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Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 06: Sri Aurobindo

Part II

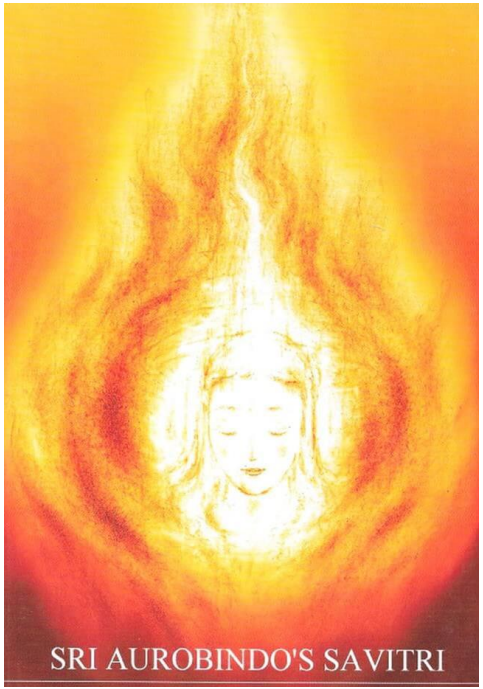
BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



(Recap) *Savitri* Introduction

- Part I (Book I to III): Aswapathy's spiritual quest
- Part II(Books IV to VIII): Savitri's upbringing
- Part III(IX to XII): Savitri's encounter with Death and her claim for Divine Truth.
- Forceful presence of the poet's own voice- '**Internal yoga'**
- An epic of humanity and divinity of the death and life divine.



Some lines from *Savitri,* Canto I, Book I

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.
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world.

Canto I, Book I

Yet only her outward self suffered and strove;
Even her humanity was half divine:
Her spirit opened to the Spirit in all,
Her nature felt all Nature as its own.
Apart, living within, all lives she bore;
Aloof, she carried in herself the world:
Her dread was one with the great cosmic dread,
Her strength was founded on the cosmic mights;
The universal Mother's love was hers.

Canto I, Book I

Only a vague earth-nature held the frame.
But now she stirred, her life shared the cosmic load.
At the summons of her body's voiceless call
Her strong far-winging spirit travelled back,
Back to the yoke of ignorance and fate,
Back to the labour and stress of mortal days,
Lighting a pathway through strange symbol dreams
Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep.
Her house of Nature felt an unseen sway,
Illumined swiftly were life's darkened rooms,
And memory's casements opened on the hours
And the tired feet of thought approached her doors.

Canto I, Book I

Awake she endured the moments' serried march
And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,
And heard the ignorant cry of living things.
Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene
Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate.
Immobile in herself, she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die.

Savitri's arrival

There came the gift of a revealing hour:
He saw through depths that reinterpret all...
A deathless meaning filled her mortal limbs;
As in a golden vase's poignant line
They seemed to carry the rhythmic sob of bliss
Of earth's mute adoration towards heaven
Released in beauty's cry of living form
Towards the perfection of eternal things.
Transparent grown the ephemeral living dress
Bared the expressive deity to his view. (Book IV)

First Meeting

Thus Satyavan spoke first to Savitri:
“O thou who com’st to me out of Time’s silences,
Yet thy voice has wakened my heart to an unknown bliss,
Immortal or mortal only in thy frame,
For more than earth speaks to me from thy soul
And more than earth surrounds me in thy gaze,
How art thou named among the sons of men?

Contd…

Whence hast thou dawned filling my spirit's days,
Brighter than summer, brighter than my flowers,
Into the lonely borders of my life,
O sunlight moulded like a golden maid?
I know that mighty gods are friends of earth.
Amid the pageantries of day and dusk,
Long have I travelled with my pilgrim soul
Moved by the marvel of familiar things.

Union of Heaven and Earth (Book V: The Book of Love)

She bowed and touched his feet with worshipping hands
She made her life his world for him to tread
And made her body the room for his delight,
Her beating heart a remembrancer of bliss.
He gathered all Savitri into his clasp
Around her his embrace became the sign
Of a locked closeness through slow intimate years.

Union of Heaven and Earth (Book V: The Book of Love)

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.
Her consciousness was a wave of him alone
And all her separate self was lost in his…

Her happy voice cried out to Satyavan:
"My heart will stay here on this forest verge

The Book of Fate

“Once my heart chose and chooses not again.
The word I have spoken can never be erased,
It is written in the record book of God.
The truth once uttered, from the earth’s air effaced,
By mind forgotten, sounds immortally
For ever in the memory of Time.
Once the dice fall thrown by the hand of Fate
In an eternal moment of the gods.
My heart has sealed its troth to Satyavan:
Its signature adverse Fate cannot efface,
Its seal not Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve.

Contd…

Those who shall part who have grown one being within?
Death’s grip can break our bodies, not our souls;
If death take him, I too know how to die.
Let Fate do with me what she will or can;
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me
Helpless against my immortality.
Fate’s law may change, but not my spirit’s will.” (Book VI)

Death in the Forest, Book VIII

"Savitri, Savitri, O Savitri,
Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die."
And even as her pallid lips pressed his,
His failed, losing last sweetness of response;
His cheek pressed down her golden arm. She sought
His mouth still with her living mouth, as if
She could persuade his soul back with her kiss;
Then grew aware they were no more alone.

Death's Queries to Savitri

Eternal truth lives not with mortal men.
Or if she dwells within thy mortal heart,
Show me the body of the living Truth
Or draw for me the outline of her face
That I too may obey and worship her.
Then will I give thee back thy Satyavan.
But here are only facts and steel-bound Law.
This truth I know that Satyavan is dead
And even thy sweetness cannot lure him back.
No magic Truth can bring the dead to life,

Death's Dilemmatic Question

Child, hast thou trodden the gods beneath thy feet
Only to win poor shreds of earthly life
For him thou lov'st cancelling the grand release,
Keeping from early rapture of the heavens
His soul the lenient deities have called?
Are thy arms sweeter than the courts of God?

Creation –a continuing process, Book X

O Death, thou look'st on an unfinished world

Assailed by thee and of its road unsure,

Peopled by imperfect minds and ignorant lives,

And sayest God is not and all is vain.

How shall the child already be the man?

Because he is infant, shall he never grow?

Because he is ignorant, shall he never learn?

Creation –a continuing process, Book X

In a small fragile seed a great tree lurks,
In a tiny gene a thinking being is shut;
A little element in a little sperm,
It grows and is a conqueror and a sage.
In God concealed the world began to be,
Tardily it travels towards manifest God:
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
Time travels towards revealed eternity.

Savitri's reply, Book X

She answered, "Straight I trample on the road
The strong hand hewed for me which planned our paths
I run where his sweet dreadful voice commands
And I am driven by the reins of God.
Why drew he wide his scheme of mighty worlds
Or filled infinity with his passionate breath?

Savitri's reply, Book X

Or wherefore did he build my mortal form
And sow in me his bright and proud desires,
If not to achieve, to flower in me, to love,
Carving his human image richly shaped
In thoughts and largenesses and golden powers?
Far Heaven can wait our coming in its calm.
Easy the heavens were to build for God.

Contd…

Earth was his difficult matter, earth the glory
Gave of the problem and the race and strife.
There are the ominous masks, the terrible powers;
There it is greatness to create the gods.
Is not the spirit immortal and absolved
Always, delivered from the grasp of Time?
Why came it down into the mortal's Space?
A charge he gave to his high spirit in man
And wrote a hidden decree on Nature's tops.

Contd…

Freedom is this with ever seated soul,
Large in life's limits, strong in Matter's knots,
Building great stuff of action from the worlds
To make fine wisdom from coarse, scattered strands
And love and beauty out of war and night,
The wager wonderful, the game divine.

Contd…

What liberty has the soul which feels not free
Unless stripped bare and cannot kiss the bonds
The Lover winds around his playmate's limbs,
Choosing his tyranny, crushed in his embrace?

To seize him better with her boundless heart
She accepts the limiting circle of his arms,
Bows full of bliss beneath his mastering hands
And laughs in his rich constraints, most bound, most free.
This is my answer to thy lures, O Death."

Defeat of Death

The two opposed each other face to face.
His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
Around it her light grew, an ocean's siege.
Awhile the Shade survived defying heaven…
Assailing in front, oppressing from above,
Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,
Light was a luminous torture in his heart,
Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves;

His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze. ..
He called to Night but she fell shuddering back,
He called to Hell but sullenly it retired:
He turned to the Inconscient for support,
From which he was born, his vast sustaining self;
It drew him back towards boundless vacancy…
His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.

Contd...

At last he knew defeat inevitable…
And left crumbling the shape that he had worn,
Abandoning hope to make man's soul his prey
And force to be mortal the immortal spirit.
Afar he fled shunning her dreaded touch
And refuge took in the retreating Night.
In the dream twilight of that symbol world
The dire universal Shadow disappeared
Vanishing into the Void from which it came.
As if deprived of its original cause,
The twilight realm passed fading from their souls,
And Satyavan and Savitri were alone. (Book X)

Savitri's firmness

"In vain thou tempest with solitary bliss
Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born,
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine…
Since God has made earth, earth must make in her God;
What hides within her breast she must reveal.

I claim thee for the world that thou hast made.

If man lives bound by his humanity, If he is tied for ever to his pain,

Let a greater being then arise from man,

The superhuman with the Eternal mate

And the Immortal shine through earthly forms.

Else were creation vain and this great world

A nothing that in Time's moments seems to be. (Book XI)

The Book of Everlasting Day

"Descend to life with him thy heart desires.
O Satyavan, O luminous Savitri,
I sent you forth of old beneath the stars,
A dual power of God in an ignorant world,
In a hedged creation shut from limitless self,
Bringing down God to the insentient globe,
Lifting earth-beings to immortality.

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
And human wills tune to the divine will,

Contd…

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.
Thus shall the earth open to divinity
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 become the life divine." (Book XI)

Satyavan's Reply to Dyumatsena's Wonder, Book XII

"Lay all on her; she is the cause of all.
With her enchantments she has twined me round.
Behold, at noon leaving this house of clay
I wandered in far-off eternities,
Yet still, a captive in her golden hands,
I tread your little hillock called green earth
And in the moments of your transient sun
Live glad among the busy works of men."

Conclusion

- Aurobindo's poetry is an attempt at rebuilding the nation's consciousness
- Faith of man can enable the unity of his being with full existence.
- Man is a transitional being capable of gaining perfection through inner growth.
- The discovery of self can lead to the discovery of the world.
- Matter and spirit though in conflict always sees the triumph of spirit
- Man can also attain divine qualities through his consciousness.
- Aurobindo's *Savitri* offers a 'glorious future, not a dull recital of a dead past.'
- It is 'neither an overflow of tradition nor an eruption of 'modernism but a recordation in poetic terms of the ends and means determining man's and earth's ultimate destiny set in the background of cosmic line.' (Iyengar)

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Love must not cease to live upon the earth;

For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.

Thank You