

## **Evolution of Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.**

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### *Abstract*

Sri Aurobindo believes that divineness is present everywhere, within us and around us. Man can realize it by heightening of his consciousness. In order to achieve that he does not need to renounce his present state. Even though, they may be the impediments for further growth, he has to grow along with it and reach the transcendental state. Consciousness in its state of evolution encompasses consciousness at all levels; while lower elements are present but are subdued. To the poet, Spiritual evolution is the ultimate purpose of life and its accomplishment lies in liberation of entire mankind from worldly misery and bondage. Sri Aurobindo, unlike other mystics, turned the spiritual aspiration of humanity towards earth. He did not like an escape from the earth to heaven; instead, he wished to transform the earth into a heaven. He started his experiment in evolution of consciousness when he began the practices of yoga in 1905. He moved to Pondicherry renouncing politics in 1910 with the sole objective of concentrating on the spiritual experiment. Integral yoga was the new spiritual path developed by him to attain the state of supra-mental consciousness for the transformation of life.

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**Key words:** Evolution of consciousness, supra-mental consciousness, descent of divine grace, compassion for fellow being, divinization of earth.

### **Introduction:**

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a great nationalist, poet, philosopher and spiritual guru, and a perfect blend of evolved consciousness in physical, intellectual and spiritual realm of human activities. He was a fierce freedom fighter, a renowned writer and an inspiring spiritual leader. One can find remarkably three different phases in his entire life with three distinct human aspirations; in his first phase of his aspiration his predominant interest was in acquiring the best worldly knowledge for realizing knowledge power of the self. His intellectual aspiration manifested in mastering world classics and pursuing Indian Civil Service at Kings College, Cambridge, England; in his second phase he found his

country in bondage hence his aspiration became fierce to acquiring political power to liberate his fellow men and the nation, his political aspiration increasingly involved him in freedom struggle both in passive resistance and by secret revolutionary activity for open revolt, and in the third phase he plunged into inward journey to acquire spiritual power for the liberation of Mankind.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual aspiration resulted in four years of secluded yoga in Pondicherry and he recorded those experiences in his spiritual and philosophical writings. His experiment in his final Phase of spiritual life was recorded especially in his poetry. One can understand from his writings, his dedication to realize the evolution of the soul and his transcendental experiences in the different phases of it. He strongly believes in the fact that every man's birth purpose is to realize the supra-mental consciousness in the course of conscious evolution; "That is possible when man is in deep communion with cosmic nature and his inner reality. He should reach a point of transition from the conditioned automated pattern of existence to the state of unperturbed awareness." (Sai 116-117) He further believes that "there is no external guidance for man to attain it, but he has to rely on his inherent aspiration and profound quest to guide his total beings in the path of spiritual evolution" (Sai -117)

### **Purpose of Writing Poetry**

Sri Aurobindo dedicated himself to the process of composing poetry as he considered it as an experiment in evolution of consciousness.

I used Savitri as a mean of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level. I rewrote from that level... In fact, Savitri has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished but a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness (letter 1936).

*Savitri*, a divine epic, composed in the Yogic state. It is the poet's inward journey to examine the possibility of evolving to 'supra-mental consciousness' from the present state of consciousness. The poet has used the process of composing the divine epic for a spiritual experiment. This epic is not describing the external reality like other epics of the world, but the complex subtle spiritual reality. Sri

Aurobindo believes that the real business of poetry is to reveal the spiritual truth within.

Poet's business most really, most intimately, is not with the outward physical life as it is or the life of the passions and motions or even with some ideal life imaged by the mind or some combining or new shaping of these things into a form of beauty, but with the life of soul and with these other things only as its expressive forms. (The Future Poetry 225)

The real subject matter of poetry is the soul within, and not the physical world.

### ***Savitri as a Symbol***

Writers use symbols when they find the limitation of language to communicate something very profound, complex and they have equivocal senses in their messages. Symbols in general are used as poetic device to signify the ideas or qualities which are varied from literal senses. Writers also use symbols when they intend to give deeper and more significant meanings; even sometimes the meaning beyond their perception limits. When poets use the device of symbol in their works, the meaning they want to produce is not fixed but dynamic. It carries multiple layers of meanings and the meanings one derives from it change from person to person and even the same person gets new meanings when he reads the poem next time.

As far as spiritual truth is concerned, it cannot be expressed using ordinary language. Spiritual truth can only be indicated as it is an implicit reality. Aurobindo ascertains this by treating the story of Satyavan and Savitri from the great epic *Mahabaratha* as a symbol. He finds dynamic operation of meanings with densely packed spiritual significances in Satyavan and Savitri story. The poet finds the myth as an appropriate medium to communicate the complex spiritual truth he has been loaded with pertain to realization of different state of consciousness, mysteries of birth and death, creation of world, immortal nature of self, pain and sufferings of mankind, descend of divine grace for earthly transformation, evolution of self from nescient state to supra-mental state, etc.,

## **Consciousness**

There are several definitions found for the term ‘consciousness’ from philosophical, psychological and religious point of views. Descartes sees it as ‘stuff’ in man beyond matter and calls it ‘a thinking stuff’ (Velmans). The word ‘consciousnesses’ spiritually refers to an understanding of presence of a soul or a self within us and believing in its inherent power to transform our present life. Leading philosophers of 20<sup>th</sup> century believes that consciousness as the ‘private language argument’. To Derrida it refers to arguments based on solilo- quy, inner monologue, or pre-expressive intentionality”(Stocker 78) To Sri Aurobindo, man has not fully realized the potentiality of his consciousness; “man is an evolving being with the possibility, or rather the assurance of-hitherto unrealized capacities opening up in him,”(Siddiqui 622) He reaches the end of biological evolution on reaching the state of man which is an unconscious evolution, and he must evolve further spiritually. According to Sri Aurobindo, spiritual evolution is a conscious evolution; man has the responsibility to take conscious efforts to evolve spiritually.

## **Various Phases in the Evolution of Consciousness**

Visions and intuitions are transcendental phenomena which the awaken consciousness experiences in the course of spiritual journey. Sri Aurobindo described many such instances from his life; once he had a vision of Lord Krishan when he was in jail, He could see the lord even in all inmates of the prison. This “spiritual experience is not just a flashy intuition, but a concrete vision at a state of extended awareness.” (Sai 23) Thus, visions and intuitions serve as key to divine reality, similarly according to the poet, the act of composing poetry and uttering mantra connect the consciousness with the divine. Writing the divine epic *Savitri*, facilitated the poet to attain the evolution of consciousness. The poet asserts this: “The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind and psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimated vital, afterwards with the higher mind often illumined and intuitivised”.(letter 4)

.The epic *Savitri*. elaborately deals with inward spiritual journey starting from “inconscient state”; to “God head state”. It begins with the Canto “The Symbol Dawn” in which the poet presents the consciousness in “inconscient state” but with latent optimistic note. The divineness has not been awaken yet and consciousness is still in darkness;

It was the hour before the Gods awake  
Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity  
Lay stretched immobile upon silence marge.(1)

The poet uses the words; ‘opaque’, ‘impenetrable’, ‘abysm’ etc., to describe the phenomena of consciousness in its lower state. It is a state in which the soul is in its ‘sommambulist whirl’ and is “forgetful of her spirit and her fate” (1) It is a state of consciousness in which the self is caught in ‘inscrutable darkness’ and “too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss”. Every man is destined to begin his journey from this state. Pain and sufferings he experiences in this state are not to be seen as demeaning forces, but as blessings in disguise; otherwise he will not move further.

Consciousness in darkness remains ‘immobile’ and ‘impenetrable’ It appears as a heavy burden to the self due to its immersion in ignorance. The same self realizes sense of freedom and happiness when it acquires knowledge. The poet picturesquely describes the varied characteristics of oneness as experienced by Aswapathy in the course of conscious evolution. Aswapathy’s feeling of oneness in the presence of God is described as:

There poured a wide intimate and blissful dawn;  
Healed were all things that Time’s torn heart had made  
And sorrow could live no more in Nature’s breast:  
Division ceased to be, for God was there.  
The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,  
Matter and spirit mingled and were one. (232)

Aswapathy actively involves in pursuit of spiritual truth. His state of mind is revealed thus in the canto “In the Self of Mind”:

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.  
Omnipotent, immobile and aloof, (283)

The poet describes dramatically how Aswapathy reaches the state that transcends the influence of time and space. He experiences the transcendent truth in his journey within by liberating his mind from the limitation of time and space:

He moved through regions of transcendent truth  
Inward, immense, innumerably one.  
There distance was his own huge spirits extent;  
Delivered from the fiction of the mind  
Time's triple dividing step baffled no more. (299)

To Savitri, the experiences of consciousness are completely different and sublime. Sri Aurobindo calls it 'cosmic consciousness'; In the course of spiritual evolution the seeker can experience deepening, enlarging and heightening of his/ her consciousness. Savitri reaches such state in the canto "The Cosmic Spirit and Cosmic Consciousness": The poet exquisitely describes the subtle spiritual experience of oneness with the universe and its impact on consciousness;

All Nature's happenings were events in her,  
The heart-beats of the cosmos were her own,  
All beings thought and felt and moved in her;  
She inhabited the vastness of the world,  
Its distances were her boundaries,  
Its closeness her own life's intimacies.  
Her mind became familiar with its mind,  
Its body was her body's larger frame [...] (556)

Sri Aurobindo describes the soul's experience of arriving at the sphere of "life divine". When the transformation takes place the self remains a mute spectator:

The frontiers of the ignorance shall recede.  
More and more souls shall enter into light,  
Minds lit, inspired, the occult summoner hear  
And lives blaze with a sudden inner flame  
And hearts grow enamoured of divine delight (710)

When the divine force flows through mortal, the self experiences ecstatic feeling. This spiritual phenomenon makes impact on the body and also changes perception of the world. The divine force while descending on mortal bodies, the mortals can feel celestial thrill and ethereal joy. This experience of transformation is exquisitely infused in the following lines:

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell  
And take the charge of breath and speech and act  
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns  
And every feeling a celestial thrill.  
Often a lustrous inner dawn shall come  
Lighting the chamber of the slumbering mind;  
A sudden bliss shall run through every limb  
And Nature with a mightier Presence fill.  
Thus shall the earth open to divinity? (710)

Freedom in the realm of spirit effects freedom on all worldly aspects. All common things appear with new radiance.

And common natures feel the wide uplift,  
Illumine common acts with the spirit's ray  
And meet the deity in common things.  
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,  
The spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life becomes the life divine. (710)

This state of enlightenment fills one's atmosphere with divine fragrance.

Transformation is possible only by the evolution of consciousness. A spiritually transformed person is a superman who works for the mission of transformation of the entire mankind. The sole concern and care of such enlightened person must be on saving the fellow being from utterly miserable existence and help them to get rid of their ignorance. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo says that enlightened persons ought not to use his ascend to seek divine bliss for selfish end by escaping from the world. The earth is the right place for such persons to stay and serve the deserted beings on the earth. He may work for the descent of divine grace towards fellow beings.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, this epic is an invaluable spiritual document and divine treasure that guides those who dedicate their life towards realization of Supra-mental consciousness and divine wisdom. Love occupies the central stage in the story of Satyavan and Savitri as it has the power to unite man and woman for conjugal relationship, and also, the power to conquer death. It is the power that unites devotee with God and Yogi with the universal power. Sri Aurobindo finds immense spiritual symbolic significance behind the myth. He believes that evolution process is not completed on reaching the state of man. At this state, man is simply an intermediate product. On realizing the responsibilities of conscious effort for evolution, man can proceed to the further heights. He is endowed with the faculties which enable him to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust, but his obsession with worldly and materialistic reality diverts him from the spiritual reality. He must realize that he has to evolve to a stage when he can find the divine presence in all.

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