

The Inward Plunge

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Chapter V

The Inward Plunge

The latter half of Sri Aurobindo's epic is devoted to Savitri's Yoga, which forms a natural sequel to Aswapathy's *sadhana*. Whereas the King's Yoga is an individual, preparatory effort, triggered off by the prospect of personal beatitude initially, Savitri's *sadhana* aims at the divinisation of the earth, and the redemption of mankind through the resurrection of Satyavan. It is a deep probe into the nature and function of death. In temporal and spatial terms, Savitri's yoga demonstrates how one can transcend Time and Space by breaking free of the dread of Death, the pitiless lord of the realm of terrestrial existence, and how through an increasingly inward voyage, involving an intensification of consciousness, the soul can attain its original status in the "Unknowable's vast estate" (Savitri 1.3. p. 39).

The titular heroine's birth and growth, her quest for her divine collaborator, Satyavan, her confrontation with *Yama* and her ultimate triumph over Time and Space are all recounted in nine Books, from Book Four to Book Twelve of the epic. The birth and growth of the divine child Savitri, her meeting with Satyavan, the Shalwa prince, and her marriage to him, form the subject matter of Books Four to Six, Book Seven, Canto One, and Book Eight. Savitri's yogic *sadhana* is elaborated in six cantos in Book Seven, Cantos Two to Seven. Her encounter with

Death, which marks the climax of her spiritual efforts, comprises the bulk of Books Nine to Eleven. The final Book Twelve is the Epilogue of the epic, and it relates the story of Savitri's "return to earth" with Satyavan, after her phenomenal victory over Death. In Sri Aurobindo's hands, all the three - Savitri, Satyavan and Death - become symbols, and so the conquest over death assumes metaphysical connotations.

Vyasa depicts Savitri variously as *kanya tejasvini* the 'radiant daughter', as *devakanya* or 'celestial damsel' who is endowed with heavenly splendour, and as *devarupini*, the very embodiment of auspiciousness in every sense. In Sri Aurobindo's vision she becomes the timeless incarnation of the Divine Mother herself. He adds: "This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to "hew the ways of Immortality" " (Letters, Savitri 729). To cite from the poet's quill, "The omniscient Goddess" Savitri is an "Ambassadress twixt eternity and change" (1.1. p.4). Savitri, therefore, has to be understood as an *avatar* like Krishna or Christ, who had come down to the world of Time and Space with a mandate from the Absolute to redeem humanity from the sepulchral inconscience of *Yama's* reign of terror. Nolini Kanta Gupta succinctly elucidates Savitri's task as an *avatar*: "The task of the incarnate Supreme Consciousness is to revive the death-bound divinity, to free the human consciousness, re-install it in its original radiant status of the Divine Consciousness"

("Savitri - The Word of Sri Aurobindo" 54).

Sri Aurobindo's comment about Savitri's advent is: "A WORLD's desire compelled her mortal birth" (Savitri 1.3. p. 22). Indeed, the divine child is the *yagnaphala* or *yagnaprasad* or fruit of Aswapathy's ardent askesis, just as Rama, an *avatar* 'incarnation' of Vishnu, was born as a result of Dasaratha's *Putrakamesti yaga* or a sacrifice for progeny, or just as Draupadi emerged from the fire as a boon-daughter to King Drupada in the Mahabharata. The Mother of the Universe descended "into earth's imperfect mould" and resumed "her divine unfinished task" of hastening the evolutionary process towards Supermanhood (4.1. p. 353). Savitri's birth is an eternal sacrifice, for the descent into the spatio-temporal mould is indeed a limitation. It is an eternal phenomenon, a cosmic occurrence. Deshpande's words illuminate this point very well. He explains that Savitri's coming as the daughter of the timeless king Aswapathy is "an eternal birth which is also the birth in eternal Time". It is "an unfolding Story of the Eternal himself," which "cannot be set into the domains of what we see as the past, present, and future" ("Apropos of Savitri" xix). Thus the poet writes about her incarnation: "Once more with her fathomless heart she fronted Time," thereby disclosing the "secret contact broken off in Time" (Savitri 4.1. p. 353).

Being a divine incarnation, Savitri was an unusual child. "Immortal rhythms

swayed in her time-born steps [. . .]" (1.2. p. 15). So she displayed emotions and attitudes which were in keeping with the realm of eternity from where she had descended, but far above this world in Time and Space. To cite the poet's words:

Even in her childish movements could be felt
 The nearness of a light still kept from earth,
 Feelings that only eternity could share,
 Thoughts natural and native to the gods. (Savitri 4.1. p. 355)

Naturally, "Time's message of brief light was not for her" (1.1. p. 6). However, as Iyengar remarks, her surface human reactions did not "really belie the veiled divinity in her heart" (Indian Writing 200). We may say that Savitri was a *jivanmukta* 'a liberated soul' with a double consciousness: she retained in her innermost recesses the infinite wealth of the Supreme Consciousness; at the same time, she displayed a superficial perception of the world like ordinary mortals. Swami Sivananda's observations are highly enlightening in this matter:

The double consciousness of the Jeevanmukta places him in a unique position like the man on the wall to be aware of both the spheres of consciousness. His realization of Brahman is irrevocable. He cannot be shaken from his supreme consciousness. Yet for the good of humanity he engages a part of

his consciousness to function in the worldly sphere. (201)

Thus, Savitri lived simultaneously in a Timeless-Spaceless stance within a Time-Space framework. At times one and, at other times the other, came to the surface. Nolini Kanta Gupta exemplifies Savitri's function in elevating human consciousness to the utmost bounds beyond the phenomenal world:

Savitri is the Divine Consciousness but here in the mortal body she is clothed in the human consciousness; it is the human consciousness that she is to lead upward and beyond and it is in and through the human consciousness that the Divine Realisation has to be expressed and established. (On "Savitri" 6)

Besides preparing the ground for Savitri's great *sadhana*, Aswapathy also initiates her into it. By dint of "the gift of a revealing hour" he gazed at her brow which was the "very room and smile of musing Space, / Its brooding line infinity's symbol curve" (Savitri 4.3. p. 372). With his inner vision he knew that the Divine Mother had granted him a boon in the form of his daughter. Addressing Savitri as "spirit, traveller of eternity," who had come to the earth from the "immortal spaces here" in order to establish her foothold on "Chance and Time," he exhorted her to "meet a greater god, thy self beyond Time" (4.3. pp. 373-75). The words of her seer-father had the effect of a *mantra* on Savitri. They created a groove in her

consciousness and she "turned to vastnesses not yet her own" (375). The seed of transformation was sown and Savitri awoke to newer and higher dimensions of perception.

The meeting of Savitri and Satyavan in the forest signifies a decisive development in the heroine's *sadhana*. Unawares, the divine maiden "had neared her nameless goal" (5.1. p. 389) at the destined spot and hour. Satyavan is depicted in glowing terms as the human soul evolving from the Inconscience to Immortality, a "Veda-knower of the unwritten book" (5.2. p. 393). Deshpande comments: "Satyavan has, in the process of evolving Time, taken on himself the burden of inconscient horror and suffering" ("Satyavan Must Die" 16). On seeing Savitri, he instantly recognised in her, his soul's reply across dividing time. Madhusudan Reddy points out: "Savitri and Satyavan, missioned souls as they were, are drawn together from their long journeyings through time immemorial, for the fulfilment of earth's destiny" (Savitri 41). The two are portrayed in the epic as archetypal man and woman. Satyavan is the Eternal's delegate soul in man, while Savitri is the divine *Shakti*, who has descended in the process of evolving Time. They are "Travellers across the limitless plains of Time" drawn together from "fate-led journeyings." When they met on earth: "A moment passed that was eternity's ray, / An hour began, the matrix of new Time" (Savitri 5.2. p. 399). Symbolically speaking, the Timeless, Spaceless Supreme Creatrix had chosen the aspiring human soul as her mate;

naturally, there was hope that the soul could break itself free out of its imprisonment in Time-Space.

The omniscient Narad functions as a soothsayer or a *nimittakarana* 'causal agent'. On seeing Savitri, who had just returned after choosing Satyavan, he immediately intuited the future course that matters were going to take. He made an ominous prognostication: "Twelve swift-winged months are given to him and her; / This day returning Satyavan must die" (6.1. p. 431). In an apparently casual manner, he set free destiny in that hour.

Savitri's mother, in a characteristically human manner, tried to dissuade her daughter from marrying the ill-fated Satyavan, but the young maiden refused to revoke her decision. In a calm and resolute voice Savitri announced: "Once my heart chose and chooses not again." Neither Fate nor Death nor Time could ever dissolve her seal of truth to Satyavan (6.1. p. 432). Once and for all, she clinched all arguments masterfully: "I have looked at him from my immortal Self, / I have seen God smile at me in Satyavan; / I have seen the Eternal in a human face" (6.1. p. 436). Narad, who could foresee with his divine eye the ultimate blessed outcome of the whole drama, endorsed Savitri's choice. He convinced the Queen to let things take their course. He prophesied that a day was bound to come when Savitri would have to launch on her mystic voyage single-handed and unhelped, and "cross alone a perilous bridge in Time." He added: "In that tremendous silence lone and

lost / Of a deciding hour in the world's fate, / In her soul's climbing beyond mortal time," Savitri would have to confront Death" on "some verge between Time and Timelessness" (6.2. p. 461). Her conquest or otherwise would have serious repercussions on human destiny, for Savitri was a ray of the Transcendent, who alone had the power to smite Death.

The one year that Savitri spent in the blissful company of her beloved husband brought out the human aspect of the *avatar*. At that stage she obviously lived in her outer surface self, and hence experienced poignantly the poverty of time and the fleeting hours. She tried to drink life to the lees, clutching at every moment she could, to be with Satyavan, but in his absence, the grief-stricken woman "saw the desert of her coming days / Imaged in every solitary hour" (Savitri 7.1. p. 472).

Savitri had only twelve months of terrestrial existence to perform and perfect her *sadhana* before she could adventure "into infinite mind-space" (7.2. p. 479) and confront Death. Her plight is comparable to that of King Parikshit in Vyasa's Bhagavatam. A change of consciousness occurred in Savitri. The surface crust of silent, inner agony was suddenly broken. A Voice "from her being's summit" summoned her to her mission in life as she sat "staring at the dumb tread of Time," tied like "a sacrifice on the altar of Time," and exhorted her to arise and "vanquish Time and Death" (Savitri 7.2. p. 474). As Savitri was still in her outer consciousness, she initially responded like an ordinary human being, feeling overwhelmed and

defeated before the mighty force of Death. But the stentorian Voice admonished and challenged her for forgetting "man and life and time and its hours," forgetting "eternity's call, forgetting God" (7.2. p. 475). Had she not been sent with a special "mandate from eternity" with extraordinary powers and potentialities to fulfil the special destiny of leading "man to Truth's wide and golden road / That runs through finite things to eternity ?" (7.2. pp. 475-76). These words sank into Savitri's consciousness; her inner self was suddenly illumined and she expressed a readiness to comply with the exhortions of the "deathless Voice" (476).

The Voice instructed Savitri to plunge into her inner depths, seek her soul, remove the clutter of thoughts from her mind, and to establish a contact with the silence of the ultimate calm which would impart to her the strength to vanquish death. The Voice proclaimed: "Thy nature shall be the engine of his works, / Thy voice shall house the mightiness of his Word: / Then shalt thou harbour my force and conquer Death" (7.2. p. 476). In short, what Savitri received was a lucid account of the steps of Integral Yoga.

Instantaneously and unflinchingly, Savitri made a living choice to seek the Infinite. Being *dhyanyogaparayana* 'adept in meditation' she began in right earnest her interiorised yoga of self-realisation for the ordeal ahead. She plunged within, came out of her body in an occult way. With her inner eye opened, she gazed more and more inward, resolute to strive, to seek, and to find her soul. At

first, a "dream disclosed to her the cosmic past" (7.2. p. 477). Savitri perceived in her inner vision, the entire panorama of the past evolutionary history of the phenomenal universe, including the formation of life and mind, the generation of pain and pleasure as "the deed of a blind World-Energy" (477). Iyengar comments that in "an arc of wide comprehension, past and present mingle and overflow into the future" (Dawn 62).

Being an archetypal woman, Savitri gradually identified herself with everything she met. Sri Aurobindo asserts that "the whole destiny of mankind was hers" (Savitri 4.4. p. 377). This part of Savitri's Yoga bears a certain resemblance to Aswapathy's exploration of the subtle worlds. The repetition, far from being a mere reiteration of the yogic procedure, is truly an emphasis on the efficacy of Integral Yoga in transcending Time and Space. Iyengar endorses this view: "That Aswapathy, in a certain situation, had received a series of illuminations, does not make it redundant for his daughter to go over the ground again [. . .]" (Dawn 79).

Savitri saw space filled with the seeds of life, and human creatures being born in Time. In her deep meditative state she felt that "Time, life and death were passing incidents [. . .]" (Savitri 7.2. p. 487). The lower, inconscient nature had to be overcome in order to attain a higher level of consciousness. She resumed her inward plunge and passed through occult regions where Time and Space were of a different order from that of the external world. In the poet's words: "She crossed

through spaces of a secret self/ And trod in passages of inner Time" (7.3. p. 490). By slow degrees she surmounted the barrier of body consciousness. Savitri's tenacious entry into the inner countries is tellingly pictured in the epic: "Hour after hour she trod without release" fixing "her thought upon the saviour Name". As a result her mind grew still and empty. She became free. "A large deliverance came, a vast calm space" (7.3. p. 491).

In the course of her yogic plunge Savitri encountered three soul forces, each of which was only a portion of her soul, projected to redeem mankind from the travails of Time. Passing on, Savitri experienced an inner silence. The epic poet affirms: "In endless Time her soul reached a wide end, / The spaceless Vast became her spirit's place" (7.5. p. 523). She emerged into the realm of "a deathless sun" (7.5. p. 525) where she encountered the Eternal and Absolute, turned towards Time and the finite. The poet declares: "There suddenly she met her secret soul" (7.5. p. 526). She could vaguely apprehend the presence of the Oversoul, which was a being "immortal in transience". Sri Aurobindo dilates:

Infinity turned its gaze on finite shapes:

Observer of the silent steps of the hours,

Eternity upheld the minute's acts

And the passing scenes of the Everlasting's play. (526)

Savitri realised her unique role in the cosmic drama:

In the Divine Comedy a participant,
 The Spirit's conscious representative,
 God's delegate in our humanity,
 Comrade of the universe, the Transcendent's ray,
 She had come into the mortal body's room
 To play at ball with Time and Circumstance. (526)

Her soul joined the Oversoul, of which it was truly an inseparable part. In the happy phrasing of the poet: "Then with a magic transformation's speed / They rushed into each other and grew one" (7.5. p. 527). To put it in another way, the human Savitri merged into the divine Savitri.

The intensity of Savitri's concentration, as she sat in meditation rose, and she went into a trance. A divine power descended into her being, causing her *Kundalini* to rise, which transformed her and transported her to a plane beyond Time and Space. In a splendid passage characterised by authenticity and *mantric* resonance, Sri Aurobindo portrays Savitri's inner change in terms of the sacred lotus imagery, *chakras* and *granthis*:

A mighty movement rocked the inner space
 As if a world were shaken and found its soul:

Out of the Inconscient's soulless mindless night
 A flaming Serpent rose released from sleep.
 It rose billowing its coils and stood erect
 And climbing mightily, stormily on its way
 It touched her centres with its flaming mouth ;
 As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,
 They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light and bliss.
 Then at the crown it joined the Eternal's space.
 In the flower of the head, in the flower of Matter's base,
 In each divine stronghold and Nature-knot
 It held together the mystic stream which joins
 The viewless summits with the unseen depths,
 The string of forts that make the frail defence
 Safeguarding us against the enormous world,
 Our lines of self-expression in its Vast. (7.5. p. 528)

Evidently, such a sublime-passage, which contains not a word more or less, can emanate only from the quill of a poet like Sri Aurobindo, who had a direct experience of *Kundalini*, and who was, moreover, endowed with *kavivyapara* or the poetic genius to give expression to it in such a sincere and picturesque manner.

The Serpent Power elevated Savitri's level of consciousness beyond the mind.

She beheld the innumerable manifestations of thoughts in Time, which were, in fact, the projections from the realm of the Timeless: "For the Eternal's powers are like himself, / Timeless in the Timeless, in Time ever born" (7.6. p. 541). The merging of her soul with the Oversoul enabled Savitri to perceive the One behind and beyond the Many. The poet uses the Passive voice to bring out the enigmatic nature of the One: "It was perceived, yet hid from mind and sight. / The One only real shut itself from Space / And stood aloof from the idea of Time" (7.6. p. 547). That "One" met Savitri like a point from Space, omnipresent, dimensionless and without direction in the recurring moment in Time, the Eternal Now. It was a "spaceless and a placeless Infinite" (7.6. p. 548), obviously beyond the pale of the human mind. But even at the level of perception which Savitri had attained then, "eternity and infinity seemed but words" (548). The *yogini* had to plunge into even greater depths of consciousness in order to truly experience Timelessness and Spacelessness.

At the zenith of her *sadhana*, Savitri actually attained oneness with the Timeless, Spaceless Absolute. From her surface consciousness it had been a very long voyage to cosmic consciousness. Having made her being a temple of the *yogasakti* or cosmic power, the traveller of eternity became a witness soul. "She passed beyond Time into eternity, / Slipped out of space and became the Infinite [. . .]" (7.7. p. 555). She surmounted the invisible barrier that divided soul from

soul. "She was all vastness and one measureless point" (555). From that point, Savitri strove to hold all in one large embrace. She ascended beyond the boundaries of Time and Space into the Superconscient, which is characterised by Infinity and Eternity. Sri Aurobindo's delineation of this ascent is marked by poetic grandeur and stateliness, and is a fitting finale to the yoga of Savitri:

The cosmos flowered in her, she was its bed.
 She was Time and the dreams of God in Time ;
 She was Space and the wideness of his days.
 From this she rose where Time and Space were not ;
 The superconscient was her native air,
 Infinity was her movement's natural space ;
 Eternity looked out from her on Time. (7.7. p. 557)

Sitaraman comments on Savitri's attainment of cosmic consciousness:

Having thus the whole of the cosmos in her consciousness she rises into the Transcendental and so becomes the conscious bridge between the Eternal and the Temporal, the Infinite and the Finite, the Superconscient and the Inconscient. (95)

Thus, at the end of her *sadhana* Savitri found her soul which was both cosmic and supracosmic. She passed beyond Time into the realm of eternity, and dwelling

perennially in the consciousness of the Divine Mother, she began to equip herself to confront Fate and Time.

Book VIII entitled "Death in the Forest" opens with a picture of Savitri's yoga of preparation to face the inevitable death of her husband. Tyberg observes how Savitri is depicted as struggling with the burdens of her *Karmic* past, striving to be relieved of the legacy of past selves which were "a block on the immortal road" (421). Sri Aurobindo's account of Satyavan's physical cessation and Savitri's realisation of this naked fact of mortality at the end of the Book is marked by poignancy:

As if from a Silence without form or name
 The Shadow of a remote uncaring god
 Doomed to his Nought the illusory universe,
 Cancelling its show of idea and act in Time
 And its imitation of eternity.
 She knew that visible Death was standing there
 And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.

(Savitri 8. pp. 565-66)

Once again, Savitri sat in meditation and plunged into her inner soul-space. She achieved clairvoyance and clairaudience. Things which existed normally beyond

the human sight were suddenly disclosed to her "limitless gaze". Her *Kundalini* started ascending and she broke free of "the cords of self-oblivion" (9.1. p. 572). The sovereign Divine Grace, silently and swiftly descended into Savitri, linking "Time's seconds to infinity". When the ascending Serpent Power reached her *Sahasrara*, it rendered her most mighty and unassailable by mortal Time. In the poet's vision:

It entered the mystic lotus in her head,
 A thousand - petalled home of power and light.
 Immortal leader of her mortality,
 Doer of her works and fountain of her words,
 Invulnerable by Time, omnipotent,
 It stood above her calm, immobile, mute. (9.1. p. 573)

Evidently, Savitri had entered into a trance. She had crossed the borders of the dividing sense. Thought, Time and Death were absent from her.

Next followed Savitri's journey with Death, a journey initially in Time and Space, and eventually transcending such limitations imposed by the remorseless dictator of the terrestrial domain. Death, who contemptuously looked upon the transient human being as a mere "bubble on Time's sea" (10.4. p. 654), admonished her for following him, as though her "breath could live where Time must die" (9.1.

p. 580). He ordered her to return to the mortal realm. But the divine woman's "high nude soul, / Stripped of the girdle of mortality" (9.1. p. 581), and equipped with an adamantine will, resolutely followed him into an Abyss where both Time and Space apparently ceased. Sri Aurobindo presents before us a graphic picture of the Timeless Void:

As if through passages of receding time
Present and past into the Timeless lapsed ;
Arrested upon dim adventure's brink,
The future ended drowned in nothingness. (9.2. pp. 582-83)

Death tried his utmost to intimidate Savitri by trumpeting his unlimited power as an annihilator of Time and Space. He proclaimed arrogantly:

I am the shapeless formidable Vast,
I am the emptiness that men call Space,
I am a timeless Nothingness carrying all,
I am the Illimitable, the mute Alone.
I, Death, am He; there is no other God. (9.2. pp. 592-93)

Unperturbed by Death's sophistry, Savitri plodded on tenaciously. Death was annoyed that a mortal should interfere with matters over which he had been the lord and master till then. He wanted Savitri to abandon the problem of the earth,

namely, its terrible fear of death caused by ignorance, to be solved by the tardy process of Time. But she persisted: "I claim from Time my will's eternity, / God from his moments" (10.4. p. 652). The verbal encounter went on for some time, when Death understood that Savitri was extremely obstinate and determined. At last, he challenged her: "But where is thy strength to conquer Time and Death?" (10.4. p. 664).

For a third time, the primordial coiled World Energy arose in Savitri. Sri Aurobindo declares: "A mighty transformation came on her." She became a "little figure in infinity" who, nevertheless, appeared to be "the Eternal's very house" (10.4. p. 664). In other words, she attained cosmic consciousness. It was as though her soul was the centre of the universe, whose circumference embraced the entire, wide Space. Savitri dealt a crushing blow to Death by declaring that, though powerful himself, he was after all, only a grandiose instrument of the Divine Mother, whose task is to "force the soul of man to struggle for light / On the brevity of his half-conscious days" (10.4. p. 666). Savitri revealed her divinity, and Death was swallowed up. The "dire universal Shadow" of Death disappeared, leaving a "mute invisible and translucent wall" (10.4. p. 668) between Savitri and Satyavan. Indeed, it was the wall that separated Death and Immortality, the Manifest world of Time and Space and the Unmanifest realm of the Timeless, Spaceless, *Brahman*. Mehta's comment is that the wall has its existence in the sphere of Time (Dialogue 327).

Sri Aurobindo pinpoints Savitri's state of consciousness at this juncture: "Her soul stood close to the founts of the infinite" (11.1. p. 671). Savitri's dialogue with Death had started in the precincts of Time and Space. Now, she ascended to a plane where "Time dwelt with eternity as one" (11.1. p. 678).

A Voice from her heart's cave tempted Savitri to choose personal, solitary bliss. Savitri refused firmly as she was aware of her heavenly mandate as well as of her own potential to fulfil it in collaboration with Satyavan. She implored to the Voice for the creation of a new man, the "superhuman with the Eternal mate," for otherwise, this entire world with all its creations would be a "nothing that in Time's moments seems to be" (11.1. p. 693). In reply, the Voice exhorted her: "But if thou wilt not wait for Time and God, / Do then thy work and force thy will on Fate" (11.1. p. 694). She had to heighten her consciousness still further and to climb "upon a ladder of greater worlds / To the infinity where no world can be." She would then be able to hear "the Eternal's firm command" (694).

The Voice explained to Savitri: "Two are the Powers that hold the ends of Time; / Spirit foresees, Matter unfolds its thought [. . .]" (694). The world of forms and shapes was a manifestation of the Spirit expanding and extending itself in Time and Space, and evolving "inevitably a charged content, / Intention of his force in Time and Space, / In animate beings and inanimate things [. . .]" (694). To Savitri who had come to emancipate mankind and to divinise the earth, the Voice announced:

"Ascend, O soul, into thy timeless self; / Choose destiny's curve and stamp thy will on Time" (11.1. p. 695).

The Voice faded, and a Power shook the phenomenal world. Savitri found herself in an ineffable world in "spaceless orbits and on timeless roads" (695). She had obviously gone beyond the *namarupatmakamjagat*, had become one with all, her consciousness having expanded infinitely. Still rejecting personal salvation in the form of an "immense extinction in eternity, / A point that disappears in the infinite [. . .]" (11.1. p. 696), Savitri chose the Almighty Lord's peace as "a boon within to keep / Amid the roar and ruin of wild Time / For the magnificent soul of man on earth" (696).

The Lord, who was pleased with the *yogini*, addressed Savitri and Satyavan as a "dual power of God" whom he had sent down into "an ignorant world / In a hedged creation shut from limitless self" to divinise the earth and to lift "earth-beings to immortality" (11.1. p. 702). He proclaimed to Savitri: "You are my Force at work to uplift earth's fate [. . .]" (702). Satyavan was God's soul who climbed from the night of ignorance through life, mind and the supernature's Vast to the "supernal light of Timelessness / And my eternity hid in moving Time / And my boundlessness cut by the curve of Space" (11.1. pp. 702-03). The Voice reiterated the avowed purpose of the *avataric* descent of Savitri and her union with Satyavan, "the godhead growing in human lives" (703) in clear tones:

These are the high forerunners, the heads of Time,
 The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,
 The high transfigurers of human clay,
 The first-born of a new supernal race.
 The incarnate dual Power shall open God's door,
 Eternal supermind touch earthly Time. (11.1. p. 705)

When the Voice ceased, Savitri held the soul of Satyavan within her all -
 encompassing soul. The mighty wings of the Superconscient closed upon her, and
 she found herself buried in the bosom of Mother Earth, suffused with the bliss and
 peace of Eternal Silence. Sri Aurobindo furnishes us with a splendid and stately
 description of the acme of Savitri's yoga:

Then from a timeless plane that watches Time,
 A Spirit gazed out upon destiny,
 In its endless moment saw the ages pass.
 All still was in a silence of the gods.
 The prophet moment covered limitless Space
 And cast into the heart of hurrying Time
 A diamond light of the Eternal's peace,
 A crimson seed of God's felicity [. . .]. (11.1. p. 712)

Savitri had attained the Eternal Now which contained all Times and all Spaces. From a timeless stance, the Transcendental Spirit watched in silence the unrolling of the Timeless, Spaceless Absolute on the terrestrial plane. All the mystic secrets in cosmic history were now revealed before Savitri's inner eye. "A key turned in a mystic lock of Time," observes the poet (712). The Power or Divine Grace descended into Savitri's entire being, and an infinite bliss and peace pervaded the whole earth.

The transformed Savitri returned to earth along with Satyavan. Her unhorizoned consciousness encompassed everything that existed in Time and Space. Sri Aurobindo states: "All things in Time and Space she had taken for hers [. . .]" (12. p. 715). She was no longer agitated by the fleeting instant or temporality. "Now in her spaceless self released from bounds / Unnumbered years seemed moments long drawn out, / The brilliant time-flakes of eternity" (12. p. 716). In short, Savitri had become the repertoire of all Times and all Spaces. The macrocosm had merged with the microcosm. Savitri, the human incarnation, had blended harmoniously with her Divine Mother-self ready to redeem earthly Time and Space. Here is the poet's lofty description of the new Savitri:

Boundless she was, a form of infinity.

Absorbed no longer by the moment's beat

Her spirit the unending future felt

And lived with all the unbeginning past. (12. p. 716)

Savitri's Yoga is an intrinsic study of death, its nature, function and significance. Death is presented conventionally as the absolute despot of the mortal world, who looks upon the earthly being most contemptuously as something trivial and immaterial. His bold statement to Savitri: "My will once wrought remains unchanged through Time" (10.3. p. 636) is a projection of his nonchalant overconfidence in his own power to wield absolute sway over the world of Time and Space. Verma aptly points out: "The submission to the death-state, as we may conclude from the polemic between Yama and Savitri, is submission to the state of matter" (15). Accordingly, the anxiety of the moment's beat is caused by the actuality of death.

Savitri is convinced that death, or more precisely, the fear of death, is only a mental phenomenon. She asserts that Death has "woven the ignorant mind into a screen / And made of Thought error's purveyor and scribe" (10.3. p. 621), so that life on earth seems only "as a dream in endless suffering Time" (10.3. p. 629). R.K. Singh pursues a similar line of argument:

She sees the problem of death not as an inherent characteristic of life's rhythm but only as subject to the operation of mind. As long as life is subject to the control of mind, the fear of Death is

bound to remain but as soon as life is freed from control of mind, giving way to supermind controlling it, there will be no death. ("The Structure of Savitri" 50)

Bound to the wheel of Time and Space, and trapped in the mire of ignorance, man erroneously puts down Death to Chance, Fate or Time. All these parameters become inter-related in the mental process. Writing at length about the synonymous nature of Time and Death, Mehta expresses a number of pertinent opinions: "Death is not the problem, it is Time which is the problem, for out of Time arise conditions of Fate. Death is only an expression of Time" (Dialogue 345).

It dawns upon Savitri that the way to the realm of the Nameless without Time and Space is inevitably through death. In Sri Aurobindo's words: "Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride / The soul must take to cross from birth to birth [. . .]" (Savitri 10.1. p. 600). What that means is that the universe has been created for the soul to adventure into Time and Space and to wrestle with the adamant necessity, namely, death. Though powerful, death is not the most powerful. Death is also a functionary in the cosmic *lila* of the Lord, one of the "aspects of God's face" in "a relative world of Time" (10.4. pp. 656-57). When Savitri becomes *mrityuvijayini* 'the conqueror of death', Time and Space cease to have divisions; names and forms disappear. The young *yogini* actually illustrates through her immense spiritual efforts how the supreme wisdom about death can help to liberate man from temporal

and spatial ignorance.

Whereas Aswapathy's yoga is a lone task, Savitri's yoga is entwined with Satyavan's fate. If he is the Eternal's representative, the aspiring, activated human consciousness stationed originally in the earth, she represents the Supermind. Satyavan symbolises aspiring humanity endowed with the potential to regain its original Timeless, Spaceless state, but which is helpless without the Divine Grace. When Savitri's *shakti* descends into him he is able to ascend. Both his meeting with Savitri and his death are momentous events. "The death of Satyavan," according to Deshpande, "is the central theme of the Savitri - tale around which the entire occult action revolves" ("Satyavan Must Die" 1). As Satyavan represents phenomenological reality, his death, on the symbolic and metaphysical levels, indicates the ending of the ephemeral and the transient. Albuquerque interprets Narad's phrase about Satyavan's predestined death to imply both the "fulfilment of eternity in time as much as time opening to eternity" (307). In other words, Satyavan's death signifies the disappearance of Time and Space and all the dualities of the phenomenal world associated with them ; and that is a prerequisite for Time to merge with Eternity, and Space with Infinity.

Savitri's triumph over Death is not to be regarded as a physical one. It symbolically implies freedom from the bondage of ignorance through a heightening of consciousness. Her ignorance of the true nature of Death ended. To cite

Deshpande: "The veil of Inconscience spread over the process of Time has now gone, thus revealing the true nature of Death" ("Respecting Savitri" xxiv). As a result of her yoga, Savitri succeeded in cutting a door to immortality through the void of Death.

Also, Savitri's return to the earth with Satyavan after her victorious confrontation with Death should not be conceived as a physical event. The body of Satyavan, which belonged to the world of Time and Space, was no more. Death had claimed it as his legitimate prize. With his physical cessation the pot space of his body had diffused into the *akasa* or surrounding space. However, Savitri's consciousness had expanded so widely that her soul could meet Satyavan's soul. So, what she had retrieved was Satyavan's timeless, spaceless self. She had reached a point where Death had lost its sting.

Savitri's yoga is a happy blend of Integral Yoga and *Tantricism*. In tune with the *Tantric* beliefs Sri Aurobindo accords a pre-eminent status to the indivisible Divine as the incarnate *Shakti*. Deshpande asserts that in the entire Occult-Yogic literature Savitri's *Shakti* Yoga is undoubtedly unique:

We have here the true meaning and purport of the Tantrik sadhana, Shakti Upasana, as a means for the effective transformation of Nature from her inconscient mode of working in the dumb

inconscious body into a luminous dynamism of her consciousness-force. ("The Legend of Savitri" 545)

The fact that Aswapathy gets the boon of a *daughter*, and not a son, is noteworthy in the context. Nandakumar endorses the opinion that the incarnation is cast as a female figure "to draw our minds to the efficacy of drawing close to Tantra in the Integral Yoga" ("Savitri: The Devikavyam" 184). The epic delineates Savitri at different ages or stages of her life: as a child, as a young maiden, as a blissfully happy wife, and as a tenacious *yogini*, which taken together bring to mind the Divine Mother's evolution in Time. To quote from Nandakumar again:

One of the important ways used by our ancients to help the aspirant get settled in the concept of the Supreme's motherhood is to see the Divine Mother in different stages of age which is an easily assimilable experience for man who is controlled by the concept of Time. ("Savitri: The Devikavyam" 203-04)

Love and *Kundalini* together constitute a solid basis for Savitri's *sadhana* for transcending the body and attaining cosmic consciousness. In the beginning, Savitri's love for Satyavan obviously has a physical dimension, but through her ardent yogic efforts, the young wife converts it into divine love. Deshpande emphasises the necessity of Savitri's physical relationship with her husband in her effort to transcend Time and Space:

Her one-year association with him in love's oneness was occultly essential when whatever had to be worked out was worked out in the enduring greatness of efficacious love. Time prepared the destiny that goes beyond time's cycles. The sanction of one-year period was a necessary and sufficient condition for the intense yogic preparation. ("Apropos of Savitri" xxxviii)

Likewise, Marudanayagam argues that the kind of "denigration of love" one finds in the Latin poet Lucretius is summarily dismissed, categorically rejected in Savitri which truly is "the greatest celebration of human love" (351).

The rise of the "coiled World-Energy" (Savitri 10.4. p. 665) in the young wife is accompanied by a psychic transformation from human love and self consciousness into the highest, self-transcending, all-embracing love. Som Ranchan offers a psychodynamic interpretation of the sublimation of human love and its efficacy as seen in Savitri:

In a word, Savitri's approach to kundalini is through psychic transformation in which her relationship with Satyavan is crucial. The psychic transformation, grounded in faith, fuelled by aspiration, tied to a relationship of deep *anteros* and *pothos*, alone can take charge of body, life and mind. ("The place of Kundalini in Savitri's Sadhana" 127)

What transpires as a result of the process is that the human love that Savitri feels for one person, and which is confined to the temporal-spatial existence, expands phenomenally into cosmic love which transcends the body, the mind, life, Time and Space. To put it more explicitly, the human element in Savitri is transmuted into a divine entity so that she becomes capable of a timeless, spaceless dimension of pure love that is all-embracing, unconditional and therefore, elevating. And for this to happen, the death of Satyavan is necessary, even indispensable, as it symbolises the end of body consciousness and spatio-temporal bondage. Deshpande makes a perceptive remark: "Yes, Satyavan must die that Death be dead" ("Satyavan Must Die" 12). Thus love, *Kundalini* and death become welded in Savitri's yoga.

We find reflected in Savitri's yoga certain time-related themes such as Choice, Original Sin, Martyrdom, Resurrection and Redemption of Time, which have a Christian ring about them. On this score, Savitri's *sadhana* finds echoes in Eliot's poems and plays. In choosing to marry the ill-fated Satyavan, Savitri virtually elects to relinquish an ordinary existence in the world of Time and Space. In a sense, she courts martyrdom, for life without her Eternal companion is death for her too. Savitri's choice and martyrdom are very similar to the predicament of Thomas Beckett, the protagonist of Eliot's Christian play Murder in the Cathedral. But, while Beckett initially doubts the spiritual validity of his choice, and has to overcome several temptations before he submits himself before God, Savitri has no such

vacillation for, being an emanation of the Timeless, Spaceless Divine Mother, she has an unflinching faith in God's plan for man and the earth. Beckett affirms: "A Christian martyrdom is never an accident," and that it is "always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways" (Murder in the Cathedral 53). Beckett implies that martyrdom is an act of timelessness, and not one constrained by the limits of temporality. Through Savitri's momentously decisive choice Sri Aurobindo likewise illustrates that he who has chosen the Infinite has already been chosen or earmarked by the Divine Mother out of her boundless grace. That is why her omniscient father tells Savitri: "I approve thy choice". He has realised that "Death is our road to immortality" (Savitri 6.1. p. 424). For the same reason Narad dissuades the Queen from changing the secret will, namely, God's plan for Savitri. He asserts: "Time's accidents are steps in its vast scheme" (6.2. p. 460). Savitri's choice is made in a moment of Time which is pregnant with all times.

By means of her yoga Savitri realised her "deep original sin, the will to be / And the sin last, greatest, the spiritual pride [. . .]". She "atoned for all since the first act whence sprang / The error of the consciousness of Time [. . .]" (10.1. p. 599). In Sri Aurobindo's view, the original sin is *avidya* or ignorance, which causes the soul to feel itself separate from its original timeless, spaceless self, and forfeit its supreme abode. Breaking away, and moving farther away from its source, it

experiences both the pains and pleasures of the flux of Time and Space, recurrence, and the never ending cycle of death and rebirth.

The Resurrection of Satyavan is the culmination of Savitri's yoga. Satyavan is the manifestation of truth on the phenomenal plane. His death metaphorically signifies the eclipse of truth by the forces of darkness, which is a mere phase in the natural cycle of change; hence it is no cause for lamentation. Narad explains to the Queen in lucid terms: "His death is a beginning of greater life, / Death is the spirit's opportunity" (6.2. p. 459). Thus interpreted, the Resurrection of Satyavan refers to the retrieving of his Timeless, Spaceless self from the jaws of *avidya* 'ignorance'. R.K. Singh elaborates how that involves an elevation of consciousness:

The death and resurrection of Satyavan is characterised by a displacement: it is the shifting over from the old psyche to a new one, the disintegration and sloughing of the ignorance - bound old consciousness and formation of a new consciousness. His is a 'mock death' in that he dies the death of ignorance [. . .] and is resurrected to the birth of spiritual life [. . .] living the life of Spirit, which is deathless. In other words, he is transformed into a new consciousness through death. ("Some Reflections on the Mythical Construction of Death in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri" 34)

Evidently, the death and resurrection of Satyavan signify how, through the yogic elevation of consciousness, man can transcend the limitations of phenomenal Time and Space. Savitri, the embodiment of the potent *Gayatri mantra*, is the Saviour Word. She, who is established in the transcendental consciousness, strives to uplift Satyavan, who is only at the cosmic level. It is with the merger of the two that Satyavan's resurrection becomes complete. Sri Aurobindo declares in clear tones: "A vast intention has brought two souls close / And love and death conspire towards one great end" (6.2. p. 459). Ranchan's appropriate remarks further clarify the "one great end": "Both Savitri and Satyavan can be considered as two ontological principles which merge into one another - just as a wave merges into the waters of the sea" ("Appendix -I" 160).

The redemption of Time and Space occurs as a result of the resurrection of Satyavan. Leonard Unger explains that the phrase "to redeem the time" implies a desire that such a time as was conducive to "the higher dream" be restored (60). "Redeeming time" was a favourite preoccupation of Eliot's. To quote from his

Four Quartets:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present

All time is unredeemable. (13)

What Eliot means is that it is through the temporal, purgatorial experience that time or temporality is conquered. He adds in the same poem: "Only through time time is conquered" (16). When the still point, which is the point of intersection of Time and Eternity is reached, one experiences the presence of all times. Eliot's plays dramatise the idea of "redeeming time," but they remain rather vague and empirical.

Sri Aurobindo towers majestically beside Eliot, for in place of occasional and vague glimpses of other worlds of reality that the British dramatist enjoyed, the Indian yogi-poet had a direct apprehension of Truth and Reality. Savitri's exploration of the hidden realms of consciousness and her apocalyptic visions which are projected in the occult theatres of her inner life serve as a prelude to the transforming action at the climactic moment of the epic crisis namely, the "death" of Satyavan. Having enjoyed transcendental bliss, Savitri, in all compassion and magnanimity like Christ or the Buddha, descends to raise Satyavan, who represents the evolving humanity, to taste the ecstasy of the *Brahmic* consciousness, far above the region of Time and Space, far beyond Thought and Mind. Obviously, in Savitri redemption is an authentic experience of the psychic strata both in the individual mind and the Universal Mind. Ignorance and the concomitants of the lower

consciousness naturally vanish at the emergence of the higher consciousness, and for Sri Aurobindo, redemption takes place "here and now" (Rameshwar Gupta, "Savitri in World Literature" 110). This is how Time and Space are redeemed and restored through the resurrection of Satyavan.

"To be one with the Eternal is the object of Yoga," asserts Sri Aurobindo. He elaborates:

To be one with the Eternal is also to live in the Eternal and in his presence and from his infinite nature, - sayujya, salokya, samipya, sadrishya. These four together are one way of being and one perfection. (qtd. in Anand 8)

In the process of elevating herself to the superconscious state of Timelessness and Spacelessness, Savitri enjoys all the four levels of mystic experience of *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman*, namely, *samipya* (proximity), *salokya* (sameness of abode), *sarupya* (sameness of form) and *sayujya* (union). The twelve months of her married life with Satyavan give Savitri a foretaste of the bliss to come, on a physical and emotional level. When, later, she in-gathers her energies, plunges within and discovers her psychic being, she attains *samipya*. Her sojourn into the interior worlds or inner spaces of the mind and beyond leads her to dwell in the inner temple of the Lord, that is, *salokya*. When she transcends the *namarupatmakam*

jagat, she becomes aware that she is not the perishable body, but is truly a spark of the Divine. She attains *sarupya* through this knowledge or awareness of her original state as a soul of bliss. In the final part of her *sadhana* Savitri identifies herself and merges with the Absolute and she experiences *sayujya*. The fourth phase is the culmination of the earlier ones. Savitri's experience of *Saguna Brahman* in the form of Satyavan is thus consummated in the ultimate experience of *Nirguna Brahman*, which is a state of Pure or Absolute Consciousness. The human bride of the mortal Satyavan is thereby transformed into the Eternal Bride of the Timeless Infinite, in a moment of divine Time.

Savitri's yoga is therefore a Purna yoga or a complete demonstration of Integral yoga for transcending Time and Space. While it forms a natural sequel to Aswapathy's yoga, it also serves as a complement to it. But, whereas Aswapathy's *sadhana* is more psychological, Savitri's *tapasya* is psychosomatic, that is, involving both body and mind. Considered together, the two yogas constitute a double spiritual autobiography of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a fact that can be easily verified by comparing Savitri with the records and diaries of their yogic experiences. Little wonder, therefore that the yogas are characterised by authenticity and immediacy which, in turn, are seen reflected in Sri Aurobindo's diction, style and imagery, for style is an index of personality.