

Savitri: A Revelation of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Evolution

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Abstract: Sri Aurobindo's poems, written over a span of 60 years, are a veritable record of the evolution of his poetic mind. We find in them a range of poetic treatments of Nature, from a sentimental and outward luxuriance to the most profound mystical insights. But it is to Savitri that we must turn to find the living body of Mystery.

Evolution is the key-word in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. "All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky." The movement and growth from the Inconscient to the Superconscient is the hidden purpose behind Nature's workings:

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine. (Savitri p. 711)

Savitri's is a wide canvas in which Nature has been treated in her various aspects. First, we have the para and aparaprakriti and a secret covenant between the two working out a purposive evolution. Then we have the cosmic, supracosmic and individual manifestations of Nature where Man, the individual, seems to hold the secret key of evolution.

The very first canto in Savitri, "The Symbol Dawn", opens with a vivid description of a beautiful natural phenomenon. But the title draws our attention to the fact that this dawn is to be viewed as a symbol. Even the epic is sub-titled 'a Legend and a Symbol', and it not only demands but imposes a symbolist reading of the text. Savitri has its own poetics woven in its structure. Savitri offers, therefore, a new approach to the perception and portrayal of natural phenomena and takes us, as if by hand, into the deeper mysteries of an obvious but hitherto unknown world of Nature.

After peering closely at the external face of Nature one soon becomes aware of the hidden forces – occult and subliminal – working behind the appearances: Evolution is the key-word in Sri Aurobindo's

philosophy. “All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky.” The movement and growth from the Inconscient to the Superconscient is the hidden purpose behind Nature’s workings:

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Index Terms: *PARA and APARA Prakriti*, Psychic Being, Superconscient, Gnostic being, Inconscient

Sri Aurobindo was a multi faceted personality. He was an eminent philosopher, a poet and a yogi. As a philosopher he was keenly interested in the mysteries of Nature and as a yogi he gained practical knowledge of its baffling truths. He was gifted with a mighty poetic genius and it is no exaggeration to say that no other poet can match his colossal and unique poetic talent in the whole range of English poetry. His poetry is a vehicle through which he expresses the truth of Nature which is the outcome of his deep realisation. His poems, both short and long, written during different periods of life from adolescence to maturity, form a continuous stream of contemplation on the mystery of Nature. Closely related to Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Nature is his theory of evolution. In Savitri, his magnum opus, he reveals the intricate workings of Nature, its methods and distant plans in the most conspicuous and picturesque manner in spite of the fact that Nature defies verbal analysis. The entire edifice of his poetry is founded on this simple premise, this natural logic that all life is yoga of nature seeking to manifest God. The Supracosmic Reality stands as the supreme truth of being and to realise it is the highest possibility of human consciousness. He was not propounding an intellectual system or writing metaphysical treatises. With an eye of a yogi he penetrates deep into Nature and with the heart of a poet feels it on his pulse.

In these pages, Sri Aurobindo’s much-discussed concept of evolution has been explained in the light of his concept of Nature as shown in the epic Savitri, for only in this paradigm can the senseless whirl of Nature be given a meaning. Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine* has been hailed as one of the greatest philosophical works of the twentieth century. It represents a theological and metaphysical synthesis of the various schools of Eastern and Western thought. But Savitri reveals a concrete realisation rather than an abstruse philosophy. (**All the poetic quotations are from the text of Savitri .**)

Through a vivid and clear cosmogony in Savitri he has brought home the truth of the various forces thrown by Nature in running and designing the cosmic machinery and this aspect has particularly been highlighted in the present paper. The key to its understanding is not to be found in the process of Nature as in sciences but is to be sought in the ultimate Reality.

Nature is eternal and infinite, and is, therefore, in its essence, indeterminable and indefinable by the finite mind. In the cosmic manifestation Nature is viewed as Para and Apara, the lower and higher. The meaning of evolution is the ascendance of the lower into the higher. But this ascension is possible only because the Supreme Reality is involved in the Creation.

Nature operates on three planes-Transcendental, Cosmic and Individual. This paper deals with the individual poise of Nature where man comes forward with mind. Matter, life and mind are the lower hemisphere of lower Nature. Gifted with mind man becomes the chief protagonist of the drama of existence and first time consciously takes the reins of evolution in his hands. The unprecedented development of science and technology has made man a demi-god of the cosmos and seems to be the all-powerful ruler of the planet. But there is this bitter truth that in spite of tremendous achievements and accomplishments, man is still a slave and not a master of Nature. The foundation of his life is on sorrow and not on happiness. Since times immemorial, scholars and intellectuals have reflected over it and discovered the factors responsible for the helpless and petty state of suffering humanity. They are – ignorance, ego, mind, fate and karmic law. Despite miraculous store of knowledge man is still ignorant. For this ignorance, his ego is responsible.

Man begins his life as an individual and he opens his eyes in this world with the consciousness of “I” or ego. This little ego is the centre of all his activities. Man lives in his egoistic consciousness and the consciousness of ego is separative, limited, petty and closed one. He lives a very petty, selfish and closed existence and this limited and separate existence is the foundation of the subsequent problems and limitations.

A tool and slave of his own slave and tool,

Possessor he is possessed and, ruler, ruled,(512)

The formation of ego has a definite importance in cosmic scheme of things. For tracing the origin of ego, one has to go back to the beginning of creation itself. It is said in the Upanishads that the Absolute, the One, willed to become many for the sheer delight of a multiple self-expression. This will of the Divine is the starting point of His self-multiplication. But it has a double working – one from above downwards, from the creative Vijnana or Supermind towards a complete involution in the inconscience below; and another from below upwards, from the emergence of matter, life and mind, by ascension – a process of evolution, towards the supernal glory of the Supermind above. So the formation of multiple divine individualities, the temporal self-figurings of the eternal One in the form of ego, takes place. The individual egos are, according to this view, microcosmic centres of the One Universal Ego.

Even having become many, the Divine has not yet become divinely many which is His primal Will. But the human ego identifies itself with the many and forgets the One, the fundamental underlying unity and thus becomes the foundation of the subsequent ignorance. Ego breeds self-love. In a state of narcissus complex, ego feels itself to be greater than Nature:

I have grown greater than Nature, wiser than God.

I have made real what she never dreamed,

I have seized her powers and harnessed for my works, (512)

Ego, under a vain illusion, imagines himself the conqueror, the lord of nature. It is like the magnifying glass in which the little individuality of man looks disproportionately big and grand. Ego makes man a demigod and says:

There is no miracle I shall not achieve.

What God imperfect left, I will complete, (512)

Besides ego, mind comes. All life is a vast yoga of Nature and in man, for the first time, she devises self-conscious means by which she may realize her perfection and unite herself with her own divine reality. In this attempt, mind is the first instrument of knowledge.

Man is essentially a thinker, the 'Manu', a mental being who leads life and body, not an animal who is led by them. Man is greatly indebted to his mind for all his unprecedented scientific knowledge and

miraculous advancements. Man by his privilege as a mental being is exempt from the full burden of the tardy laws of evolution. Before the arrival of man on the scene, the evolution was more or less unconscious, slow and tardy. But now Nature has evolved and left man so far on the point where he will have to evolve himself consciously and expedite the pace of evolutionary journey and carry it to its ultimate destination. The slow evolutionary stream has got a momentum with the emergence of mind. But “Mind is not the last term of evolution, not an ultimate aim, but, like body, an instrument” (Sri Aurobindo, Synthesis11).

Man lives an unenlightened existence with his old rounds of thought, thinking always with tomorrow’s hopes. And in this way his little hour is spent in little things. He is satisfied with his common average kind.

Even religion is narrowed down to conventional worship. A loveless religion is invented. His religion is devoid of the fire of love and love is the quintessence of religion. The average humanity is rooted in inertia or *tamas* of this mind. The inertia of the mind is more tenacious than the inertia of body. It lacks a sense of adventure and experimentation and is not aware of its higher destiny:

He is ignorant of the meaning of his life,

He is ignorant of his high and splendid fate. (53)

This is really alarming for the general progress of humanity because a sense of adventure is indeed the impelling force behind all progress. “Life reveals its secrets only to the adventurous, and not to the timid who for ever seek security and safety” (Mehta, Dialogue 114).

The greatest drawback of reason is that she seeks to understand the dynamic flux of life with an approach that is utterly static. She has formulated a code of fixed, precise, indubitable and rigid laws but the eternal truth is not static and inflexible. It imposes a dead uniformity upon the creation:

Then science and reason careless of the soul

Could iron out a tranquil uniform word,

Inflicting Matter’s logic on Spirit’s dreams

A reasonable animal make of man

And a symmetrical fabric of his life. (255)

It is very strange that even though modern civilization has raised its stupendous structure on the foundations of mind, it has begun to feel sick of the mind itself. The work of reason is an inconclusive play. “Absolute her judgments seem but none is sure”. Whatever temporary truth it formulates, “Time cancels all her verdicts in appeal.” Even though the knowledge it acquires appears to our little mind the highest light in reality, “Its rays are a lantern’s lustres in the Night” (252). It is not a master of truth, rather it is:

A bullock yoked in the cart of proven fact,
She drags huge knowledge –bales through Matter’s dust

To reach utility’s immense bazaar. (252) In recent times, Indian philosophers like J. Krishnamurti and Vimala Thakar have expounded the view that the normal state of man is a condition of trouble and disorder, a kingdom either at war with itself or badly governed and for this mind is responsible. Thakar in her book The Mutation of Mind attacks the very process of thinking to get knowledge:

We try to arrest the movement of life. We try to imprison the life, gather the life in our hands. We give it a name, make compartments, make categories and norms for that life. We start living according to these norms and ideas. Naturally norms and ideas become the screen between us and reality, between us and the movement of life. So long as there is thinking and feeling, as long as there is reacting of the mind, we will not perceive what life is, what reality is. (133)

J. Krishnamurti, a great authority on human mind in the twentieth century, declares that the thinking mind is a great stumbling block to the understanding of the reality as it is highly conditioned and limited. Studying its mode of operation, its total mechanism, he finds man a fragmented being, either emotionally or intellectually, one part acting, and one withdrawing. Sometimes he is resisting or adjusting and in both the conditions he is not an integrated being, a real knower and master:

Thought is conditioned. The mind, being the storehouse of experiences, memories from which thought arises, is itself conditioned; and any movement of the mind, in any direction, produces its own limited results. When the mind makes an effort to transform itself, it merely builds another pattern, different perhaps, but still a pattern. Every effort of the mind to free itself is the continuance of thought; it may be at a higher level, but it is still within its own circle, the circle of thought, of time. (Commentaries, third series 66)

In this lower realm of Nature death, fate, pain and evil are the off-springs of ignorance. Ignorance implies bondage, a slavery of man to his lower Nature and her three modes of operation. Nature seems to be unrelenting and cruel in having some rigorous rules like death, fate and the law of karma –the law of determinism. Man has to constantly wage a war against all these brute forces which are beyond his power. Similarly in the face of death, man is helpless. ‘Death is the king of the world of ignorance,’ Savitri repeatedly declares. The widespread presence of evil and pain questions the basic assumption of all philosophies that tell the existence is bliss and love.

This is the external state of man that highlights the imperfect, limited and sorrowful existence of man that seems to be beyond any remedy. If one meditates over it, one finds that this is the surface story of his existence and not the deep truth of his existence. Man turns his gaze inward and realises a flame of aspiration burning there. That occult force is called aspiration. Man secretly nurtures a hope, an aspiration in his heart of hearts for a bright and promising future. With this deepest longing of his heart he, as a bhakta, looks upward to the heavens in a prayerful mood for help. On account of this unfailing aspiration, as a gyan-yogi he makes persistent enquiries, pierces through his hard material sheath of ignorance and gets some mystical knowledge of the riddle of existence. With the kindling of aspiration, he feels, as a karma-yogi, fierce energy and illimitable zest to perform splendid and magical works without being perturbed and shaken. He opens himself and calls the Unknown, Immobile and Immutable to help him in finding out the truth, the real meaning of his existence and with this opening, the higher Nature, in the form of ‘Divine Descent’ begins to pour down her brilliant messages of truth and wisdom on him.

Aspiration in the lower world of man is always followed by the descent of divine Grace from the higher world and this two-fold phenomenon is called the ascent and descent. The lower Nature of inertia and ignorance ascends high to touch the summits of consciousness and the higher descends to hold and lift it up. At every state, the initial ascent is answered by the characteristic descent of the divine Nature: “A divine intervention thrones above (58).

With the inward turn, man realises that besides body and intellect, he has an entity ‘psychic being’ or the veiled divinity within. The first striking realisation he gets that he is essentially a Spirit or Self.

In moments when the inner lamps are lit
And the life's cherished guests are left outside,
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs.
A wider consciousness opens then its door; (47)

The psychic being is that which endures and is imperishable in man from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine. He comes to know that there are the higher stages of mind.

In the knowledge of the true self the ego dies a voluntary death and the various parts of his being like physical, vital and mental act in harmony and unison for attaining the integral perfection:

The parable of the search for the soul is a drama played, with a greater or lesser intensity of involvement, in the life of almost every body. "Know thyself!" is an ancient exhortation, and this could become the discipline of atma-Vichara, or inquiry into the nature of the Self. (Iyengar, Dawn 86)

The consciousness of Supermind is the highest one and with it the hemisphere of higher Nature begins. Here the dualities of existence are reconciled and a unity is experienced. In this consciousness, man realises that all the so-called adverse facts have their own utility in the cosmic scheme. The ignorance is needed in the lower hemisphere. The spiritual evolution obeys the logic of a successive unfolding of higher and higher states but in this transitional process it gets sustenance and momentum from the obstructions of lower Nature. The lower Nature creates all the play of opposites in life in order to ascend the perfect knowledge or gnosis which would resolve them in harmony in some distant future. Savitri calls this supramental change a complete reversal of consciousness in which being is filled with supreme energy of consciousness-force which would do away with pain and suffering and bring instead the power of Delight or Ananda. The Gnostic consciousness of Ananda is able to transform all pain and pleasure into an integral expression of bliss. The core of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in Savitri is that in distant future, the Spirit will descend into the matter and the ignorant man of today will be a Gnostic man of tomorrow. Not only the individual but the collective divine transformation of the race as a whole is the aim of Nature. The whole

earth will have to be divinised one day. Savitri ushers man in a new age –age of hope and divine fulfilment. It assures him that it is not a vision but the only reality of human existence.

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
 The Spirit shall take up the human play,
 This earthly life become the life divine. (710)

Savitri with a robust optimism and certitude reveals the spiritual truth of the future of humanity in a prophetic voice:

Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.
 The greater destiny waits you in your front: (370)

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