future in the present moment or the Eternal Now. The epic poet employs a picturesque image to delineate the seeker's state:

As if a story long written but acted now,
 In his present he held his future and his past,
 Felt in the seconds the uncounted years

And saw the hours like dots upon a page. (1.3. p. 33)

As an individual experience, Aswapathy had overcome body consciousness and acquired *trikaladrsti*. We learn from the epic that his "walk through Time outstripped the human stride" (1.3. p. 45). Plunging his roots into infinity, and basing his life upon eternity, he resumed his "epic climb" (1.4. p. 46) from the alone to the Alone. After his personal liberation, Aswapathy continued his *sadhana* assiduously, seeking the key to the realisation of the mystic knowledge for all mankind. Vesting an unflinching faith in the Divine Grace he withdrew into an inner silence in order to make further forages in consciousness.

Silence is one of the attributes of *Brahman*. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written extensively on the potency of inner silence to lead us to transcendental knowledge. To Sri Aurobindo silence implies freedom from thoughts and vital movements so that the whole consciousness is quite still. "It is on the Silence behind the cosmos that all the movement of the universe is supported" ("What does 'Silence' Mean" 4). About Aswapathy the epic poet remarks that the "Silence was his sole companion left" (1.5. p. 79). This silence opened into the vastitudes beyond earthly Space and Time. In a significant passage the epic poet brings out the inter-relatedness between the Silence and the "secret knowledge" which dawned on Aswapathy:

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. (1.4. p. 67)

The commentary of Madhusudan Reddy is pertinent here: "The earth is the scene of the growing manifestation of Spirit in space and time, and man is a mode of its conscious manifestation in whom the finite is destined to integrate with the Infinite" (Savitri 23). It is this "secret knowledge" of the *Rishis* that Aswapathy's soul, a "sailor on the flow of Time" (Savitri 1.4. p. 69) arrived at.

Elaborating on Aswapathy's state at the moment, Sri Aurobindo remarks: "He dwelt in the wideness of the Eternal's reign. / His being now exceeded thinkable Space [. . .]" (1.5. p. 79). He broke the "triple cord of mind" (1.5. p. 82) or the *hrdayagranthi*, thereby freeing himself of his ego and *avidya* 'ignorance'. With an upsurge of *Kundalini* his consciousness widened immeasurably, so that he felt that a "boundless being in a measureless Time / Invaded Nature with the infinite [. . .]" (1.5. p. 83). Having passed the familiar earth zone at the end of the first stage of his austerity, Aswapathy entered into subtle occult realms which were totally strange and formidable, being cast into moulds of Space and Time quite different from those of terrestrial dimensions. This is how the poet describes the entry:

A voyager upon uncharted routes
 Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown,
 Adventuring across enormous realms,
 He broke into another Space and Time. (1.5. p. 91)

Each plane of existence has its own grade of Time and Space based on the nature and frequency of vibration of its matter and on the peculiar modes of extension and duration of the manifesting Spirit. The word "broke" is purposefully employed by the epic poet to suggest that the movement into another spatio-temporal plane can never be a gradual process; it is always abrupt. All this "breaking" process is analogous with the sudden Quantum leap of electrons to the next orbital or subshell inside an atom, whenever there is a change in energy levels.

The fifteen cantos of Book Two describe Aswapathy's spiritual odyssey in minute, picturesque particulars. Driven by an insatiable thirst for the ultimate Truth, the protagonist sojourned into several supraphysical worlds, which are mapped out in psychic terms, such as the worlds of gross matter, subtle matter, little life, higher life or heaven, and even the nether regions of hell. Paranjape notes: "There is a general pattern of ascension in these fifteen cantos from matter, to life, to the mind, and finally beyond the mind" ("Savitri" 108). And in the estimate of Nadkarni, "Book Two, which describes Aswapati's exploration of the various worlds of

consciousness, is probably the hardest part of the whole epic" (Preface, "On Savitri" xii).

It has to be rightly understood that Aswapathy's journey is not a geographical movement. On the contrary, it is an occult movement which enables the king to soar to different planes by means of his astral or mental body instead of the physical vehicle. Leadbeater elucidates this point in The Astral Plane:

So when we speak of a man as rising from one plane or subplane to another, we do not think of him as necessarily moving in space at all, but rather as transferring his consciousness from one level to another - gradually becoming unresponsive to the vibrations of one order of matter, and beginning instead to answer to those of a higher and more refined order; so that one world with its scenery and inhabitants seems to fade slowly away from his view, while another world of a more elevated character dawns upon him in its stead. (16)

Another point to be borne in mind is that the words "higher" and "lower" with reference to different planes of consciousness do not refer in any sense, to their location in physical space, for in fact, they all occupy the same space. There are several spaces other than the gross, physical space or *sthulakasa*. We find in the Upanishads and the *Tantras* repeated allusions to subtle spaces such as *cittakasa*,

cidakasa, mahakasa, and so on. The term *akasa* connotes space. Iyengar touches on this concept of subtle spaces when he presents a precise picture of the various worlds visited by Aswapathy:

This occult world is a model world, an "overt universe", mediating between the world we live in and the omnipresent universe that is *Sachchidananda*. It is not one world but all possible worlds - one might say, what Yasoda saw in little Krishna's mouth, all the worlds together but forged as one world. The occult world - stair defies and transcends *our* notions of Space and Time. (Dawn to Greater Dawn 44)

Aswapathy first entered the kingdom of subtle matter which overtops our physical world. It was a region of the dream-world where preparations were on for everything that was to manifest on earth subsequently. Madhusudan Reddy brings out the theatre imagery inherent in this world: "It is in this master theatre that the drama of earth-existence is first enacted to the full satisfaction of its supreme author-director before it is staged in our Space-Time auditorium" (Savitri 72). The subtle beings dwelt "Immortal in a world of motionless Time / And an unchanging muse of deep self-space" (Savitri 2.2. p. 109). Indeed, it was a fixed, immobile world in frozen Time and Space. The sense of separateness and distance from all objects outside oneself, which is very typical of the phenomenal world, was absent

in the subtle world, for there a "fourth dimension of aesthetic sense / Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all, / To the cosmic wideness re-aligns our souls" (2.2. p. 112). The fourth dimension implies an expansion of consciousness and a total release from the petty confines of the ego, and an ability to visualise higher and higher orders of reality which lie beyond the scope of ordinary perception. Hanlon's perceptive comments deserve mention here: "The act of visualizing a higher figure is an act of self-realization, of not only widening one's mental and material horizons, but of increasing the spaciousness of the soul" (Into the Fourth Dimension 32).

Passing beyond the subtle physical realms Aswapathy entered into the domains of life, where everything was in a flux, being subject to "Time's inconstant wheel" (2.3. p. 117). He was temporarily fascinated by the Life planes at the peaks, which melted into the vastitudes of the Self where the finite blended with the infinite, where Time merged with the Eternal. He saw that:

On a spiritual and mysterious peak

Only a miracle's high transfiguring line

Divided life from the formless Infinite

And sheltered Time against eternity.

Out of that formless stuff Time mints his shapes [. . .]. (2.3. p. 120)

But Aswapathy was quick to see that Death reigned supreme in that region, so that immortality appeared to be powerless before it.

An overall sense of inertia and inconstancy characterised the realm of the Little Life into which Aswapathy next entered. About the ephemeral creature's daily life, he noted: "Time has he none to turn his eyes within / And look for his lost self and his dead soul" (Savitri 2.5. p. 165). In the Inconscient was present an involved consciousness with infinite possibilities, but the matter was so gross that there was felt no need to grapple with higher notions such as Infinity or Eternity.

Escaping from the grey anarchy of the lower life, Aswapathy travelled into the kingdoms of the greater life. It was predominantly a world of dreams and aspirations waiting to be fulfilled. Life's mission was to manifest the Unmanifest. About this region, the poet states: "A timeless mystery works out in Time" (2.6. p. 178). Aswapathy noticed that the beings of that world were tenants of a freer space and enjoyed "universal widenesses" (2.6. p. 183), though reluctantly, to the infiltration of true knowledge and pure love. The creative life force of that realm devised innumerable bodies for the infinite and the disembodied. Commenting on this region Madhusudan Reddy writes: "In its vesture of Time, this greater life-force conceals the immortal flame [. . .]" (Savitri 82). In spite of cosmic dimensions there, no "silent peak is found where Time can rest" (Savitri 2.6. p. 197). Aswapathy observed that life there was perpetually on the move, having lost touch with Eternity. Sri Aurobindo remarks that "indifferent the Eternal watches Time" (2.6. p. 201). Clearly, this was a region where the aspiration for the Timeless Infinite was not

keen enough, and where, thus, the limitations of Time and Space prevailed.

Seeking calmly to find the cause of the world failure, Aswapathy penetrated the surface view of Nature where he perceived the dark, hostile and perverted mind of Nescience looking up at creation. "It was a space where nothing could be true" (2.7. p. 206), for it was the region of Hell in all its naked horror. The yogi realised that while there, man's endless state of perverse pains and sufferings was nothing but an "anguished nothingness" (2.7. p. 218). Time and Space had no meaning, because all the time "the soul lived on and suffered more" (2.8. p. 227), due to "the dull aching hours" of this "life's long hell (2.8. p. 228). Sri Aurobindo's delineation of the hellish existence, in which Time and Space have lost their meaning, is comparable to the long accounts of *narakavarnana* 'accounts of hell' one comes across in Vyasa's Bhagavatam, Dante's Divine Comedy, and the portrayal of life in the existential literature of the West. Like Nilakanta (Shiva), Aswapathy consumed the poison of that soulless place, and by a sacrificial act of sheer identity with it, he "saw in Night the Eternal's shadowy veil, / Knew death for a cellar of the house of life [. . .]" (2.8. p. 231). He continued to strive to discover the secret key of change in the deep slumber of the cosmic will.

Aswapathy had to pass through nights of doubt and depression before it dawned on him that even the darker aspects of our terrestrial drama had some significance in our evolution through Time and Space. He needed time to assimilate his

experiences before moving on. In the next plane, he experienced, "a wide intimate and blissful Dawn" where "all things that Time's torn heart had made" were healed (2.8. p. 232). Division ceased to be, and he could perceive the integral union of matter and spirit. Aswapathy then flew into the paradise of the Life Gods, a region characterised by perpetual joy and a bright felicity. The yogi rose to the stature of the gods and he was suffused with a sense of immortality. In Sri Aurobindo's crisp statement: "Immortality captured Time and carried Life" (2.9. p. 237). Mehta's observations on the pilgrim of Time are quite revealing:

He had seen for long the endless succession of Time, but the flow of Time by itself made no sense. He wanted to know the meaning of Time - succession. But for this he must touch the realm of Timelessness, for it is the Timeless that contains the meaning of time. (Dialogue with Death 38)

What the epic poet indicates is that it is only through Time that Eternity can be experienced.

With an ever-expanding consciousness the King moved next to the realms of the Mind which had packed "into its sealed small infinity, / Its endless time-made world outfacing Time [. . .]" (2.10. p. 238). Here, the "moments stretched towards the eternal Now, / The hours discovered immortality [. . .]" (2.10. p. 238). What the

poet means is that for an instant, Aswapathy was able to taste the concentrated bliss of the everlasting Now and the boundless Vast. In that instant Time appeared to stand still, and immortality was unveiled. The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart uses a similar term "Eternal Present" to denote Sri Aurobindo's "eternal Now". He too believes that God consolidates the past and the future in the present. "The three divisions of Time are an open book to Him, an intense Eternity where all movement stops, so also all becoming" (Nityabodhananda 88). But at the level of awareness attained so far, such an ecstatic, liberating experience was only a momentary one for Aswapathy.

Rising even more above the limits of the human mind, Aswapathy perceived that the ascending planes of the greater Mind exposed the "omniscient immensities" (Savitri 2.11. p. 261) beyond. This was a luminous region where the gulf between the human and the divine happened to close up. About this level of consciousness, the epic poet affirms: "Our present feels sometimes their regal touch, / Our future strives towards their luminous thrones [. . .]" (2.11. p. 263). The awakened soul climbs back to unborn heights where "Time's last ridges touch eternity's skies/ And Nature speaks to the spirit's absolute" (2.11. p. 264). We may say that here we have an intersection of Time and the Timeless, Space and the Spaceless, for thought, which is in Time and Space, gives way to vision, which transcends these two parameters. Obviously, such an ascent is through a triple realm of thought. Ordinary

thoughts are "World-Time's enjoyers" and "Moulders and measurers of fragmented Space" (2.11. p. 266). Still higher are the lords of Thought, whose all-surveying gaze embraces Time and Space. Aswapathy had attained this height of perception characteristic of the greater mind. He had made of Space his "wide all-seeing gaze/ Surveying the enormous work of Time [. . .]". This realisation dawned on him: "The cosmos is no accident in Time [. . .]" (2.11. p. 271). Nadkarni elaborates that the powers of the greater mind "try to squeeze termless truths into transparent systems and to make the Timeless accountable to time" ("Aswapati's Travels through the Worlds" 294). Neither thought nor mind could help him grasp the "secret knowledge" of the seers and the *Rishis*. He realised the need to transcend mind and thought, and to surrender to the Divine. As a result: "The timeless Ray descends into our hearts / And we are rapt into eternity" (2.11. p. 276).

The King left the frontiers of awakened thought to scale the summits of the unseen and the unknown mounting "in haste to the Eternal's house" (2.12. p. 277). His *Kundalini* was slowly reaching the *Sahasrara*. Sri Aurobindo's depiction of the mystic phenomenon is both colourful and picturesque:

Time's sun-flowers' gaze at gold Eternity:

There are the imperishable beatitudes.

A million lotuses swaying on one stem,

World after coloured and ecstatic world

Climbs towards some far unseen epiphany. (2.12. p. 279)

When our subtle centres of consciousness open like flowers to a celestial atmosphere, we are released from "the rude and tragic hold of Time" (2.12. p. 279).

At the level of consciousness then attained, Aswapathy became fully aware that his further ascent to greater, unknown and unseen heights would be impossible without Divine aid. Sri Aurobindo firmly believes: "Only the Eternal's strength in us can dare / To attempt the immense adventure of that climb [. . .]" (2.12. p. 280). Avoiding the various *siddhis* or occult powers that accrue with the rise of the Serpent Power, Aswapathy passed on to a more divine sphere which was above the realms of the diverse gods and godheads, above "the parting of the roads of Time, / Above the Silence and its thousandfold Word [. . .]" (2.12. p. 282).

Leaving behind him the world of the Ideal, the King entered the realm of the self of Mind. Detaching himself from his physical moorings, he became a witness self, silently looking on at the passing phenomena. This witness silence, the poet says, is "the mystic birthplace of the soul" (2.13. p. 283). Clearly, Aswapathy had attained *atmabodha* or self-realization; through the intensely spiritual nature of his inmost self he could identify himself with the immensity of the Infinite and the Eternal: "He stood on a wide arc of summit Space / Alone with an enormous Self

of Mind / Which held all life in a corner of its vasts" (2.13. p. 283). His soul experienced the peace of silence that comes as a result of the freedom from a cluttering of thoughts in the mind, and it comprehended the cosmic whole. All on a sudden, a ray of light fell on the scene. It then dawned on the traveller in Time that all the knowledge erected by the mind was unsound and unreliable.

Aswapathy resumed his spiritual odyssey tirelessly. He noticed a recluse-gate in the background of Mind-Space. He soon found a nook which could embrace all the worlds and spaces from the most gross to the most subtle. It was a "point that was the conscious knot of Space, / An hour eternal in the heart of Time" (2.14. p. 290). This was the realm of the disembodied, the heart of Space, the heart of Time. There, the King noted that "Distance could not divide, Time could not change," and all there was "soul or made of sheer soul-stuff" (2.14. p. 291). By then, Aswapathy had reached the expanse of the World-Soul, which was the centre of all. The poet comments: "His soul passed on, a single conscious power, / Towards the end which ever begins again," in a bold attempt to arrive at the ultimate source of all things, human and divine (2.14. p. 295).

Above the World-Soul Aswapathy found a huge being. It was the "figure of the deathless Two-in-One, / A single being in two bodies clasped [. . .]" (295). It was *Ardhanariswara* or the dual power of Shiva and Shakti, whose trance of bliss sustained the mobile world. Aswapathy felt that his entire being was becoming a

channel for the influx of the unknown. Currents of omnipotence flowed into him as he perceived the One, the "sole omnipotent Goddess ever veiled" (295), who was the Creatrix or the *Mulaprakriti* from whom all things including the dual power had emerged. Overwhelmed by the resplendent brilliance of the Divine Mother's face, Aswapathy made a "surrender of his boundless mind," a "self-giving of his silent heart," and he "fell down at her feet unconscious, prone" (2.14. p. 296).

Aswapathy's overwhelming experience brings to mind Arjuna's bewilderment and consternation when the Lord Krishna revealed his *Visvarupa* 'cosmic form' to him on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. As long as we are fettered by Time and Space, the effulgence of the incommensurable Omniscience will be unbearable in intensity to the physical vehicle. Mukherjee brings out the potency or overwhelming nature of the yogic state when the mortal consciousness confronts the Transcendental:

We may recall in this connection the stern warning uttered by the supreme Lord to Moses so that the latter might not try to go near Him and "see" Him in his original Form. For no consciousness lodged in any material embodiment can ever succeed in doing so.

(87)

What Aswapathy experienced was truly a most profound moment, pregnant with all times and all spaces, suffusing him with indescribable joy. But the timeless

experience lasted for only a split second:

After a measureless moment of the soul
 Again returning to these surface fields
 Out of the timeless depths where he had sunk,
 He heard once more the slow tread of the hours.

(Savitri 2.15. p. 297)

Arising, the King had a vision of the "one same stupendous All" with its "inexhaustible acts in a timeless Time, / A space that is its own infinity" (2.15. p. 298). Pandit epitomises Aswapathy's realisation at that juncture lucidly: "An all-revealing Light leads him to the regions of transcendent Truth where Time and Space are seen in their true nature as self-extensions and self-durations of the Spirit" (A Summary of Savitri 82). Aswapathy realised that: "There distance was his own huge spirit's extent; / Delivered from the fictions of the mind / Time's triple dividing step baffled no more [. . .]" (Savitri 2.15. p. 299).

Aswapathy had reached the Overmind region where Space did not divide and Time was one idea. Henceforth, everything was perceived in visions, which lay beyond the realms of Space and Time. This is how Mukherjee explains the state of Aswapathy's soul, which had caught a momentary glimpse of the Body of the Divine:

The soul admitted to this awe-inspiring vision beholds all things

in one view, not with a divided, partial, and therefore bewildered seeing of the mental consciousness but with the all-embracing and therefore all-reconciling courageous vision of the heroic spirit. (78)

In the course of his spiritual odyssey Aswapathy succeeded in experiencing every level of consciousness, each endowed with its characteristic Time and Space. He ranged freely both in the manifest and the unmanifest planes, explored the secrets of the Infinite in the Superconscient. As a fitting finale to his long voyage, he "scanned the secrets of the Overmind, / He bore the rapture of the Oversoul," and as a result, his "finite parts approached their absolutes, / His actions framed the movements of the Gods, / His will took up the reins of cosmic Force" (Savitri 2.15. p. 302). To put it in a nutshell, he became, through identification, the unborn, eternal self.

At the near end of his adventure of consciousness, Aswapathy saw through the evanescence of temporal existence. Earthly power and knowledge seemed to him to be mere "gifts of Time" (3.1. p. 305). A silence settled on the yogi's striving heart and he turned to the "Ineffable's timeless call" (305). Having transcended the ego once and for all, he was passing beyond the manifest world of forms and names. Mukherjee furnishes a brilliant commentary on this experience:

When one reaches the horizons of manifestation, standing on the dividing line of separation between manifestation and non-manifestation, one seems to discover that sight and form cannot cross the line and one is left with a pure perception alone and if this ends, the whole *namarupatmakam jagat*, the world of names and forms, will vanish into nothingness. (82)

This is what transpired in the case of Aswapathy who realised thus: "All he had been and all towards which he grew / Must now be left behind or else transform / Into a self of That which has no name" (Savitri 3.1. p. 307). The yogi became omnipotent, "a lonely seer of Time" (307). He found himself in a state of divine abyss or void. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space, / An Everlastingness cut off from Time [. . .]" (3.1. p. 308). Obviously, the King resumed his upward flight with increasing weightlessness so that he could travel easily into the domains of mystical spacelessness. Mehta clarifies that it was "not so much the space of nature as the Space of Consciousness" (Dialogue 69).

Aswapathy had reached the fag end on the road of Time. To quote from the epic: "What seemed the source and end was a wide gate, / A last bare step into eternity" (3.2. p. 311). Suddenly, there appeared before him in that utter silence a most marvellous presence. It was the Divine Mother, the mediatrix who connected

the earth with the Supreme, standing at the head of Time. "The Adoration of the Divine Mother" (3.2) offers us the vintage of Aurobindonian poetry, a true blend of picturesqueness, cadence and mysticism. The King perceived that a "Mother Might brooded upon the world," that the "Formless and the Formed were joined in her," and that she stood at the head of "birth and toil and fate" (3.2. pp. 313-14). The Divine Mother is both *nirguna* 'formless' and *saguna* 'with form'. Vyasa's Devi Bhagavatam underscores this idea throughout. Sri Aurobindo apparently echoes Vyasa when he postulates that the Divine Mother, in brief, is the origin of Time, Space, form and relativity. His portrayal of this enigmatic phenomenon is both elevating and prophetic:

This was a seed cast into endless Time.

A Word is spoken or a Light is shown,

A moment sees, the ages toil to express.

So flashing out of the Timeless leaped the worlds;

An eternal instant is the cause of the years. (3.2. p. 315)

What the poet means is that the seed of aspiration for the Divine was sown in Aswapathy's being. It is the *bijakshara* or the primal sound *Aum*. *Sabdabrahman* or *Aum* reverberates, and in an instant the vision of the Ultimate Reality or the "bodiless Namelessness" (Savitri 1.3. p.40) flashes. But it takes ages for the Many to emerge from the One and manifest on earth. Pandit supplements: "A moment's

vibration in the Eternal is at the root of these unrollings of Time" (Readings in Savitri 7: 79). At the acme of his mystical climb, Aswapathy could identify the Divine Mother in both her *saguna* and *nirguna* aspects. That was "the mystery the Night conceals" (Savitri 3.2. p. 314). One who unravels this enigma intuitively, obviously goes beyond Time and Space. Sri Aurobindo affirms that it is by dint of the Divine Grace that Aswapathy succeeded in his yoga. Her descent and compassion alone can alter the powerful foundations of inexorable Time. She is "the magnet of our difficult ascent," indeed. "Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base" (314).

Aswapathy made a total, unconditional and unhesitating surrender before the Divine Mother. The poet declares: "His soul was freed and given to her alone" (3.2. p. 316). At once, a last and overwhelming transformation came over him. His soul spread out like a sea and embraced the entire universe in one unity. Sri Aurobindo portrays Aswapathy's attainment of cosmic consciousness in a manner which has a high quality of immediacy: "Infinity swallowed him into shoreless trance" (3.3. p. 320). As a result:

He abode defended in his shoreless self,
 Companioned only by the all-seeing One.
 A Mind too mighty to be bound by Thought,

A Life too boundless for the play in Space,
 A Soul without borders unconvinced of Time,
 He felt the extinction of the world's long pain,
 He became the unborn Self that never dies [. . .]. (3.3. p. 322)

The light of bliss and might penetrated his inmost being and infused him with the rapture of beatific energies which joined "Time to the Timeless, poles of a single joy" (3.3. p. 323). Evidently, at the end of his arduous journey through overmental and supraphysical planes of consciousness, Aswapathy succeeded in transcending the mind, thought, Time, Space and therefore, pain and misery.

When he was thus blessed with the beatific vision of the Mother Divine, the Seer-King, who was magnanimity incarnate, beseeched Her to grant a similar transformation for the entire earth, but the Creatrix cautioned him: "Speak not my secret name to hostile Time; / Man is too weak to bear the Infinite's weight" (3.4. p. 335). Occult or mystic truths and revelations are invariably kept secret by those who know them, lest the ignorant should mock at or abuse them. Sri Aurobindo emphasises the importance of the opportune moment. Hence, the Divine Mother exhorted Aswapathy to anticipate the right time, reassuring him: "All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour" (3.4. p. 341). But the noble king persisted: "Mission to earth some living form of thee. / One moment fill with thy eternity, / Let thy infinity in one body live [. . .]" (3.4. p. 345). Aswapathy was manifestly

pleading with the *nirguna shakti* to condescend to restrict and confine her transcendental Self, and assume a mortal form in the co-ordinates of our space-time continuum, in order to redeem mankind, struggling and chafing under the yoke of mortality. He implored to her: "Pack with the eternal might one human hour / And with one gesture change all future time" (345). Complying with his ardent prayer the Mother, out of compassion, granted him the boon that all things shall be fulfilled in Time:

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,

A branch of heaven transplant to human soil ;

Nature shall overleap her mortal step ;

Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will. (3.4. p. 346)

Critics and scholars are of the general opinion that Aswapathy's *Yoga* is highly autobiographical. "Aswapathy is a projection of the Saint's heroic self-image," observes Murti (8). Likewise, Som Ranchan regards the king to be Sri Aurobindo's mouthpiece ("Appendix - II" 164). S.D. Sharma's remark is quite relevant in the context: "Wading through the quagmire of worldly allurements with a dauntless spirit, the poet stretches his soul in this epic poem out to infinity - telescoping the past, the present and the future [...]" ("Spiritual Pabulum" 47). Georges Van Vrekhem is very vehement in equating the epic hero with the epic poet himself. He states categorically that "the Protagonist of the first three Books of *Savitri* is not the

Aswapati of the Mahabharata, but Sri Aurobindo himself." He adds that, these three books together with his later sonnets and shorter poems - are his spiritual autobiography ("Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati in Savitri" 258). He notes that Sri Aurobindo mentions for the first time the name of Aswapati only on page 341 ["But Aswapati's heart replied to her" (3.4)], evidently discounting the importance of the legendary king and sage, and to prevent the dimming of our perception of "Sri Aurobindo's world-transforming action" (262).

Vrekhem's observations are not unfounded. A close perusal of Sri Aurobindo's later sonnets (1930-1950) in particular reveals a parallel personal odyssey to Aswapathy's *sadhana*. For instance "The Pilgrim of the Night," "The Inconscient," "The Infinite Adventure," (CP 144, 145, 147) etc. describe the epic poet's sojourn through the various planes of the mind. "Transformation" records his supramental change as a result of his arduous travel into the inner occult fields. The poet has "drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine" and realises that "Time is my drama or my pageant dream" (133). In "Cosmic Consciousness," he affirms: "I have wrapped the wide world in my wider self / And Time and Space my spirit's seeing are" (144). Again, in "The Self's Infinity," the poet states: "I have become what before Time I was," that "My life is a silence grasped by timeless hands," that "I am alone with my own self for space," and that "I stretch to an eternal everywhere" (152). "Immortality" depicts the state of consciousness of the poet whose *Kundalini* has been roused:

having abolished death and time, his nature lives in the deep heart of immortality. The Serpent Power has crossed the *Ajna* and reached the *Sahasrara*, for Sri Aurobindo declares: "God's contract signed with Ignorance is torn; / Time has become the Eternal's endless year, / My soul's wide self of living infinite Space [. . .]" (167). In Iyengar's view, the Rishi's travels in Sri Aurobindo's poem of the same name "might be a first foreshadowing of Aswapathy's more extensive travels in *Savitri*" (Sri Aurobindo 157).

More examples may be adduced to substantiate the point in question. The fact is that on perusing the three books pertaining to Aswapathy's immense *sadhana*, one does get the feeling that the poet is not writing about something of which he does not possess first-hand knowledge. In fact, the King's yoga of transcendence is a clear reflection of Integral Yoga. Little wonder therefore, that there is an immediate quality in the poet's meticulous or even clinical description of each state of consciousness experienced by Aswapathy. Raghavacharyulu displays a deep, penetrative insight when he writes trenchantly on this aspect:

Aswapathy is the focus of the outer epic which formulates Sri Aurobindo's own pursuit of Integral Yoga and serves as a frame for the inner epic describing Savitri's plunge into the interior distance of the Eternal, Infinite, Universal Being [. . .].

His transcript and testimony of the mystic experiences provide an exact, comprehensive and profound record of the Yogic climb of the *Kundalini* from the *Muladhara* to the *Sahasrara* through the involuted spiral of the various *Chakras* and *Mandalas* as described in Patanjali's great work. ("The Immense Journey" 65-66)

The similarities between Aswapathy's *sadhana* and Sri Aurobindo's yoga should not lead us to suppose that there is a one-to-one correspondence in each detail; nor is it proper to assume that there is a chronological presentation in the narration of the occult phenomena. Iyengar staunchly endorses this view: "The identification of Aswapati's Yoga with Sri Aurobindo's should not, however, mean equating Aswapati's with Sri Aurobindo's life at all points or in every particular" ("A Survey of Savitri" 309). Deshpande elucidates this point comprehensively. He remarks that Sri Aurobindo's approach to Aswapathy's yoga is neither chronological nor "Newtonianly linear in the successive manner of a cause-and-effect series". He adds:

In fact it transcends the dimensions of Time [. . .]. We may say that when Sri Aurobindo is describing the upward journey of Aswapati climbing the ascending hierarchy of these innumerable worlds [. . .] it is not a curve of Time that he is tracing in sequence.

[. . .] it is a work which graphically characterises the entire evolutionary march of the Soul of the Earth. That is why the autobiography is a legend, an intense and powerful Legend of the Future, a future that is being enacted all along. ("Apropos of Savitri" xxii)

The fact that Sri Aurobindo's unique yoga derives from the seed idea of the *Tantra* is illustrated by Aswapathy's yoga. Nandakumar argues, for example, that the Tantric mode that helps one "to connect" with the Unknowable helps Aswapati not to be lost in the "Everlastingness cut off from Time" ("Savitri: The Devikavyam" 190). He is transformed as a result of the *Kundalini* adventure of consciousness, into a sort of divine spaceship existing beyond Time and Space, endowing him with supramental Time vision. The various tiers of the World-Stair that he "sees" are truly the externalised image of his inmost thoughts "that resemble the different *avaranas* or coverings in Sri Chakra where the one Divine is also seen as the many in gradations of divinity [. . .]" (199). No longer is there any division of Time or Space. "For worlds were many, but the Self was one" (Savitri 3.3. p. 323).

Aswapathy's *sadhana* is an upward mode of expansion of consciousness, which enables one to perceive the true nature of Time and Space. Through his marvellous forages into the unknown and uncharted territories of soul-space

undertaken with the utmost tenacity, the king understands how Time and Space are different, often bizarre, on different subtle planes. Throughout the odyssey of the soul, there is a sustained contrast between the ephemeral and the eternal. Purani makes an observation to this effect: "An ascending and a descending order of worlds from Eternity into Time and from Time back to Eternity was thus revealed to Aswapathy" (Sri Aurobindo's Savitri 167). In the words of the epic poet: "Ascending and descending twixt life's poles / The seried kingdoms of the graded Law / Plunged from the Everlasting into Time," and "Climbed back from Time into undying Self[. . .]" (1.5. pp. 88-89). Aswapathy could clearly perceive the relation between Eternity and the Time movement.

Thus, at the end of his occult climb, Aswapathy is so evolved in consciousness that he becomes, we may say, an authority on Time and Space. Dilating on the relevance of such an all - comprehending enlightenment Iyengar makes a remark, which serves to sum up the King's immense *sadhana*:

It is only from the ground of such total knowledge of past, present and future that he can be in a position to locate current ills and seek their removal, and to infer the evolutionary trends and pray or strive for their early and full realisation. (Dawn 39)

And it is left to Savitri to continue and complete the great task.