

Savitri : A Legend of Divine Love

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ABSTRACT: *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece. We cannot fully understand or appreciate him and his philosophy unless we have an understanding and appreciation of his grand epic, *Savitri*, which he himself has described as "A Legend and a Symbol". The story of Savitri is well known through *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*. Aswapati, King of Madra who was childless undertakes severe tapasya to propitiate Goddess Savitri, who blesses him with a daughter. Savitri grows into an attractive and accomplished young lady but nobody wants to marry her because of her powerful personality. Aswapati tells her daughter to seek her own husband and she sets out on quest. It is after two years that she returns and in the royal court makes the announcement of her choice of Satyavan – son of Dyumatsena, the blind King of Shalwa, then in exile. Narada, who happens to be present on the occasion, speaks against the choice. Satyavan, he says, is destined to die after a year. Savitri, however, does not change her mind and the marriage is duly solemnized. Savitri is content to remain with her husband, sharing his simple life of hardship and serving her old parents-in-law. Soon one year comes to an end. The God of Death appears in the woods where Satyavan accompanied by Savitri, is engaged in felling a tree for fuel. The Yama casts his deadly noose around Satyavan's spirit and moves away. Savitri follows the Deity, by virtue of the power of her purity, the loving wife forces him to return her husband. Sri Aurobindo himself brings out its significance for us by transforming into a sublime and beautiful epic. The poet highlights the divine and spiritual love between Savitri and Satyavan in a symbolic way. Naturally, *Savitri* is the supreme expression of Sri Aurobindo's vision and his message to mankind. In her supreme heroism Sri Aurobindo found in an embryonic form the symbolic affirmation of life on earth. It is no wonder therefore that Sri Aurobindo returned to this story again and again as he advanced on the path of his yoga of transformation.

KEY WORDS: *Savitri, Legend, Symbol, Divine Love*

I. SUMMARY

Savitri as a 'Legend of Divine Love' describes the sudden meeting of Savitri and Satyavan. The poet describes their meetings in detail for two reasons: firstly, it gives the poet an opportunity to sing the glory of Love. Secondly, the poet can highlight the virtues of Satyavan. The meeting between Savitri and Satyavan is said to be the unique example of spiritual love. According to V. K. Gokak, "Not only has this episode the purity of love scenes in Shakespear's *Romeo and Juliet* and Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*; it is distinguished by a Platonism whose luster makes even makes Shelley's splendours somewhat mawkish and immature."¹ The love that is described is pure and tender and beautifully combines the soul with the body, the spiritual with the erotic. This is ideal love and this is love as it should be. For love between man and woman without the element of spirit is no better than carnal craving and this love without its physical aspect is no better than mere abstraction and is incomplete and imperfect. The tree of true love, as Robert Browning has reminded us, has its roots in the soil but its flowers bloom in the sky. The ecstasy of true love's fulfillment in the life of Savitri and Satyavan is depicted by Sri Aurobindo in glowing verse; the lily's spirituality and the rose's rapture are wonderfully balanced:

“He gathered all Savitri into his clasp
Around her his embrace became the sign
Of a locked closeness through slow intimate years,
A first sweet summary of delight to come,
One brevity intense of all long life.
In a wide moment of two souls that meet
She felt her being flow into him as in waves
A river pours into a mighty sea...
As when a soul is merging into God,
To live in Him forever and know His joy,
Her consciousness was a wave of him alone
And all her separate self was lost in his.”²

Sri Aurobindo says that love is a glory from the spheres of eternity. Love has brought down power from eternity to firmly establish himself in life on earth. Men seem to meet each other as if by accident but in fact it is all by some secret design of providence. Savitri and Satyavan knew each other although unknown to sight and although life and mind had altered to hold a new significance.

“These bodies summed the drift of number less births
And the spirit to the spirit was the same.”³

When Satyavan sees Savitri for the first time he experiences a sea-change in his life. One sacred moment had knit their hearts together again and again and made them each other forever, recovering the recognition in deeps. As star attracts another star, in heavens, so Savitri and Satyavan look at each other in wonder and rejoice. It happens at times that when two persons meet, the inner being of one recognizes the inner being of the other behind the veil of the outer senses. The inner deeper self which is more conscious begins to grow aware of the relation. It is a moment which has the touch of eternity. A fresh hour begins the womb of a New Age:

Attracted as in heaven star by star,
They wondered at each other and rejoiced
And wove affinity in a silent gaze
A moment passed that was eternity’s ray
An hour began, the matrix of new time.”⁴

The union of Savitri and Satyavan is really the union of Prakriti and Purusha. Therefore, this union is celebrated on a cosmic scale. Sri Aurobindo says that fate ties a knot with morning’s halo threads on the high glowing cupola of the day. They are heart-bound before the sun who is their marriage fire. The wind is the priest who mutters the sacred verses amid the choral whisperings of leaves:

“On the day high glowing cupola of the day
Fate tied knot with mornings halo threads.
The wedding of the eternal lord and spouse
Took place again on earth in human forms,
In a new act of the drama of the world
The united two began a greater age.”⁵

Savitri’s long search for her soul-companion makes it a marriage of the most romantic choice possible. The marriage fits in with a definite stage in the spiritual evolution of Satyavan and Savitri. They find the fulfillment of their quest in each other. Together they are able to assert the victory of love over death. It is Savitri’s victory but Satyavan was the occasion for it. This is what the two lovers were born to realize. V. K. Gokak says, “The love at first sight in this episode does not need either to be cured or strengthened by second sight. It is not merely a Platonic recognition of the other half but recognition that extends over a number of lives and is rooted in the unity of spirit. It is Aurobindonianism rather than Platonism.”⁶

In the Book *The Everlasting Day*, after the disappearance of Death, a mysterious power is released and the foundations of the entire universe are shaken. Savitri hears a powerful voice that asks her to choose by repeating choose four times. And what is her choice? Her choice is God’s peace, God’s oneness, God’s energy and God’s joy. But each of these she asks not for herself but for mankind. This is how Savitri fulfils her role as the avatara who incarnates herself for the transformation of mankind. According to Sri Aurobindo, human consciousness has to undergo a total transformation. Savitri inspires man to prepare for this integral revolution. After the mysterious power disappears, Savitri and Satyavan are left together. Soon they become conscious of the presence of an all-pervading power of benevolence. This power has nothing but praise for Savitri for being true to her life’s mission and showers blessings on both of them for the success they have achieved in their supreme mission:

“O Satyavan, O luminous Savitri
I sent you forth of old beneath stars,
A dual Power of God in an ignorant world...
The Superman shall wake in mortal man
And manifest the hidden demi-god...
All then shall change, a magic order come
Overtopping this mechanical universe.

A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world...
The spirit shall look out through matter's gaze
And matter shall reveal the spirit's face...
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.”⁷

Satyavan is the soul of man climbing to God, Savitri is the power of the Eternal's spirit. The two will lead man to God through many incarnations. They have been promised by the Divine that the mundane life will become the Life Divine, Savitri and Satyavan return to earth, calm of mind, all passion spent. Savitri and Satyavan remind us of the Adam and Eve of *Paradise Lost* – are ultimately united with their people:

“Drawn by white upon a high-roofed car
In flare of the unsteady torches went
With linked hand Satyavan and Savitri,
Hearing a marriage march and nuptial hymn,
Where waited them the many-voiced human world.
Numberless the stars swam on their shadowy field...
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.”⁸

The journey of Savitri and Satyavan comes to an end. The vision of the struggle and victory is concluded. For purity and tenderness and for the soul that does not deny the body but gives to human values their due place in a scheme of life. It would be difficult to find a more powerful episode of love in World's literature. Sri Aurobindo had made an epic of what was only an episode in Vyasa and endowed the story with novel spiritual implications. Sri Aurobindo uses *Savitri* as a means of ascension. Each major state of progress found him on the peaks of a higher level of consciousness. He reminds us here that man is amritasya putra, he is made by God in His own image, and therefore he is full of infinite possibilities. *Savitri* conveys the message of hope to the contemporary society which is confronted with the alarming danger of annihilation and destruction due to the explosion of technological knowledge. The present state of man's existence should be taken as a temporary phase of a dark night that precedes the dawn of illumination. Indeed *Savitri* is not only a *Legend of Divine Love* but also a massive epic of hope.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1]. Gokak, V K. *Sri Aurobindo – Seer and Poet*. New Delhi : Abhinav Publications, 1973, P.24.
- [2]. Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri*. Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1979, P.410.
- [3]. Ibid., P.399.
- [4]. Ibid., P.399.
- [5]. Ibid., P. 411.
- [6]. Gokak, V K. *Sri Aurobindo – Seer and Poet*. New Delhi : Abhinav Publications, 1973, P.32.
- [7]. Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri*. Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1979, P.702-11.
- [8]. Ibid., P.724.